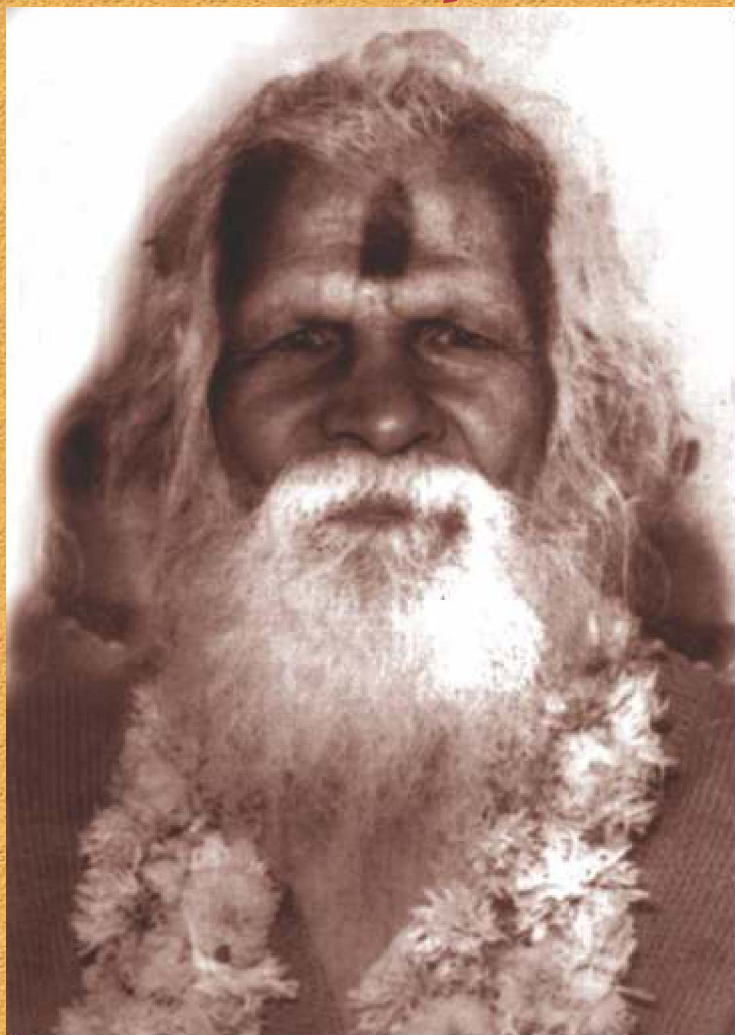


The Story of Divine Compassion



Autobiography of
Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj
Vasishta Guha, Himalayas

THE STORY OF DIVINE COMPASSION

**Autobiography of
Paramapujya Sri Purushottamanandaji Maharaj
Vasishta Guha, Himalayas**

Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty Charitable Trust

13/8, Pampa Maha Kavi Road,
Shankarpuram, Bangalore - 560 004.

**THE STORY OF DIVINE COMPASSION - Autobiography of
Paramapujya Sri Purushottamanandaji Maharaj, Vasishta
Guha, Himalayas**

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Preface

(This preface was written by Poojya Swami Shantananda Puri in 2007, during the publication of the second edition of the autobiography in Malayalam).

Salutations again and again at the holy feet of my Gurudev! It was my rare good fortune to have come under the spiritual umbrella of my Gurudev as early as in 1956, which was possible only due to his grace.

The autobiography was penned by my Gurudev not only because of the insistence of his devotees but also perhaps to pre-empt any distortions that may occur at the hands of later day biographers. The reader while savouring page after page of the book cannot but fail to notice that Gurudev has portrayed himself only as a sadhak. And what a sadhak! Neither the infirmity which stuck him at an early age, nor the trials and tribulations that he had to encounter in his quest, deterred him from his path of God-realisation.

Even as a young boy, Gurudev had strong spiritual disposition. As a schoolboy, his devotion and faith in the Lord of Guruvayoor made him undertake a hazardous journey to that temple town although he was barely able to walk. Gurudev was very keen to pursue his studies but destiny willed otherwise. Yet, while lying in his sick bed he taught himself Sanskrit, mastered it enough that he could read the Bhagavatah which is certainly not an easy composition to learn. His proficiency complemented

by his devotion made him highly popular in the spiritual circle in his hometown Thiruvalla and it also led him to Swami Nirmalananda the then president of Ramakrishna Ashram, Bengaluru. Swami Nirmalananda took him under his wings and seeing his purity, innocence and devotion gave him the sobriquet *Bhakata Neelakanta*. Gurudev has time and again expressed his devotion and gratitude to Swami Nirmalananda. It was Swami Nirmalananda who took Gurudev to Swami Brahmananda.

To have obtained *mantra diksha* from the spiritual son of Ramakrishna Paramahansa is in itself an eloquent testimony of the spiritual calibre of the future Swami Purushottamanadji Maharaj. Although closely associated with the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and possessing considerable organisational skills, Gurudev chose to be a wandering mendicant in the *devabhoomi* of the Himalayas following the call of his heart. This was in fact predicted by Swami Nirmalananda who had once seen Gurudev's palm. In his wanderings Gurudev had to undergo a lot of privations. He had to endure excruciating physical suffering which on occasions goaded him to even end his life. But divine intervention was always at hand at every moment of crisis at which Gurudev always marvelled. Once after hearing about Vasishta Guha, Gurudev was strongly attracted to that place even while hearing the name and made it his final abode. It was an inhospitable environment but Gurudev resolutely decided to remain there. In this autobiography, Gurudev has recorded even the small acts of kindness shown to him. For example, like the boy in the village who gave him some salt which was at that time so precious a commodity to the villagers that they would never

part with it. Touched by the boy's kindness Gurudev enquired from him what he wanted. When the boy replied that he wanted to study, he started to teach him and few others and later with the help of the Raja of Tehri Garhwal opened a school in Goolar village which is running even today as a government inter college. Most of the time at Guha was spent in meditation so much so that at one stage Gurudev gave away his copy of his favourite scripture, Bhagavatham. Bhakti has blossomed to Jnana.

During the years that Gurudev lived in *sahaja samadhi* in the Guha, hundreds of people flocked to see him not only from the plains of northern India but from all parts of the country and even abroad. Gurudev was an embodiment of both jnana and bhakti. Everybody got instantly attracted to his child like laughter and he exuded a state of bliss which was possible only for one in constant companion with the Supreme Being. There are numerous anecdotes which testify to his infinite compassion which manifested as miracles. My gurubhai Swami Nirvedananda has recorded in his book "At the feet of my Guru", the instance of a stranger who came to the Guha suffering from a chronic condition of piles and was cured, after Gurudev with his own hands fed him some pieces of an orange. It is well known that for many years a tiger slept in the same cave where Gurudev resided.

At a glance Gurudev could divine the character of a person and know what was in his mind. Swami Jnanananda Giri, who hails from Switzerland and has been living in India for nearly fifty years, has given a thrilling account of his first meeting with

Gurudev. With a heavenly smile which turned into a cheerful laughter, Gurudev picked up a picture postcard which was received in that days mail and waving it before his visitor asked, “Do you know this country and place?”. The picture postcard was of Zurich in Switzerland depicting that part of the town where Swami Jnanananda Giri was born! Once the ambassador of Switzerland met Gurudev and asked him if it would not be better for the welfare of the masses if he lived with them rather in seclusion at a cave. In his inimitable style Gurudev replied. “Sitting in a cave one can influence the minds of people far away. One can move mountains. It is not necessary to go anywhere.” The diplomat was simply awestruck by this reply.

Innumerable are the people who received his benediction and were saved from calamities. Even after shedding his mortal coil, Gurudev has appeared before his devotees and saved them from impending crisis. Once a devotee’s wife had to deal with her child who was taken suddenly ill. Gurudev appeared before her, blessed the child and gave her some instructions. Needles to say that the child recovered. A lady devotee was yearning for *mantra diksha* which was refused by the then Swamiji in Vasishta Guha. Somehow, she had not got it in Gurudev’s lifetime. She was lamenting about this to me when I told her, “If your longing is so intense you will get it from my Gurudev itself.” I happened to meet her after a passage of time when she ecstatically told me that Gurudev had appeared in her dream and given her *mantra diksha*. It was not as if Gurudev was partial to devotees who had met him. There are both young and old who have had the vision of Gurudev although they had never met him.

These miracles are cited not for any sensational value but to bring home to the reader the boundless compassion of Gurudev. While on the austere spiritual path himself, he understood the problems of people caught in worldly affairs and most graciously came to their succour.

The years of penance that Gurudev performed at Vasishta Guha has further sanctified its holy precincts. Even today numerous visitors to the Guha are overwhelmed by the vibrations that reverberate in this sacred place. Some fortunate ones have even had the vision of Gurudev inside the cave. May Gurudev's life and message further spur the readers in their spiritual endeavour towards God Realisation!

Sri Ramanasramam


29th July 2007, Guru Poornima

Swami Shantananda Puri



Dedication

Dedicated at the lotus feet of
Sri Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj,
an ideal disciple of
Pujya Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj,
who propagated the teachings of
His Guru throughout India and abroad.



My Guru Dev

- Swami Shantananda Puri



What is there left for me to write about my Guru Dev, when the scriptures have dealt with the glory of a Guru elaborately? It is told in Shiva Mahimna Stotra - “Let us take the best of the materials required for writing. We require ink powder, a small container with water to dissolve the powder (till early last century, ink was being prepared in this manner and one used to dip a pen with a nib to write). We also require a pen, paper on which to write and a good tireless writer who can write for 24 hours daily for any length of time. To satisfy this requirement,

let us pulverise into a powder, the entire black mountain called Ajnana Giri at the end of the earth and dissolve it all in the ocean water. Let us choose a small branch of the divine wish-fulfilling tree called 'Kalpagam' and use the entire surface of the earth as paper to write on. Let us engage Saraswati the Goddess of learning to write for 24 hours a day, ceaselessly. Even then, be assured, you will never be able to exhaust the 'glorious traits'.

असित गिरिसमं स्थात् कज्जलं सिन्धुपात्रे
 सुरतरु वरशाखा लेखनी पत्रमुर्वि ।
 लिखति यदि गृहीत्वा शारदा सर्वकालं
 तदपि तव गुणानामीश पारं न याति ॥

My Guru Dev was a strict disciplinarian but at the same time very compassionate too.

He used to prohibit some of his disciples from doing breath control exercises (Pranayama). Swami Viranand was one of such disciples. About 1½ kms, further up from the Vasishta Guha was a palace of the king of Garhwal. One evening Swami Viranand had gone for a walk and was sitting on one of the stone-seats in the garden inside the palace. Even when the king came into the garden along with his Dewan, Swamiji did not get up and show any respect for the king. The following conversation took place between the king and the Swamiji.

'Who are you?'

'I am Swami Virananda, a disciple of Swami Purushottamananda, of Vasishta Guha'.

‘Oh! have you learnt any thing from your Guru or are you idling your time?’

‘Would you like me to show you something of what I have learnt?’

‘Why not?’

Now Virananda, who had acquired some mystic powers (siddhis) extended his hand and it contained a new Garland of artificial flowers which the king had put on the picture of Hanuman-ji on the first floor of the palace. Virananda further asked the king- ‘Is this enough or shall I bring forth all the contents of your safe kept inside the house’? The king was awed by the performance and with humility requested him not to demonstrate any more of his powers. In the meantime, the Dewan ran quickly to the Vasishtha Guha and apprised Guru Dev of what all happened resulting in the humiliation of the king. Guru Dev came up and was waiting at the entrance to the Ashram on the main road. When Virananda returned jubilantly, Guru Dev accompanied him to the cave down below beating him all the way and exclaiming “How many times have I told you not to do Pranayama and earn these mystic powers? Who asked you to demonstrate your powers?” This is a case of his disciplining the disciples. This same Virananda became mad in 1958 and after stealing some articles of Guru Dev at the time of the latter’s camping at Lucknow, disposed them of in exchange for some trifles. This is also the result of disregarding the specific advice of a Guru.

Another time when Guru Dev went to Madras, he was taken to the house of one Professor in English called ‘U.S. Ramachandran’

of Vivekananda college for the first time. During the course of the conversation, Mr. Ramachandran, mentioned about a stomach ache he had been continuously suffering for the last three years and had not been responding to any treatment. My Gurudev asked him to remove his banian and put one of his fingers on Mr. Ramachandran's navel. Mr. Ramachandran felt as if an electric shock was passing through his entire body and was immediately got rid of his stomach ache for ever. I heard this incident from Mr. Ramachandran himself at Anandashram, Kanhangad more than once.

Another instance of Gurudev's compassion. There was one Madan Babu at Lucknow. He was a disciple of Guru Dev who once advised him not to marry. That same year Mr. Madan Babu got married and in due course got two children (boys) too. Soon enough his wife died suddenly leaving one boy aged four and another aged 2½ years or so. After some time Madan Ji went to Vasishta Guha, leaving his children in the care of his sister at Lucknow. He told Guru Dev about his bereavement and asked his advice as to what he should do. Guru Dev well remembered his earlier advice which had been disregarded and replied rather sarcastically, - 'Why, you marry again and if she also dies, marry again and so on.' When Madan Babu expressed his desire to return to Lucknow, Gurudev asked him- 'Aye, why don't you remain here for a couple of days more and then leave?' Madan Ji hastened to reply 'I can not. I have to look after my children'. Gurudev ended the conversation with an exclamation 'Oh!'

One day, at Lucknow, Madan Babu was preparing poories for his children. A big fireplace was burning with hot charcoals and he was frying Poories in hot oil in a frying pan. His eldest son was dancing and singing on a small but tall stool by the side of the fire-place. Suddenly the stool over turned and the boy fell on the frying pan with boiling oil. He fell on the ground and over him fell that boiling oil, frying pan, the burning coal and finally that sigree too. The father brought a gunny bag and with its aid rescued the child from the burning oil and the charcoal. On enquiry, the boy confirmed that he was safe and sound and no harm befell him. It was a miracle.

Madanji was living in the first floor of his own house. He used to go to his office daily in a bicycle after locking up his both children in a room with all provisions for food, water etc. and with an attached bathroom. One day, when he was taking his bicycle down, before leaving for his office, the younger child came running to him, fell down in the first step of the staircase and rolled down all the forty steps or so till he reached the ground. He began to wail loudly. When Madan Babu left the cycle back in the room and taking the child in his hand enquired the child as to where all he got hurt, the latter denied that he was hurt at all anywhere and there was no pain. When asked for the reason for his wailing loudly, he exclaimed- “इतनी दूर से नीचे गिरा । मैं रोऊंगा नहीं क्या? ‘I fell down from such a distance. Should I not wail and weep?’” This was a second miracle. A few days later when he went to Vasishta Guha, Guru Dev greeted him saying ‘Aye, are you looking after your children well?’

Perhaps the greatest of his miracle was myself. When I first came to him in 1956 October, I was absolutely raw and had no knowledge of spirituality. In the very first meeting I was ordered to do Srimad Bhagavata Saptaham - both reading and expounding its meaning, on the forthcoming birth day of Guru Dev in December. It was my first introduction to spirituality. This was repeated every year both during his life time and much later too for a number of years. I never got any direct tuition from him. After the Samadhi of my Guru Dev while I was in East Africa (Tanzania), for nearly four years (October 1967 to 1971) due to various pressures in the worldly life, I forgot my Guru, meditation other spiritual practices and God too. My Guru Dev's hands were long and he was patient. Much later he applied his lasso to bring the wild horse under control. Through the intervention of my senior Guru Bhai, Swami Nirvedananda, my close contact with Vasishta Guha and its inmates started from about 1978 culminating in my own taking sannyas, after



A View of Holy Ganga from Ashram

retirement and completing nearly too decades of monkhood so far. My Gurudev used to tell me, “When I am with a body, my powers are limited. When once I leave my body, my powers to help my disciples will be unlimited”. Every great master comes to this world with a list of people to be guided by him. Somehow, though not on the original list, I was brought by a wind of extreme luck to the door of my Master. At last, my Guru Dev added my name as a foot note to his list. What a compassion? I do not deserve to be even a dust of my Guru Dev’s feet.

How I came to the feet of my Master and my experiences with him are all detailed fully in my book ‘FRAGRANT FLOWERS’ published in 2002 and available for reading or downloading in the website “www.swamishantanandapurimaharaj.org”



Introduction

- Swami Chaitanyananda

[This introduction was penned by Poojya Swami Chaitanyananda (Head, Vasishta Guha Ashram & Managing Trustee Sri Purushottamanand Trust), at the time of publication of second edition in Malayalam in July 2007. Swami Chaitanyanandaji was fortunate to be with Guru Maharaj for around 7 years, i.e., from early 1954 till the day of Mahasamadhi of Guru Maharaj in 1961.]

Om Sri Gurumoorthaye Namaha

The ‘**Autobiography or Iswara Karunyam**’ of his Holiness Parampoojya Sri Sadguru Maharaj in Malayalam was originally printed and published by Sri Swami Paresananda Puri at Kamalalayam Press, Trivandrum in the year 1956. Now based on the advice and encouragement of Swami Shantananda Puri, devotees have come forward to release a second edition and distribute it free of cost. We are extremely pleased with this development.

The life of Sri Guru Maharaj at Vasishta Guha from 1928 to 1961 was of great spiritual significance. In those days one had to tread on foot for around 22 km, over stones and thorns, through dense forest to reach here. Guru Maharaj stayed here unperturbed in the midst of several wild animals like tigers, wild

bears, leopards, pythons and several poisonous reptiles. Sitting lonely on meditation at the banks of Gangaji almost every day, till midnight was a daily routine of Guru Maharaj. In those days it was difficult to see a human being in these surroundings. Instead of proper food, Guru Maharaj happily remained here many a day, consuming some wild roots and berries. Guru Maharaj was a person of few words. Every word from him was deep and profound like an ocean in a pitcher. Those were the fortunate ones, who heard those nectarine words. Just hearing his words was a blissful experience.

The local populace viewed Guru Maharaj as God and they had deep reverence for him. The life story penned by Guru Maharaj in Malayalam was up to 1955 or so. The biography from 1955 till the Mahasamadhi on 13th February 1961 (Maha Sivaratri) was written briefly in English by our Gurubhai Swami Nirvedananda Puri.

From the old timers, we have heard wonderful incidences of Guru Maharaj in his earlier days at Guha. We are confident that his inspiring life history will act as a beacon to those fortunate spiritual aspirants reading this.

We pray Guru Maharaj to bestow his abundant blessings to all.

Vasishta Guha

29th July 2007

Swami Chaitanyananda

Dhyaanasloka of Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj



ध्यानस्तोकः

श्री रामकृष्णं जगतां शरण्यम्
ब्रम्हानन्दं ब्रह्मसमाधिनिष्ठम् ।
तच्छिष्यवर्यं पुरुषोत्तमं च
गुरूनिमान् नित्यमहं नमामि ॥

Dhyaanasloka

Sri Ramakrishnam Jagataam Sharanyam
Brahmanandam Brahmasamadhi Nishtam ।
Tad Sishyavaryam Purushottamam Cha
Gurooniman Nityamaham Namaami ॥

Daily I bow down to the spiritual preceptors,
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa the refuge of the world,
Swami Brahmananda engrossed in attribute less (absolute) Brahman,
and his pre-eminent disciple Swami Purushottama.

(This Dyanasloka of Swami Purushottamanada is
said to be composed by his Sannyasi Sishyas, sometime after
Guru Maharaj's Maha Samadhi in 1961. We express our gratitude
to Bhaktakavi Sri. T.B.Lakshmana Rao for the English translation.)



Dhyaanasloka of Swami Shantananda Puri



ध्यानस्तोत्रः

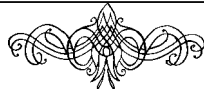
वेदान्तादिसमस्तशास्त्रजलधिं कारुण्यजन्मस्थलं
जीवन्मुक्तयतीश्वरं भयहरं वैराग्यभूषान्वितम् ।
सौलभ्यादिगुणोज्ज्वलं शिवसमं मन्दस्मितं तापसं
शान्तानन्दपुरिं नमामि सततं सर्वार्थसंसिद्धये ॥

Dhyaanasloka

Vedaantaadi-samasta-shaastrajaldhim kaarunya-janmasthalam
Jeevanmukta-yateeshwaram Bhayaharam Vairagyabhushaanvitam ।
Saulabhyaadi-gunojwalam Sivasamam mandasmitam taapasam
Shantanandapurim namaami satatam sarvaartha samsiddhaye ॥

I incessantly bow down to Sri Shantananda Puri Swamiji,
the ocean of Upanishadic and Scriptural Lore,
the origin of compassion,
the liberated Lord par excellence among the saints,
the one who dispels fear, the one adorned by the jewel of dispassion,
the one embellished with the radiance of easy approachability,
standing on par with Lord Siva, the ever smiling ascetic,
for the attainment of all purushaarthaas (dharma, artha, kaama, moksha).

(Composed by Bhaktakavi Sri T. B. Lakshmana Rao)





H.H. Srimad Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj

AUM

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE AUTO-BIOGRAPHY OF HIS HOLINESS SWAMIJI PURUSHOTTAMANANDJI MAHARAJ OF VASISHTA GUHA, DIST. TEHRI-GARHWAL UTTAR KHAND (HIMALAYAS)

It is with a profound sense of inadequacy and humility that, after the publication of His Holiness Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj's Autobiography in Malayalam language even during the Swamiji's life time, in 1956, it is only now, almost 38 years later, that it has been possible for Sri Purushottamanand Trust to place before the English-knowing public this English translation of the autobiography. Very shortly, the Trustees hope to bring out a Hindi version too, so that a much larger section of the Swamiji's devotees could read the great work and benefit from it.

Born in a middle-class house-hold in the town of Tiruvalla in Kerala State on Sunday, November 23, 1879, and given the name of Neelakantan, he was afflicted with rheumatism and paralysis even as he had just completed studies in the Fifth Form (equivalent to the present day 10th Standard) and had to discontinue his education and remain practically bed-ridden for about five years. Later, a friend introduced him to the Sri Ramakrishna Sangh in Tiruvalla where he began

to participate in Bhajans, Kirtans, religious discourses, etc. and himself give readings from the Srimad Bhagavatham. The year 1916 marked a turning point in his life when he was spell-bound by the darshan of Swami Nirmalanandaji of the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa) who had come to Haripad in Kerala. Nirmalanandaji exercised a profound influence on Nilakantan's life. In 1916, through his good offices, Nilakantan was given "Mantra Deeksha" at Haripad by Swami Brahmanandji Maharaj, the then President of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Calcutta who had come down to Kerala. This was followed, in October 1923, by his initiation into Sanyasa, with the Sanyasa Ashram name of Purushottamananda Puri, by Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the then President of Sri Ramakrishna Mission, during Nilakantan's visit to the Belur Math. Purushottamanandaji has vividly described, in his own words, his struggles during his childhood, his physical affliction, his spiritual leanings ever since childhood, how the Lord manifests His divine compassion at every twist and turn in life; how He fulfills His guarantee of "Yogakshemam Vahamyaham" if only we have the good sense to surrender ourselves completely to Him; his sojourn all over India; how he reached Vasishta Guha in the Tehri-Garhwal District (Himalayas) of Uttar Pradesh, and lived there and identified himself with the Guha to the extent of his name becoming synonymous with the Guha; and how his spiritual life evolved itself from day to day.

Our whole life is a continuous spiritual Sadhana and the Guru Maharaj's autobiography affords immense opportunities for

every reader and devotee to draw heavily from Swamiji's life. Devotees who had been fortunate and blessed enough to have come into contact with the Guru Maharaj during his life time (until his Maha Samadhi on February 13, 1961), will find this autobiography kindling nostalgic memories. Others would find the reading of this great work eminently rewarding.

The Trustees place on record their appreciation for the dedication and devotion with which Shri J. Padmanabha Iyer carried out this English translation despite his impaired health.

The Trustees hope that every reader of this book will be able to get an idea of how, despite physical and other disabilities, a selfless life, a ready willingness to help one's fellow creatures, a sense of total surrender to the Supreme, will enable each one of us to scale towering heights in our spiritual evolution. This book is accordingly dedicated to the memory of the Guru Maharaj whose boundless Blessings and Grace will be received by all his devotees.

For the Sri Purushottamanand Trust
Vasishta Guha
1994.

Swami Chaitanyananda

**PREFACE BY THE PUBLISHER OF THE
MALAYALAM EDITION (JULY 1956)
(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

Having retired from Government service, I decided that I should devote all the remaining time in my life towards the attainment of spiritual elevation and the fulfilment of the purpose of my existence and birth. One can attain such spiritual elevation through devotion to God, single-pointed contemplation, and unceasing effort. Possibly because of the effect of Vasanas in the previous births, even in my youth, I could acquire a certain amount of real knowledge. Towards fulfilment of my ambition, I reached Kanyakumari and threw myself heart and soul in the worship (bhajana) of Sri Jagadambaa. After 3 - 4 years, I prepared myself for a pilgrimage to all the important temples and punya- tirthas in Bharatadesa. With the blessings of Providence, I could visit all the sacred temples and punya tirthas from Kanyakumari to Kailasa and from Sri Dwaraka to Sri Puri Jagannath; particularly I was blessed to visit Manasa Sarovar and the great Sri Kailasa.

During my first pilgrimage in 1954, while in the Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh, I came to know that the Vasishta Guha of ancient days was only a little way from there; and that a great and noble sage had been staying there for 25 years, constantly engaged in sadhana-anushthana. So I reached Vasishta Guha accompanied by a Tamilian Sanyasi. I prostrated before that divine Sage, with great devotion,

attracted by his child-like face, the divine effulgence emanating from him and the magnetic lustre of his face.

From the way in which we talked in Tamil language, he could readily understand that I hailed from Kerala; accordingly he continued the conversation with me in Malayalam. I gathered that the Purvashrama of that noble Sage was in Tiruvalla Taluk of Travancore State. I also became acquainted with a Bengali Brahmachari who was his disciple and was staying with him. That Brahmachari informed me that Swamiji was engaged in writing some books and that, particularly, because of the affectionate insistence of his devotees in India as well as abroad, he was now writing his autobiography. We also had conversations with the Swamiji regarding his autobiography. He very kindly fulfilled my desire to go through the portions till then completed in manuscript. I apprised Swamiji that I had a desire to go on a pilgrimage of the Himalayas once again and visit Badrinath, Kedarnath and other sacred places; that if, with God's blessings, this ambition of mine got fulfilled in the near future, I would take that opportunity to call on the Swamiji again at that time; and that, if the manuscript of the autobiography became ready at that time, I myself would like to undertake the work of publishing it in book form. And, treating his sincerely uttered best wishes as the blessings of a great personage, I returned the next day itself.

I again embarked on a Himalayan pilgrimage, goaded by my inner Self, in 1955. I went to Vasishta Guha and called on Swamiji. Seeing that, in addition to his spiritual practices, various social services which he had undertaken for helping the public, had also yielded excellent results, I

felt considerably elated. Swamiji, very kindly handed over to me the completed manuscript copy of his autobiography.

I reproduce below certain extracts from the book “To Badrinath” published in 1953 by Sri K. M. Munshi, Union Minister who, in his book, has recorded about the selfless services rendered by Swamiji to the public after getting to know about them first-hand.

“A few weeks previously while we were guests of the Rajmata of Tehri-Garhwal at Anand Kashi I met a Sadhu who lived on the bank of the Ganga in a cave called Vasishta Guha.

“When one morning we visited this natural retreat, we found hanging on the outer wall a portrait of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; the interior of the cave was dark and deep. A shrine of Shiva was installed there: An old Sadhu, frail, fragile, tiny, accompanied by his disciples limped forward to meet us and began to talk in fairly fluent English. His name was Swami Purushottamananda Puri.

“We met again in the afternoon and had a long talk. He told me his story. He originally came from Travancore and was initiated by one of the senior disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. After wandering for many years, he heard of a cave in the wilderness in 1928. So, with staff in hand and a blanket on his back, he limped his weary way to Vasishta Guha, determined to meditate there in solitude.

“Another Sadhu, however, was in occupation of this cave and refused to share the cave with the newcomer. It is easy

enough to leave the world; but very difficult to get rid of one thing, the sense of possession.”

“But Purushottamanandaji was persistent; he refused to give up the idea to live in the cave; he kept vigil outside it for a few days and slept in the open. He had no food; he had no fire at which to warm himself. He remained in the wilderness trusting in God. “The ways of the Almighty are inscrutable. A villager gave six matches to light a fire with. A woman gave me some milk and so I managed to live”, he said.

The original occupant of the cave eventually left it and went away. Our friend moved in and began to meditate.

After a time, Purushottamanandaji went on a pilgrimage to Amarnath and did not return until six years later. He first cleared the cave of the silt which had been brought down by the river during the floods, and he once again settled down to meditate. People from surrounding villages flocked to see him, offered him food and afterwards became his disciples. He took a paternal interest in their welfare; helped them, advised them and induced them to build a high school in the locality. He is now a man of considerable influence in the neighbourhood. Everyone honours and respects him.

He is, I discovered, a deep Vedantin and his ways are simple, innocent, almost child-like; he smiles and smiles all the time. Loneliness, starvation and a hundred other aches mean nothing to him; he lives a real life possessed of God, which give him perpetual Joy and Peace. He has come to this state after years of Sadhana.

Before we parted, he admonished me. He asked, had I not had enough of life? It was high time I realised what I really was. “I wish I could”, I replied. (Then follows a Malayalam translation of the above extract in English).

Conferment of birth as a human being is itself the result of divine compassion. The charioteer who steers us on the right path in life is also the Supreme God. Those human beings who are able to think on these lines without the least trace of ego or arrogance; who, keeping a steady mind in prosperity as well as in adversity, in joy as well as in misery, are able to contemplate and meditate on that Supreme Effulgence with sincere devotion; and who serve Him with their whole body and mind, experience this bliss of good deeds on an ever-increasing scale. The autobiography of the author, the adorable Sri Purushottamanandaji, amply illustrates how God leads a person to Himself - a person who by virtue of good deeds done in prior births, has been born with a good, true and sincere heart and conduct; how God gives such a person either fulfilment of his desires or miseries in order to bring him close to him. To such of those as wish to tread a similar path of self-realisation, there is no doubt that this autobiography will help in showing them the way. Known for his innocence and simplicity right from childhood, what the venerable Swamiji has recorded with his child-like simplicity, is published here in print exactly as it was written by him, for the benefit of countless readers.

PUBLISHER

DEDICATION

It was in the Valia Kottaaran (Big Palace) near the Subramanya Temple at Haripad (Kerala State) that I was fortunate to have my very first darshan of Shri Nirmalananda Swamiji. Attracted by the magnetic spell of that divine person's eyes and drawn towards him, I gently walked up to him and was fortunate to repose my head in that lap, I had, in effect, offered my very body there. It is my firm belief that, even now, that head continues to repose there itself. I dedicate this Autobiography too at the Lotus Feet of that great person with reverence and devotion.

VASISHTA GUHA
19-09-1955

PURUSHOTTAMANANDA

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CHAPTER - 1

OBEISANCE TO THE PRECEPTORS

Many have been desirous of knowing about the life-story of this humble soul, but I was not very keen to spend time writing about the trivialities concerning my life. However, on the present occasion of my sojourn to Kerala when almost everyone who met me expressed a desire to know more about me, I happened to tell them: “I shall endeavour to place my life-story before you before long”. I am embarking on writing my autobiography with the sole object of ensuring that this assurance of mine does not remain unfulfilled.

MY FAMILY

2. You would certainly have heard of the erstwhile Travancore State which was also referred to by such endearing and praiseworthy names as Sri Vanchi Rajyam, Sree Vaazhumcode, Venaad, Dharma Rajyam, etc. (Travancore State is presently part of Kerala State in the extreme south of India). Our former administrators used to refer to this princely State as “the Star of India”. Travancore is a breath-takingly beautiful country and its rulers, the Maharajas, used to govern it with deep and abiding affection for their people whom they considered to be not merely their subjects but as their own children. Travancore is a country which is lavishly endowed by nature - lofty, ever-green mountains, numerous rivers carrying pure water and

providing navigation for steam-boats and country craft; vast and enchanting natural lakes; forests abounding in myriads of wild animals and numerous species of trees; variegated flora and fauna; hundreds of ancient and hoary temples, churches, educational institutions; courts of law; roads and highways; railway lines and tunnels - these and many other ornaments adorn this beautiful land. One can say that persons who do not know to read and write practically do not exist here. Situated in the central part of Travancore is the taluk of Tiruvalla (Districts and taluks have, in some cases, undergone changes in name after Independence, but Tiruvalla town still retains its name -Tr.). The names of several places in the State are inextricably linked with the principal temples there. Tiruvalla has an ancient temple dedicated to “Sree Vallabha”, and Tiruvalla is nothing but the “tadbhava” form of the word “Sree Vallabha” (Sree Vallabha is Lord Vishnu, the Consort of Goddess Lakshmi or Sree - Tr.).

3. This body was born in a house near “Chakra Saalakkadavu” (a branch of the Manimala river) approximately two furlongs (about 400 metres - Tr.) east of the Tiruvalla temple. That property is even now being referred to as “Kuzhiyil Parambil House” (which may be loosely translated as “the house in the low - lying compound - Tr). The house belonged to an ancient Nair family which had several distinctions conferred on it. Such titles as “Kurup”, “Pillai”, etc., earned by it proclaim its greatness. But nothing is permanent.

Either by extravagance on the part of some of the heads of the family, or by their ignorance, practically all its immovable

properties got sold in auctions. One thing must be stated here: the family had carried on for several generations as an Undivided Hindu Family until 1030 Malayalam Era (1854 A.D) when it had to break into two branches. Paappi Amma and Ummini Amma (Rukmini Amma) were daughters of the same mother. Pappi Amma had two daughters, Narayani Amma and Parvati Amma, and two sons, Govinda Pillai and Padmanabha Pillai. Ummini Amma had two sons Kesava Pillai and Narayana Pillai and a daughter by name Kutti Amma. Ummini Amma had received substantial financial assistance from her husband. It was because the Kaaranavanship (i.e office of “Karta” or Administrator of a joint family - Tr.) of the family fell on Paarvathiakaar Govinda Pillai that the entire family property barring a small house got sold in auctions. (A Paarvathiakaar is a junior Revenue official subordinate to a Tahsildar - Tr). Some of these properties were purchased at the auction at a low price by Ummini Amma’s husband and made over to her. This enabled the members of the family in Ummini Amma’s branch to live in comfort. They constructed a good house and started living in it separately. This house is known as “Kizhakke Kuzhiyil Parambu” (i.e. the eastern portion of the low-lying compound - Tr). The other branch, “Padinjaare Kuzhiyil Parambu” (i.e. the western portion of the low-lying compound - Tr.), lived in a mud-house and somehow carried on with their existence. It was the noble Nair families of Mathilbhaagam, Tiruvalla (an area in the vicinity of the Sree Vallabha temple - Tr.) that used to process paddy by de-husking, pounding, etc. to convert it into rice and supply the entire requirements of rice of the temple for the daily pujas, etc. Pappi Amma used to get a little income from this activity. She

must have received some assistance from her husband as well. She got both her daughters married. The elder daughter passed away after giving birth to a child. The younger daughter, Parvati Amma, the author's mother, was married to one Narayanan Nair who was staying near the Tiruvalla temple. He used to work as an attendant in the temple, maintaining and lighting all the oil lamps there in the traditional way, etc. Although his family had landed property and other assets, Narayanan Nair never used to keep an eye on them and he was quite content with the limited income and other benefits from the temple. Needless to say Parvati Amma used to receive adequate assistance from him. He, the author's father, was an ardent devotee and a detached soul. After completion of their education, both Govinda Pillai and Padmanabha Pillai entered Government service in junior positions. Pappi Amma too passed away in due course and the entire responsibility of running the family fell on Parvati Amma. Although she was illiterate, her intelligence, acumen and efficiency were unparalleled. Virtues such as integrity, compassion and self-respect shone in her. Her heart and intelligence would always go out to others in distress. For quite some time after her marriage, Parvati Amma had no child and she used to perform various religious rites in the hope of begetting a child. It must have been as a result of these observances - making offerings and gifts to the deserving; fasting; penance; worship at temple, etc., that this humble soul was conceived in her womb in her 25th year, and delivered on the Sukla Paksha Dasami (the 10th day of the bright lunar fortnight - Tr) under the Uthratthaathi star (Uttara Bhadrapada or Uttara Proshthapada)

Dhanur Lagna in the month of Vrischikam (mid-November to mid- December - Tr) in 1054 Malayalam Era (1879 A.D) (This corresponds to the date 23rd November 1879 A.D - Tr).

4. It can easily be guessed how much happiness this event would have given to the parents, maternal uncles and neighbours. And this boy was named Neelakantan. When he was 4-5 years old, this boy was initiated formally into learning the Malayalam alphabet (Vidyaarambha) at the Bhaktaprayathu Vaaryam and then sent for formal education to the a “Kalari” (educational institution) of Velu Aasaan, a profound scholar. Aasaan treated the boy with great affection. When, within about two months, the boy could piece together letters of the Malayalam alphabet and read, and also do simple counting, addition, subtraction etc., he was sent to the Government Central School near the temple where he studied for 4-5 years. I think I studied there until I reached the highest class available there. All the teachers used to display especial love towards this boy and he used to earn prizes in all the classes.

5. There is a house-hold by name “Nallooparambil” near this boy’s house and he had a friend called Kesava Pillai in that house. One day when this boy happened to go to Kesava Pillai’s house, he found him writing out the letters of the English alphabet - A,B,C,D and so on and studying them. Kesava Pillai’s elder brother was a student in the Government English School and this was his idea of preparing the younger brother also for being sent to that school. Seeing this, a keen desire arose in the mind of this boy also to study the English language; and then

and there he learnt all the 26 letters of the English alphabet. He then returned home and mentioned everything to his mother. The very next day the boy's maternal uncle took both the boys to the English School and got them admitted to Class I. It was this uncle who bore the entire expenses of the boy's education; and in this school also Neelakantan was the object of love and affection of the teachers.

6. This school had classes only upto Form IV (present- day IX Standard - Tr). Pujya Sri N. Narayana Iyer was its Headmaster. He was indeed a very capable person. He had a nick-name "Tiger of Alappuzha (Alleppey)" which expressed very clearly his courage and capacity to inspire fear (Alappuzha is a port-town and a large commercial centre on the Western Coast of this State - Tr). It was to the C.M.S.College School at Kottayam, about 16 miles (26 km) to the north of Tiruvalla that I had been sent for continuing my studies. There, after having passed Form V (10th Standard) with a high rank, I entered Form VI (Matriculation or S.S.L.C. Stage - Tr).

7. In those days, transportation facilities were not available as we have now. All travel had to be done on foot. I went once to Kottayam after the holidays to know my result. Soon again I came back home to take my box, books, clothes etc. How much happiness this gave to my mother and the others!

8. "*Asmaakam tu manoratho parichitaprassaada vaapectada Kreedaa Kaanana Keli Kauthuka Jushaam Aayuh Param Ksheeyate*". Practically all the pleasures of worldly persons are derived from their wishes or flights of fancy. Consistently with

this, Parvati Amma is also fancifully hoping for happiness from wealth. At that time I had two brothers and two sisters. One of the brothers, Krishna Pillai, was very intelligent and hard-working. Father and maternal uncles had very high expectations about them. Both the boys are clever indeed and one of them has reached the matriculation class (present day XI Standard), Optimistic and pleasant thoughts of a bright future, such as: “Surely, now we have nothing lacking”, delight the hearts of the elders. Before long the curtain falls. The scene that unfolds itself thereafter is indeed awesome beyond words.

9. This “Neelakanta Pillai” stayed in his house on that occasion only for one night. That very same night he experienced some pain in the right leg. Mother got to know about it. When questioned by her, he brushed it aside, saying it was of no consequence. Inwardly the boy was deeply afraid that, if he spoke the truth, they might not permit him to go to Kottayam. At 5 a.m. the next morning, he started after taking some light food. The pain in the leg started getting worse, but ignoring that, he reached Changanassery (a town about 8 km to the north of Tiruvalla and 18 km south of Kottayam Itself - Tr), by 10 a.m. but that day it took him 5-6 hours even to reach Changanassery (a third of the distance - Tr). Feeling dead tired and hungry, he sat down on a platform built under a banyan tree on the way. Just then a Namboodiri Brahmin happened to come that way. He invited me saying; “You look extremely tired and weak. Have some food at my place and then proceed.” Reaching that noble brahmin’s residence with great delight, I finished my bath and food and then continued my journey. I have not seen that

noble soul thereafter. His generosity and large-heartedness were firmly implanted in my mind and many are the times when I have recalled them in my memory. After proceeding a short distance, I instructed the porter who was carrying my things to go ahead, keep my things in the College hostel and get back. And so he did; in fact, midway, I met him on his return journey, but I did not tell him anything about my pain, fearing that, if I told him, mother would grieve when she came to know about it. Look at the short-sightedness of man! The reason for all this must certainly have been my keen desire to continue my studies. After alternate spells of walking and lying down to rest, I eventually reached the Hindu hostel around 5 p.m. On arrival, I did not lie down normally but simply fell down in excruciating pain. The hostel manager was Sri Vilvattathu Raghavan Nambiar. He and my dear class-fellows started discussing what best could be done to get me some relief. Thinking it might be a sprain or a dislocation, they got a Christian mother to come and massage my foot. The pain only got aggravated. (Later it became clear that Nilakanta Pillai had been afflicted with rheumatism and paralysis - Tr.) On seeing that, they brought an Ayurvedic Physician (Vaidya). He advised that it was a terrible mistake to have massaged the leg in that condition, and suggested that I be sent back immediately to Tiruvalla. This was on the third day of my reaching Kottayam. How to get back home? The pain was such that I could not take even a single step. All I could do was to keep lying on my back - even turning to one side or the other was totally out of the question - such was the unbearable pain being experienced by me. Who indeed would be willing to take such a patient to Tiruvalla? Not only my class-mates, but

nearly every-one in the hostel held me in some affection. They all consulted among themselves and sent me back to Tiruvalla. Two of my classmates, N.P.Velu Pillai and Govinda Pillai also accompanied me. Around 10 O’Clock at night they put me in a country craft (small row-boat). About 2 pm the next afternoon, we reached Peringal ferry. My house was over a mile (1½ km) away. How to reach there?

10. Close to my house was a house called “Oorayil”. Sri Kesava Pillai of that house-hold had a special affection for me. This was known to Velu Pillai also. Velu Pillai was disinclined to break the news of my ill-health all of a sudden to my mother and the others in my family. He arranged for me to lie down in the river- boat and proceeded to acquaint Kesava Pillai about my condition and my arrival. An extremely anxious and distressed Kesava Pillai went to my house and informed my maternal uncle, Sri Padmanabha Pillai, but did not convey anything to my mother. Being a very intelligent woman, my mother immediately guessed from the facial expressions of Kesava Pillai, my maternal uncle and others that something very distressing had happened. From the previous day she had been experiencing quite a few bad dreams as well as bad omens. A porcelain jar full of oil which my mother was carrying, had slipped and fallen down from her hands all of a sudden and shattered into a thousand pieces. It is said that this is a particularly bad omen. There is truth in proverbs too!

11. Around 3 p.m, my uncle, along with Kesava Pillai, Velu Pillai and two or three servants (coolies) carrying a reclining

chair (easy chair) came to the ferry. Placing me in the chair they had me carried and taken to the house around 4 p.m. Mother gets to know the gravity of the situation; her courage drains away. My uncle and the others console her and apprise her of what has to be done. They made me lie down comfortably in a place. Velu Pillai and Govinda Pillai had to return immediately to Kottayam. My mother feeds them sumptuously and soon they leave for Kottayam after accepting the money needed for their fare.

12. “*Anyathaa Chintitam Kaaryam deivam anyatra chintayet*”
(In brief, “Man proposes, God disposes” - Tr).

*“Vannuvonam kazhinju vishuvennum
Vannillallo Thiruvaathirayennum
Itthamoronnu chinthichirikkave
Chathupokunnu kashtam Siva Siva”*

[Translation of the above Malayalam sloka - Onam has come and gone. Vishu is also over. But Thiruvathira has not come (i.e. Ardra Darsanam in December). In the midst of these and other thoughts, alas O Siva, man departs from this world! - Tr.]

Here too, all the castles in the air have caught fire. Yet new castles are being built. I am in terrible pain. It is painful if one were to touch even the cot on which I am lying. On top of this, no appetite. I tried my best, but in vain, to keep my pain and suffering from my mother and the others. All around me everyone was in great misery. My father was away in Rameshwaram on a pilgrimage. All my educational expenses

were being borne by a maternal uncle, Sri Govinda Pillai. He was an “Amin” (a “process-server” - Tr) in the Munsiff’s court and had gone out on some office work. My father had been a rheumatic-patient and had obtained relief from treatment by an Ayurvedic Physician, Sri Nanu Vaidyan of Chengannur (a town about 11 km to the south of Tiruvalla - Tr). Everyone had a lot of confidence in that physician and my uncle himself went and fetched him for my treatment; and the line of treatment directed by him was started. By then my father also returned from his pilgrimage to Rameshwaram. It was not as though my father was not distressed by my condition; he had the fortitude to bear anything in life.

13. Arranging for and physically carrying out anyone’s ayurvedic treatment is an extremely arduous task. In those days the physician would only prescribe the composition of the medicines. The entire task of getting the various herbs, roots, leaves and seeds identified, plucked and collected; preparing the Kashaya; processing the medicated oils and then preparing Ksheerabala 108 times repeated; getting ready various oils, ghees and other preparations; and several other preparations; and several other time-consuming and labour-intensive items of work had to be got done by the patient’s own people in their own premises. All this was enough work and more for the members of the house-hold. If specialised treatment like “Kizhi” or “pizhichil” had to be started, it meant taking the assistance of 4 or 5 outsiders for several days. All this involved quite a good deal of expenditure. It was because of my mother’s competence, dedication and organisational skill that all this could be taken up and completed without a hitch.

14. In Kerala in those days chit funds used to be organised everywhere. Whenever mother joined a chit where the chit was allotted by drawal of lots she invariably used to get the money at the very first draw. With the interest on this amount, she could pay up the amounts due from time to time, leaving the principal intact. In this way, she had managed to create certain assets such as cash, paddy, ornaments, etc. Uncle was a spend-thrift. One can say that, by conducting the marriages of my sisters with pomp and splendour far exceeding his capacity, he managed to wipe out practically all my mother's assets. Mother was also a happy spender. The thought upper most in her mind was: "When my children come of age, what possibly can I lack?" She had reposed practically all her hopes in this humble soul. It was in these straitened circumstances that I became bed-ridden. Readers will be able to imagine readily how much hardship I would have caused to my doting mother and other relatives. O, God, everything is Thy sport. Who can know the secret of all this? Salutations to that great power which is beyond conception and thought! *"Achintyavaibhavaaya Namoh Namah"*.

15. I did not get any relief worth mention from Sri Nanu Vaidyan's treatment. After that, treatment was got done by fetching Sri Kaarakkal Madhava Vaidyan. This was followed by treatment by Ashta Vaidyan Sri Vayaskara Mooss. "Kizhi" and "Pizhichil" treatments were done four or five times and a good deal of money had been spent.

16. I did not render totally useless even this period of affliction. From childhood I had a deep interest in taking a very

early bath in the morning and going to temples; in listening to and reading works such as the Bhagavatham and the Ramayanam; and in observing religious days such as Ekadashi, Pradosha, etc. Father used to read Ezhuthachhan's (Thunchathu Ramanujan) Sri Bhagavatham for mother and the others to listen to. Sometimes I too used to listen to these readings. Once when I happened to listen to the story of Prahlada being read out I experienced a wonderful sense of pleasure and joy. If only I could also attain devotion like Prahlada!

17. Owing to the existence of such spiritual tendencies deep inside me, I never used to experience any sorrow or misery because of my illness. My entire misery lay in the fact that I was the source of unlimited sorrow of misery and hardship for others. My thoughts are even now always for the misery and hardship of others. When people from the neighbourhood used to come and see me out of affection, they used to say: "O, this has happened to this good boy!" and experience misery; and I used to console them.

18. Even while studying in the school at Tiruvalla I had learnt by heart several hymns (Stotras). We also used to get magazines such as Prabuddha Bharatam. I had also read an English translation of the Bhagavad Gita. Even at that time I had experienced a desire to read the Bhagavad Gita in the original Sanskrit language. An earnest desire to study Sanskrit was born in me only for this purpose, and this desire was more or less fulfilled right on my sick-bed.

19. Once when Sri K.P.Neelakanta Pillai who had some affection came to see me, he presented me with both the volumes

of Bhandarkar's Sanskrit Reader. I began to study both these books on my own. I learned the Bhagavad Gita by heart. Even while studying in the Malayalam School, I had studied books such as Amarakosa, Siddha Rupam, Sanskrit Jnana Deepika, Sri Ramodantam, etc. and also several Sanskrit slokas. Even on my sickbed, I used to go through the works of Bhartruhari and other poets. Through these I was able to obtain a small degree of acquaintance with Sanskrit.

20. All of five long years passed in this way on the sick bed. Treatment continued without respite. Various emotions sprout within me, thinking about the misery and hardship I have been causing to my parents and others. Now I am able to walk a little, using a stick. Several persons came to see me. They happened to mention about the goodness of Lord Guruvayurappan. It was at Guruvayoor that Sri Narayana Bhattathiri who had been afflicted by paralysis got cured. And I happened to hear about the hymn Narayaneeyam which had poured forth from his heart in a ceaseless flow. The thought "How could I reach Guruvayoor?" took pride of place in my heart. For one thing, that place was far away. And, on top of that, it was next to impossible to get unreserved approval from my mother and others to my going there.

21. So I must somehow go away without letting them know. This body may have become weak, but there was no weakness of the spirit. Changanassery was only 6 miles (9½ km) from my house. If I could reach that place somehow, then I could go from there by river-craft to Ernakulam and then by bullock-

cart to Trichur. And Guruvayoor was just 16 miles (25½ km) from Trichur. All this information I had gathered. “*Iswaro Rakshathu*”. (May God look after me -Tr).

22. During the day-time of the night on which I had planned to leave, I had already made the necessary preparations. I had tied together in a small bundle 2-3 books, 2-3 clothes and a little money and secreted the bundle under my bed without anybody knowing about it. I had also prepared a note: “I am now leaving this place to obviate the misery of all of you and of myself. None need grieve”: I intended to leave this note behind. That night also I took the Kashaya medicine. The dose for the next day was also ready. I lay down after taking Kashaya and food. My bed was inside the room. Father, mother and the others used to sleep in the fore-court (front verandah). I was anxiously awaiting the moment when they would all go to sleep. When I was satisfied that they were all fast asleep, it must have been close to midnight, then, I quietly slipped out of the room with my bundle and a stick to support me. I had placed a pillow on the bed and affixed my note on to the door. What I am about to do is a heinous act. I never had a thought for the unbearable grief that would be experienced by my parents and others when my absence got discovered, apparently because my mind was soaked with the single thought that I would get substantial relief from my illness if I could go and worship at Guruvayoor. It was all God’s will.

23. Well then, from the verandah I came out quickly to the courtyard and from there, on to the road. When I had walked

half a mile (just over half a kilometre - Tr), I saw a person who was quite well-known to me but, fortunately, he did not notice me. If he had, the story would have been entirely different. It is indeed the Lord who carries us. Reaching the eastern entrance to the temple, I prayed specially to the Lord and prostrated. Then I resumed walking in the utter darkness of the night. By the crack of dawn I reached Perunna in Changanassery. There is a famous Subramania temple there and, attached to it, a choultry. I went inside the choultry and, with the caretaker's permission, kept my things there and rested for a while, I told him the entire truth. The caretaker knew my house-hold and also my uncles and others.

24. He insisted that I return home. He threatened that, otherwise, he would straightaway inform my people. When I patiently explained to him and made him understand my precise intention in going to Guruvayoor, he reluctantly agreed. I made it a point to present him with a set of new clothes.

25. Come what may, I must bathe and offer my prayers in the temple. For well over five years, I had not taken my bath in cold water - I used to bathe only in water specially prepared by boiling 5 acidic leaves and berries and then cooling it. Anyway I had enough courage now. I dipped myself in the temple tank and after finishing my bath, I worshipped the deity in the temple. The caretaker took me to his house for food - excellent rice and curries. It was not as though I was not hungry, but the food would simply not go down my throat. I had also become worried, thinking of my mother and others. Am I to return

home? My mind is not willing to agree to that course. I decided to proceed to Guruvayoor itself. Finishing my food, I returned to the choultry and quietly waited. By 4 p.m I proceeded to the Market Jetty where country-craft wait (to pick up, and load and, unload cargo - Tr). I think that the caretaker had also accompanied me.

26. That was a market-day. Changanassery was a very famous and prominent market centre. Many are the commodities and vegetables brought here for sale on the market-day and country-craft (river-boats) laden with all kinds of goods ply to other centres. I went close to the river-boat which would be leaving for Ernakulam and, with the boatman's permission, got inside it and sat in a corner. It is not unlikely that somebody may come from Tiruvalla in search of me. It was precisely to escape from such persons that, much before its departure time, I got inside the craft which was laden with bunches and bunches of plantain (banana) fruits. The boat fare did not exceed 4-5 annas (25-30 paise).

27. Here I get a co-passenger-cum-follower, a tall, hefty person who wanted to go aimlessly just anywhere and not to any specific destination. When he happened to talk to me in the Jetty before he boarded the craft it struck him, and he decided, that he should travel with me, and he got into the craft along with me. He had quarrelled with his people at home and was getting away. Think of the greatness of the Lord! He is the greatest Helper of the helpless ones. He keeps on rendering help from time to time to those who think of Him. He indeed is our true Mother and Father and Friend; and Relative; and

Knowledge; and Wealth Our Everything! “*Tvameva Maataa cha Pitaa Tvameva / Tvameva bandhuscha Sakhaa Tvameva / Tvameva Vidyaa Dravinam Tvameva / Tvameva sarvam mama deva deva*”. One who understands this truth understands everything. It is for the realisation of this truth that He keeps on creating misfortunes and calamities for those who avidly desire to worship Him. “*Vipadah Santu nah sasvat*” - “May calamities befall us eternally” - was Kunti devi’s prayer.

28. The craft continues to be moored in the Jetty until 8 or 9 p.m. How much inconvenience and trouble are experienced by the travellers! Today travel facilities have increased manifold because we now have buses, steamboats, trains, and, to crown them all, aeroplanes. The boat started moving after 9 p.m. A great relief indeed. We reached a place called Tanneermukkam around noon the next day. That was an excise check post. Excise officials are posted there to check all river-craft. This affords some rest and respite to the passengers too. This is a good opportunity for taking one’s bath or food. Myself and my co-passenger got out of the boat, had our bath in a temple tank, worshipped at the temple, procured some eatables, fruit or some beaten rice, from a shop and started eating. In those days there used to be 5 or 6 river-boats proceeding from Changanassery to Tanneermukkam. From one of those boats, a man was shouting, ‘Don’t let that man get away. I am now coming from Tiruvalla. He is running away unauthorisedly. His mother and others are in great misery, they are as good as dead. So this person must be sent back to Tiruvalla.’ The moment this announcement was heard, policemen crowded around

me. They threatened me, saying they would send me back to Tiruvalla under police escort. I had plenty of courage, and I told them: “I am proceeding to Ernakulam for my examination. If you send me forcibly somewhere else, I would not be able to write the examination, and you will be responsible for all the consequences.” On hearing my words uttered without the slightest tinge of fear or hesitation, doubts started getting created in their minds. They said: “Let’s take a look at your bundle.” I opened the bundle and showed it to them. They saw only the books and the clothes; they did not notice the saffron-coloured earth in it. They then allowed me to proceed to Ernakulam itself. As the boatman was hurrying me, I got into the craft quickly. I should say that I ate practically nothing, but my co-passenger had taken food.

29. The boat encountered favourable wind. When all the sails were fixed, it started moving faster. By 7 a.m. the next morning, we reached Ernakulam. Both of us disembarked.

30. On hearing about the miseries of my parents and others at Tanneermukkam, I too had become considerably agitated. As soon as I touched land at Ernakulam, I started making enquiries about the location of the Posts and Telegraphs office. I had never been to Ernakulam before. My mother had not permitted me to go even to places in the vicinity of our house. She had agreed to send me to Kottayam only because it was inescapable for my studies. I was the apple of her eye, so far as my mother was concerned. I located the telegraph office and immediately sent a telegram to Tiruvalla : “PROCEEDING GURUVAYOOR (.) NONE NEED GRIEVE”.

31. Ernakulam being on the banks of a lake, the majesty, grandeur and beauty of its buildings get enhanced three times. But I was hardly conscious of all that. I asked for the location of the temple. After taking my bath in the temple tank, I worshipped the deity. One could buy lumps of cooked rice from the temple. Both of us procured rice and ate it. Now I should get to Trichur. One could get into a bullock-cart or into a horse-drawn vehicle which could carry 4-5 persons. In those days people generally used to walk the distance to Trichur. As I could not walk such long distances, I climbed into a bullock-cart along with some others and started the journey to Trichur. My fellow-traveller did not get into the cart, but without separating from me, started walking alongside the cart. Around 4 p.m. we reached Trichur. I may have paid 6-7 annas as the fare (37-44 paise - Tr). There are several hotels there. We entered a Brahmana hotel and kept our things there. I was extremely eager to worship at the famous Vadakkunnaatha (Siva) temple there. Taking our bath in the temple tank, we entered the temple precincts. It is difficult to do worship systematically in that large temple without the aid of a professional “guide”. One such person got hold of us and enabled us to worship. The aarati (deepaaraadhana) too was over. Our guide said: “Now you must get back immediately to your hotel. There are plenty of thieves here and one of them may take away your things.” In view of this, we rushed back to the hotel, took our food and spent the night in the hotel itself.

32. By dawn we started for Guruvayoor, 16 miles (25 ½ km) from Trichur. As I did not have money for the cart fare,

we decided to walk the distance. I could just walk in a manner with the help of the stick. We proceeded, asking for directions at every turn and corner. My fellow-traveller helped me out whenever I was in trouble. On occasions he even carried me. What should I say? Somehow, sitting, walking, crawling, lying down, we reached Guruvayoor. Oh, what good fortune!

33. At the eastern entrance, outside the Gopuram (temple tower) there is a Deepastambham (a tall, granite pillar carrying hundreds of lamps which would be lighted with wick and oil- Tr). This pillar was erected by the famous Sir C. Sankaran Nair. This humble soul too reached that pillar. The door to the Sanctum Sanctorum was open. It would have been about 5 p.m. then. *“Tat taavat bhaati saakshaat Gurupavanapure. Hanta bhaagya janaanaam”*. (This is a quotation from the very first stanza of the immortal work Narayaneeyam by Shri Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri extolling the various incarnations, disportations and glories of Lord Narayana, “dwelling as Guruvayurappan Himself at Guruvayoor, Oh how fortunate indeed the people are!” - Tr). A great effulgence radiates outside from inside the Sanctum Sanctorum. At this unforgettable and rare sight all my troubles vanished like darkness dispelled by the morning sun. The very first thought that arose in my mind was that I was not fortunate enough to worship Guruvayoorappan earlier. I consoled myself, thinking that, at least now, this fortune had befallen me. My whole body is impatiently clamouring for the darshan of the Lord after quickly finishing my bath. After finishing my bath at the temple tank, I entered the temple precincts along with my fellow-traveller. Standing in front of the sanctum sanctorum,

I worshipped the Lord and experienced a deep bliss. We returned again outside the eastern temple tower and put up our wet clothes for drying. Since I had not taken any food for practically the whole day, my thoughts now turned towards food. I got acquainted with a person who was doing regular worship (bhajanam). I gave him a few coins. Around 9 p.m. he came with a portion of the “cooked rice” that had been offered to Sri Guruvayoorappan. Squatting on the southern verandah outside the eastern gate, we ate the rice. Salt and water were the sole side-dishes. But it is difficult to describe the heavenly taste of the rice. I can say that, never before or after that, had I tasted such delicious food. “Hunger is the best sauce”, so the saying goes. After food, we spread a cloth on the ground outside the eastern entrance and fell into delicious slumber.

CHAPTER - 2

34. Although quite a few people would have heard and known about this place and this temple, let me also add one or two words of my own. The idol installed inside the sanctum sanctorum is said to have been consecrated jointly by Guru (Jupiter) and Vayu (the wind-god). A special divinity has been attributed to this idol. This idol, before installation, became visible to Guru and Vayu (Pavana) in a river somewhere. Realising the great divinity of the idol, they decided to install it and consecrate it at some worthy place for public benefit. The place selected by them got the name Guruvayoor (Gurupavanapuram) and the deity started being referred to as Guruvayoorappam (Guruvatapuraadheesan). This is a very ancient temple. It is learnt that Sri Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri who had been rendered immobile by paralysis was suspended from an “Uri” (a kind of conical sling made of rope in which earthen pots containing curd, butter etc are customarily kept and hung up from a hook on the ceiling, beyond the reach of cats and mischievous children - Tr) in front of the sanctum sanctorum and that, seated in the “Uri”, he carried on continuous worship of the deity. The immortal classic Narayaneeyam issued forth from the innermost recesses of his heart. This composition contains the entire essence of the Bhagavatham. As soon as the work was completed, Bhattathiri fully recovered from his affliction. And he was blessed with the vision of the Lord. The first stanza of the last decad (dasaka) of this work begins with the stirring words “Agre pasyaami”. (“I see right in front of me” - Tr).

35. This composition is divided into 100 dasakas (decads) generally 10 slokas each, but some have 11, 12 or even 13 slokas. The last verse in each dasaka ends with an appeal to Lord Guruvayoorappan: “*Gurupavanapuraadheesa maam paahi*” (“O, Lord of Gurupavanapura, please protect me, i.e. relieve me of my affliction” - Tr) or words to that effect. “*Ko deergha rogo! Bhava eva saadho,*” “which is the long (longest) disease/affliction!” is the question. “Bhava, samsara, the unending cycle of births and deaths, is the longest disease” is the answer. “*Sareeram aadyam Khalu dharma saadhanam.*” Is not the body the boat that ferries us to the other side of samsara? This body must therefore be looked after well. By continuous and assiduous worship of the Lord, both the diseases are assuaged -physical (bodily) and Samsara.

36. I gathered information from that worshipper regarding the practices, modes of worship, offerings, etc. in the temple. For the calls of nature, one had to go some distance from the temple. After answering the calls of nature in the morning, myself and my fellow traveller were coming back to the temple when he told me: “I do not wish to stay here. Right now I wish to return home:”. He had no money. He sold his (gold) earrings and waist girdle to somebody quickly and got ready cash. Immediately he left for home. He had to travel via Tiruvalla. He undertook to call at my house and intimate all details to my people. I thought: “Was not this person sent just for rendering me help and assistance?” What else could I do but think of the Lord’s infinite compassion and fold my hands in silent prayer? (The words “Lord’s compassion” occur for the first time here

in Malayalam. “Easwara Kaarunyam” is the alternative title of this divine composition - Tr).

37. And once again I was all alone. I used to spend the time in bathing in the temple tank, worshipping the Lord, chanting his sacred names, doing circumambulation of the temple, etc. A friendly worshipper made arrangements for me to have food regularly at the nearby house of a Namboodiri Brahmin and spend the night there itself. The daily expenditure never exceeded 2 annas (12½ paise). I used to take food only once a day - that too, after 12 noon when the mid-day pooja in the temple would have been over.

38. What a bliss! On the dot of 3 a.m., the Chief Priest Namboodiri opens the door of the sanctum sanctorum. Every day, without fail, this soul also finishes his bath then and reaches the temple to witness the “Nirmaalya Darsanam”. The sandal paste, flower garlands, ornaments, etc. with which the deity had been decorated the previous day are removed, the idol is anointed with gingelly (til) oil, and the oil is then washed away with “Vaaka Powder”. Thereafter abhisheka is done for the deity. This abhisheka theertha is called “Vaaka Chaarthu”. This Vaaka theertha is considered to be a sacred, divine medicine. When the Vaaka Chaarthu theertha issues out from the (granite stone) spout, several people would be waiting there to collect a few drops and apply them on their head, face and eyes and to imbibe a little quantity. I too used to penetrate the crowd and collect a few drops every day. After the Vaaka Chaarthu, follow the Suddha Abhishekam; offering of roasted paddy to the

deity (Malar or Nelpori Neivedyam); Usha Pooja; the morning Sri Bali; Pantheeradi Pooja; and Ucha Pooja (noon pooja, also called Prasanna Pooja). While these poojas are being performed, there will be music - vocal and percussional. At the steps to the sanctum (sopanam) Ashtapadi (Geetha Govindam) will be sung to the accompaniment of a special percussion instrument called Idakka. This Geetha Govindam was composed by Jaya Deva. Excellent Sanskrit, all the stanzas wrought in devotion and melody - the composition excels in devotion. Jaya Deva himself says,

“Yadi Hari smarane sarasam mano
Yadi vilasa Kalaa sukuthoohalam
Srunu tadaa Jaya Deva saraswatim”

Meaning as given by Guru Maharaj himself: “If you desire to remember Sri Hari lovingly / If you have curiosity in the flourishing of art.... / Then listen to Jaya Deva’s Saraswati (poetry)”.

How true! This is not to be taken as self-trumpeting. All he has done is to tell the truth, the Reality, that essence from his immortal self. My own knowledge of Sanskrit improved when I started getting by heart Narayaneeyam and other hymns. I used to be present inside invariably at the time of all the poojas. While trying to appreciate and soak myself in the beauty and flavour of the Ashtapadi, while listening to the pangs of separation of Radha, I too used to experience a kind of ache in my heart. Slowly I got to know the entire Ashtapadi by heart along with its meaning.

39. It must be said that all thought of home and nest has vanished now. One day, after worshipping the deity at mid-day (noon) pooja, turning back, I saw my uncle standing there. I have already mentioned that this uncle had a very special affection for me. On seeing him I prostrated before him. He was also in a happy mood because of “darshan” of the Lord. He had come with the intention of taking me home. All his anger towards me had subsided. With great happiness he said: “It is through you that I got this good fortune”. He made certain arrangements for my stay at Guruvayoor. Although he desired to stay at Guruvayoor for several days, he had to return home after 2 or 3 days because he was a Government official.

40. My mother, father and everyone else also now heaved a sigh of relief. I too was relieved.

41. My bath was invariably in the temple tank. Twice daily. In any case, sometimes even more. It was the oil anointed on the idol that I used to apply on my head before bathing. My acquaintance with Mannarathu Gopalan Nair, the attendant of the Chief Priest, secured for me several facilities. All this is Lord’s will. He took me to the Chief Priest and got me his permission to stay in the Chief Priest’s premises and to have my food there. I could eat only after the Chief Priest had partaken of food, but then what I got for eating was the choicest pick, the best of the best items offered to the Lord as Neivedyam. I considered this to be an exceptional good fortune. Now I used to take food occasionally at night as well.

42. Does not the temple throw open the doors of the sanctum at 3 O'clock every morning? What inexplicable joy the eyes and the heart experience on witnessing the Nirmalya Darsanam! The mind experiences absolute tranquility and peace. And it is in peace that happiness resides. Many are the patients who come here, and most of them return fully cured. This fact became fully established in my own case. And slowly experience also gets built up. A person, Kunjunni Nair, had lost his speech. His people brought him to Guruvayoor for regular worship (bhajanam). After a few days the word "Krishna ..." issued forth loudly from his mouth. From then onwards he started singing loudly songs glorifying the Lord and worshipping him. Eventually he became one of His foremost devotees.

43. When the sanctum sanctorum opens at 3 a.m., I would sing the very first verse of Naaraayaneeyam: "*Saandraanandaavabodhaatmaka.....*". Then I would circumambulate the temple. Sometimes I would explain the meaning of this verse to some of the other devotees. When the sanctum opens for the mid-day (noon) pooja, I would sing the entire last dasaka of the Naarayaneeyam, beginning with "*Agre Pasyaami....*".

44. The pain in the leg and the general ill-health are progressively getting cured. I can now walk without the help of the stick. Treatment and cure here are on the Naturopathy -Nature Cure - system. Bathing in cold water; seeing good things with the eyes; pure air; clean and sanctified premises and surroundings; listening to the Bhagavatham and other sacred

scriptures; Harinama sankeerthanam; japa; meditation - the mind is constantly engaged in these activities. There is no time to think of one's physical ailments. The mind experiences perfect happiness always; and this happiness percolates into the physical body. How much merit one must have earned to experience such a state!

45. I spent 5-6 months there, leading such a blessed life. Mother once sent my younger brother to Guruvayoor along with an attendant. They too were looked after and sent back. Eventually I too decided to return home

46. *“Paropakaaraartham idam sareeram”* - “this body is intended for service to others”. I had learnt this truth from my childhood itself. One person from my part of the country happened to come to Guruvayoor. I kept him with me for 3 - 4 days. He had no money with him. After four days he developed fever and head-ache and eruptions on the face the next day. This is naturally an indication of small-pox. Here the people are mortally afraid of small-pox; the very mention of the word strikes terror. What can I do? Even Gopalan Nair (the Chief Priest's attendant) insisted that the sick person be taken away. It was summer then. I had noticed a bridge while proceeding westwards from the western entrance to the temple. First I took the patient to a secret place under the bridge and made him lie down there. Then I discovered a place nearby which was densely populated by trees. I took him inside that place and made him remain there. All this I had to do myself. I used to take him food and medicines in the morning and evening. Some Muslims were staying not far away. Are they also not human beings? Seeing the

distressing and helpless condition of the patient, they extended a helping hand. Everything was because of the greatness of the Lord - what else can I say? At last the man got cured and took his bath. He stayed for a few more days.

47. My next thought was for going home. I collected quantities of the oil anointed on the deity - a whole tinful; and other things. There is a place called Chaavakkaad close to Guruvayoor. Merchants used to proceed from there by river-craft for procuring bunches of plantain fruits and other commodities from Changanassery. I proposed to travel with them in one such boat. The Chief Priest is the Lord's Representative. With his approval and blessings, I got into the river-craft during day-time one day with all my bundles of things. The patient who had recovered from small-pox was also with me. I had to spend 2-3 days in the boat. We would have our bath and take our food, when the boat halted and was tied up at some intermediate points. It was 1 O'clock at night when we reached the Changanassery Market Jetty. I sent all my things in advance through the man who was with me. And all alone, I started immediately on foot for Tiruvalla which I reached around 3 a.m. I did not have much pain but the leg had become very weak. Needless to say mother was extremely happy. Now it has become a compulsion to have an early bath and worship the deity. After resting a while, I proceeded to the temple, bathed in the tank and worshipped Sri Vallabha. I returned home around 9 a.m and had my food and rest. With great glee I narrated all my experiences to all those who came calling at my house to see me. All were happy.

CHAPTER - 3

48. I was keen to resume my education. It was over 5 years since I left school. Nevertheless I had not forgotten much. This became clear to me during my conversations with students studying in the VI Form (Matriculation or X Standard - Tr).

49. In any case, father took me to Kottayam. Oorayil Kesava Pillai was a famous lawyer. He was having his legal practice then at Kottayam. He was a close friend of my father's. We went straight to his place at Kottayam, near the Tirunakkara temple. He knew my nature. With delight he made me stay with him. While there, whenever convenient, I used to teach his nephew.

50. We went to the C.M.S. School around 11 a.m. after food for securing re-admission to the school. The Principal then was an Englishman, one Mr. Asquith. When we explained matters to him, his reaction was : "It is over five years since the boy left school. It is not, therefore, possible, to admit him to Form VI. I can only permit him to join Form IV". (Form IV is equivalent to 8th std. - Tr).

51. All my class-mates had become graduates. So, joining VI Form itself meant considerable loss of self- respect. What then to speak of joining Form IV?

52. Boldly I told the Principal: "Sir, you must admit me in VI Form itself. In such and such an year, out of the 100 students

who had taken the examination for promotion from Form V to VI, only nine had passed in all the papers. The others had simply been promoted. I was one of those nine''. On hearing this, Mr. Asquith himself went and fetched that particular year's examination register - a bulky one - and he consulted that book in my presence. He glanced through the relevant entries just once and closed the book. He then sent for the Headmaster and instructed him that I should be admitted to Form VI itself. He also ordered that a certificate of my physical fitness should be produced from a doctor.

53. Almost everyone holds the Vayaskara Mooss (one of the 8 leading Ayurvedic Physicians in Kerala - Tr) in great respect. Thinking that a letter from the Mooss would serve admirably as a medical certificate, armed with suitable presents, myself and my father proceeded to his residence around 4 p.m. It will be recalled that I had been under the Mooss's treatment. He recognized me at once and we explained to him the situation as also our object in calling on him. Just then the Headmaster, Shi P. M. Chacko, happened to come there. The Mooss spoke to him favourably about me, and he agreed to admit me the next day.

54. The next day itself I joined the class and started studying. Despite my having studied with care and attention, I managed to fail, but I did not feel any disappointment. Thereafter I never went to school. I continued my studies at home itself. Death claimed my uncle as a victim and I became afflicted with my old disease again. Treatment started again. Once I remitted fees for the examination but I fell sick at the time of the examination

and could not even walk. Then I decided that I would not study thereafter. I went to Guruvayoor again and returned after staying there for 5-6 months. My father too passed away and my mother also became ill. My mother's one great desire was that I should be at her death-bed.

55. Mother's illness worsened. Treatment continued uninterruptedly. Despite her illness, she continued to attend to the house-hold work without fail. She became bed-ridden but only for three days. I was constantly beside her. Chanting of the Lord's names continued day and night. On the night of the third day, my mother attained her heavenly abode.

56. I was ceaselessly praying for her peaceful death without pain or agony; even so when the soul departed from her body, I experienced unbearable pain, anguish and grief. I practically collapsed.

*“Aastaam taavadiyam prasooti samaye durvara soolavyadhaa /
Nairuchyam tanusoshanam malamayee-sayyaa cha saamvatsaree /*

*Ekasyaapi na garbhabhaarakharanaklesasya Yasyaah kshama /
Daatum nishkritim unnatopi tanayastasyai jananyai Namah.*

Cremation and other conventional rites were performed the next day. The subsequent rites were performed by myself and my younger sister. My younger brother was a Government servant at Devikulam. Immediately on receiving the telegram, he too came. After performing all the rites upto Pinda, a grand feast

was given on the 16th day. The priest was also kept satisfied. I observed the deeksha till the 41st day; on that day we gave a feast for the Brahmanas and gave them dakshina.

57. I may say that I had now become practically independent. All it meant was that I could carry on my activities of devotion and worship to my heart's content and at my convenience. This was because while mother had not permitted me to go anywhere, I was now master of my own time. I have never whiled away time to no purpose. Even on my sick bed I used to study and teach others whenever I could. It was the little knowledge of Sanskrit that I had which paved the way for my unlimited good. I continued to teach small children something useful. A small building in a nearby temple was converted into a class-room where I used to teach children for some time. One gentleman took me to a place called Kalluppara. There also I started teaching some children. This small class later developed into a little school. I was again bed-ridden and I returned home.

58. Obstacles used to arise in the execution of things that the heart cherished. I started spending practically all my time in devotion and worship. The temple at Tiruvalla was indeed a large and sacred one. Reaching the temple very early in the morning, I used to do all my japa, meditation, chanting and reading of sacred texts there itself. Now I had started reading the Bhagavatham text in the original Sanskrit itself regularly. The lady of the house-hold called "Sankara Velil" near the temple happened to express a desire to hear Bhagavatham being read. In response to this, I used to go to that house regularly every

night and read the Bhagavatham. This lady's eldest son Nanu Pillai and some others used to be present regularly to listen. Nanu Pillai used to have a lot of affection, regard and respect for me; he was also my class-mate.

59. In the temple too, after the evening Deepaaradhana (Aarti) group singing of devotional songs used to be conducted. Even from childhood I used to enjoy listening to music. I used to experience ineffable joy, listening to the strains of devotional music issuing forth melodiously from the mouths of devotees, to the accompaniment of percussion and other instruments. I could not even restrain myself from dancing to these mellifluous tunes. This daily music festival would last for two hours. Thereafter I would go to "Sankara Velil" to begin my Bhagavatham reading. The lady of the house felt extremely happy; and her regard and respect for me increased to the extent of a mother's love and affection for her son. This noble, fortunate lady was indeed a second mother, granted to me after my own mother's death. I continued leading such a happy life.

60. I had a dear friend by name Paramu Pillai who was a clerk in the Munsiff's court. In those days the Munsiff was Shri M.R. Narayana Pillai. He was a religious man and particularly an ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. In accordance with his wishes in 1910 a Ramakrishna Sangh was established at Tiruvalla. Most of its members were clerks and lawyers. In the absence of a common meeting place, the members used to meet at 7 p.m. on Sundays in various houses by rotation and conduct Kirtan, reading of texts, etc. Paramu Pillai's turn to

host the assembly came. He compelled me also to attend the session. And what did I see there? Some people were sitting there. There was neither interest nor curiosity on their faces. I too sat down there. I had with me the Bhagavatham text in Sanskrit. They expressed a desire to hear something from this “Swamiji”. Although I was not a Swamiji or any such religious person, they used to address me as Swamiji with devotion. After remembering the Lord devoutly, I opened the Bhagavatham text and started reading out a portion. Even now I distinctly remember that particular portion. As soon as the notes from Lord Krishna’s flute were heard, several Gopika women came running with agitated minds to the forest where he was sitting and playing. The Lord entertained them all with sweet words. Then he told them: “It was not at all proper on your part to have come at this midnight time to this forest which is full of cruel wild beasts. For women their husbands are their gods. If they serve their husbands with devotion, what indeed can women not attain? They can get everything. You have extreme devotion for me, there is no doubt at all about it. You have now seen me. I too am very happy on seeing you. Now you must all return home.” It is impossible to describe the grief experienced by the Gopikas on hearing this. It is but natural that they felt irritated and annoyed with the Lord. In sobbing tones they told the Lord: “O Lord! Please do not utter such unpleasant words to us who, abandoning everything and thinking that you are our everything, have sought refuge in you.”

61. It was this portion that I had read out to them and explained the meaning. Every one present felt happy. In fact,

practically everyone shed tears. The reading ended at about 9 p.m. After Mangala-aarti and distribution of prasada, all of them returned home, and I proceeded to Sankara Velil house where I had to begin the customary reading of Bhagavatham. Just then, a person comes there, with a lantern to escort me.

62. As readers would have noted, Shri M.R.Narayana Pillai had a special interest in the Sangh. The members used to apprise him immediately of what transpired at each session. The moment he heard about what happened at today's meeting, he felt a keen desire to see me.

63. I reached his house, escorted by the peon. He received me and seats me with great respect. Some other gentlemen were also present there. He too must listen to my Bhagavatham reading. He had the text with him. I read out for him. He as well as the others present experienced great joy. That was the very first time I was meeting him, and I took an immediate liking to him. This bond of friendship became firmly established. All these are but the Lord's dispensations. He has since departed from this world but the fond memories of my friendship with him still linger fresh in my mind. The peon escorted me back to Sankara Velil.

64. My presence was insisted upon at all the sessions of the Sangh and there was nothing I could do to wriggle out. Not only that, they then elected me as the President of the Sangh. At that time we managed to secure a place, near my and M.R.'s houses, where the Sangh could hold its sessions regularly. That was the bungalow belonging to the leading lawyer Oorayil Kesava Pillai

(A reference has been made to him already in para 49 above - Tr). It was in that place that, in the presence of Shri M.R., the Sangh continued to hold its weekly sessions. This was the Poorvaashram of Swami Nirvikarananda.

65. There is now increasing enthusiasm and devotion on the part of people in general, and singing of devotional songs, group chanting and reading of sacred texts are being organised ever more than before, in each house.

66. I have already mentioned that Munsiff Shi M. R. was an ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. Prior to that he was Munsiff at Haripaad. Haripaad was a place quite well-known to him, and he had already established a Shri Ramakrishna Sangh there. Lawyer Shri Subbaraya Iyer and Dr.Chellappa and others were its prominent members. Sri Nirmalananda Swamiji was the then President of the Bangalore Ashram. He was a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna. One was not fortunate enough to have had darshan of Shri Ramakrishna. Who could deny himself the good fortune and pleasure of seeing one of his disciples? The Haripaad Sangh people invited Swami Nirmalanandaji to that place. Lawyer Shri Subbaraya Iyer went to Bangalore and escorted the Swamiji to Haripad. They had also informed M. R. of the date on which Swamiji would be reaching Haripaad. M. R. i.e. got ready to leave. M.R and myself used to meet daily. When I learned from M. R. about the Swamiji's visit, I was very eager to have his darshan. M. R. was very happy at this.

67. In those days, a yoga practitioner, by name Sthanu Aasaari used to stay with M.R. It seems he had experienced

Samadhi frequently. He was married and had his family and children. His house was in Tiruvananthapuram. Quite a few people used to treat him with great devotion as though to a preceptor. Along with both of them (Shri Aasaari and Shri M.R), I too left for Haripaad by a separate river-craft from Pulikkezh ferry around evening. Towards midnight we reached Pallipaadu. Arrangements had been made there for our stay at the residence of Koikkaleth Shri Velu Pillai. There is a good Krishna temple there. After taking some food we spent the night there. The next day we worshipped at the Krishna temple, had food and rested.

68. My thoughts were all about the Swamiji. The eagerness to have his darshan at the earliest multiplied several times. Around 11 O'clock all of us started for Haripad. Partly on foot and partly by bullock-cart, around 12 Noon we reached the Valiakottaram (Big Palace) near the Haripad temple. It was there that arrangements had been made for the Swamiji's stay. Entering the Palace, I saluted my preceptor Shri Subbaraya Iyer and gathered all details from him.

69. The Swamiji had just finished his food and was resting. I had a great desire to consume the left-overs from the Swamiji's food. I enquired: "Well, is the leaf off which Swamiji ate, still there?" And I received the answer: "Yes, the leaf is still here only". Immediately I rushed there, ate all the left-overs and derived immense satisfaction. Returning I came back to M. R. and sat beside him, eagerly awaiting the Swamiji's darshan.

70. A small dais had been put up there and a chair placed on it for the Swamiji to sit. Swamiji graced the dais with his arrival around 4 p.m. after rest.

*Vastram Vapus Vachanam Vidyaa Vinayam enniva
Vakaaram Anchum Illaathon Nissaaran Bhuvi Kevalam.*

(Translation of this Malayalam verse: “He who does not have these five “Vakaaras” (words beginning with the letter “Va”), Vastram : befitting dress; Vapus : a good body; Vachanam: good speech; Vidyaa : Knowledge learning; Vinayam : Humility; is indeed of no consequence in this world” - Tr). These five vakaaras had fully blossomed in the Swamiji. A tall and grand personality (aajaanubahu); eyes flashing fire; valiant as a lion; sporting courage, valour and refuge on his face - a veritable Rudra at the time of the deluge (Samhaara Rudra). All eyes turn to the Swamiji. (The Swamiji was one of the direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa - Tr.)

71. The Swamiji is welcomed and received there. After glancing all around with eyes flashing fire, Swamiji sat down. M.R and myself, along with several others, sat on a bench down below on the ground.

72. This humble soul was of no consequence, a mere trifling unfit even to go near Swamiji. I had not brought any offering for him. All I had was a good garland of tulasi leaves (Osimum). Will Swamiji accept it? How to reach Swamiji’s lotus feet? When my mind was in utter turmoil with these and similar thoughts, that Embodiment of Love, the Lord, looked at me and enquired of others: “Is he not a devotee (Bhakta)?” The moment I heard these words, I mustered up all the courage I needed, forgot everything else, rushed to the Swamiji’s feet and prostrated before them. In actual fact, what I had done was not to prostrate

at his feet but to repose my head on his lap. And with that act, I had unconsciously transferred all my burdens and problems to him. Even now, is not this head reposing in that lap? I felt that the Swamiji had accepted me just as a loving father lifting up his little son and placing him on his lap. All my burdens had disappeared. It was all God's compassion - OM.

*“Koti yugangalilaayi sanchayicheedunna
Punyaphalamanee Martyajanmam
Theduvin Sadguru paada padmam.
Punarneduvin Sowbhaagya Jnaanaamrtam”*

(Translation of this Malayalam verse: “This human birth is the culmination of the merits assiduously accumulated over crores of Yugas. (Having got such a rare birth) go forth and search for the lotus feet of a good Preceptor; and obtain once again the nectar of Prosperity and Pure Knowledge”-Tr.)

CHAPTER - 4

73. I returned to my seat and sat down. The organisers read out felicitation addresses and presented the scrolls to Swamiji. Swamiji spoke only a few words that day, “All this honour shown by you to this insignificant person is not because of any merit in me but only because of the compassion of my Gurunath”. By the time Swamiji had spoken these few words, streams of tears started flowing down from his eyes. O, how very fortunate and blessed are those who have abiding devotion to the lotus feet of their preceptors! *“Guroranghri Padme manaschennalagnam tata kim, tata kim, tata kim tata kim?”* Meaning as given by the Guru Maharaj himself: “Even though a person may possess all material wealth, if he does not have devotion to the Guru’s lotus feet, all that wealth is of no consequence; it is of no consequence”.

74. After talking for a while, Swamiji returned to his room for rest. The members of the audience returned to their houses, their hearts content with the Swamiji’s darshan and listening to his honeyed words.

75. That night, a Brahmana gentleman, Subramania Iyer by name, took me and the others to his house. After taking food there, I rested with the single thought “Swamiji” pervading my mind.

76. In the morning we again reached Haripad. In the forenoon there was a “Bhajana Yatra” in the Subramania temple in

honour of Swamiji and I too participated in that. Extremely heart-warming devotional songs were sung. I am always thrilled to hear such songs. That evening Swamiji gave a long speech in the High School.

77. At night I again reached the Big Palace (Valiakottaram) for Swamiji's darshan, along with M. R. Having prostrated before Swamiji with devotion, I kept standing near him. Swamiji asked me so many things. Finally he asked me: "Do you know Gita Govindam, Ashtapadi? Please sing it". I have already mentioned something about Gita Govindam. I had learnt by heart the full Ashtapadi, beginning "*Maamiyam Chalita*". I had no knowledge or sense of raga or taala; still, in order to please Swamiji I sang that Ashtapadi without hesitation or shyness. Haripad was famous for good music; still I think nobody found my singing unpleasant.

78. Then calling me to him, Swamiji ordered: "You must return to Tiruvalla itself. There you must develop the Sangh." Then he conferred on me the title "**Neelakanta Bhakta**". Was it not a rebirth that this humble soul got then?

79. The next day we returned to Tiruvalla, Swamiji returned to Bangalore. He used to send me letters frequently from Bangalore, first through M.R and later directly. I used to preserve those letters with great devotion. However it is distressing that, somewhere, sometime during my frequent travels, they got lost.

CHAPTER - 5

80. Along with M.R. I started from Tiruvananthapuram with the intention of visiting the principal pilgrimage centres in India. We first went to Bangalore for Swamiji's darshan. Bangalore is a holiday resort. It was Swami Abhedanandaji who thought of establishing the Ashram which is situated in a good locality. The foundation stone was also laid by him. It is Swami Nirmalanandaji who completed the construction and brought this Ashram to its present stage. A special peace and tranquillity manifests itself in this Ashram. All parts of the Ashram are kept immaculately clean and tidy. The whole place was adorned by flower gardens and mango orchards. Swamiji is a great person, well-conversant with all fields of activity. One could say he is a versatile genius. One need not say much about the excellence and greatness of an Ashram administered by such a great and eminent person.

81. M.R. and myself stayed there happily for 3-4 days. Swamiji had at that time been invited by some eminent persons to visit the Nilgiris. Swamiji took us both along too, and we reached the Nilgiris comfortably. There were several people at the railway station, awaiting Swamiji's arrival. They received Swamiji and escorted him. Along with Swamiji, both of us also got the opportunity of staying in a good bungalow. The lawyer Parappanangaadi Shri Kunjirama Menon had called on Swamiji first even *en route*, and he used to come here too off and on.

82. As is well-known, Nilgiri is a cold place. We reached there during summer - in April, or perhaps in May. This was

my first experience of staying in a cold place. Daily there were speeches by Swamiji, as well as conversations with people. At this distance of time, I am unable to recall them, but I still remember vividly one particular incident.

83. The famous lawyer Shri Haripad Krishna Iyer came once for the Swamiji's darshan. It was from the standpoint of an atheist (nihilist or naastika) that he began speaking to Swamiji. When he returned there was a little bit of change in him. When it was explained to him beyond doubt who or what the "I" was he became a theist.

84. I am able to see you; so I the "seer" must certainly be different and separate from you. Look, am I not able to see my own body? That means the "seer" is definitely separate from the body. Likewise the "seer" is able to see or cognise the mind, the intellect, and the ego (ahamkaara). Hence the "seer" must certainly be beyond the mind and the intellect. It is this "seer" that the vedas and scriptures with one voice proclaim as the "*chakshushaschakshuh, srotrasya srotram*" - eye of the eye, ear of the ear, etc. This is the real "I" - God Soul (Aatman) etc... etc. So went the explanation.

85. I stayed there for about a week. Everyday I used to go to the market place. One day, while returning from the market, it started to rain. Not a heavy rain, but a drizzle. But as I was not equipped with an umbrella or other protection, I was drenched and shivering with cold when I returned to Swamiji's presence. Swamiji had got a good fire going in the room. Even as he noticed me at some distance, he called out "Come here, come quickly and sit down here"; and made me sit near the fire. O,

Swamiji, the repository of compassion! But sometimes he is also hard-hearted. “*Vajraadapi Kathoraani, mrdooni Kusumaadapi*”. (“Harder than even diamond, and softer than even a flower are the hearts of great men.”) This, it is said, is the characteristic of the hearts of great personalities. I have seen this clearly manifest in Swamiji on several occasions.

86. I was enjoying the pleasant warmth of the fire. I began stoking the fire. Swamiji’s entire attitude changed. He began to scold me. Swamiji did not in the least like the manner in which I was placing sticks of firewood in the fire. Swamiji is an “artist personified”, the very embodiment of art. He had understood fully my utter incompetence. He came and sat down near me with an unbaked wheat chapati in his hand, and asked me: “Do you know how to bake this?” What could I say? Swamiji himself cut the large chapati with a knife into several small pieces and baked them all in the fire. After smearing ghee, he fed us all and he also gave us tea. Scolding me, he says: “Sanyasis should have the skill to do all jobs. How can those who do not know how to do their work in the best possible manner even desire to attain the status of a Sanyasi? All of you may be having your conception of Shri Ramakrishna as an idiot incapable of doing any work. Your idea of Sanyasa may also be like this”. Well, so far so good. He was an extremely competent and proficient person. He used to observe very closely each one of our activities and scold us and correct each of our lapses then and there. When we would be hanging up our washed clothes for drying, he would come to us and show us exactly how they should be spread out. While placing clothes on the clothes-line,

he was very particular that they be folded precisely so that all the edges were aligned perfectly and there was no wrinkle or lack of symmetry.

87. “Although Shri Ramakrishna would generally be in meditation and samadhi, his eyes used to notice everything all around him. Cleaning, wiping and polishing everything well; arranging them all tidily in their respective places; sweeping the courtyard; cooking rice; slicing vegetables - these should not be considered petty items of work. If you are able to do all these things with neatness, precision and beauty, then you will acquire the intellectual and other capacities to perform great things in a praise-worthy manner.”

88. “Do you have any idea how much of scolding he had to do in training us”? Once a (guru)bhai had occasion to buy a cast iron pan from the market and bring it. As that gurubhai was a simpleton, the merchant had cheated him and sold him a broken pan. Shri Ramakrishna understood this the moment he saw the pan. Taking the pan in his hand and tapping it at different points, he demonstrated that, from the very sound, one would know where it was broken. He scolded the gurubhai a good deal and made him go back and get the pan replaced by a good one”.

89. I listen to all this and imbibe it slowly. And slowly a transformation takes place in my ideas. Is it not false self-respect that causes all troubles? It is only now that I get the firm conviction that Swamiji’s scoldings constituted priceless good advice designed to eradicate completely my ego and my

incompetence. Who indeed can understand the ideas of great men - and how?

90. As per Swamiji's instructions, M. R. and myself started for our home town. Swamiji's instructions were that it was futile to roam about here and there. M. R. left for Tiruvananthapuram and I went to Tiruvalla. Needless to emphasise that my stay with Swamiji in the Nilgiris helped reform and improve my life style a good deal.

91. Staying in Tiruvalla, I used to devote my time and attention exclusively to spiritual matters as before. Gradually people started taking me to other places also for Kirtan, Bhajans and reading of religious texts (paaraayanam). Bhajan Sanghs got established at several places.

92. Once I went to Kanyakumari, worshipped in the temple of the Goddess, and stayed there for a few days. On another occasion, I went to Rameswaram to immerse the ashes of my parents in the sea. There too I stayed for a week. There are several tirthas there. The priests took me to all of them and made me take my bath and do "bali" (libations to the departed souls). After taking my bath in the "Sethu", I immersed the ashes in the sea. Although these priests harass and pester pilgrims excessively, yet their assistance is inevitable for new comers.

93. I returned to Tiruvalla. A Vedanta Sangh had been established at Tiruvananthapuram with Dr. Tampi as its President. It was to Tiruvananthapuram that the Swamiji came next, accepting the invitation of the Sangh people. This information

had been sent to Tiruvalla also. Shi M. R. continued to be the Munsiff at Tiruvalla. Shri Krishna Iyer and Shi C. K. Krishna Pillai were sent as representatives (delegates) to Thiruvananthapuram from Tiruvalla. They proceeded to Thiruvananthapuram and had darshan of Swamiji. They also participated in the activities of the Sangh. During conversation with Swamiji, they happened to mention to him, all on their own, that there was a proposal to set up a Math at Tiruvalla also. Swamiji was extremely pleased to hear this. On return to Tiruvalla, they conveyed this information to M. R., myself and the others. M. R. was an ardent devotee of Swamiji but even so he had not even dreamt of establishing a Math at Tiruvalla. Now he was agitated, thinking what to do. Swamiji having been told, he decided that somehow or the other, the Math must be established.

94. Within a few days, Swamiji would be proceeding to Haripad from Thiruvananthapuram, and from there he would come to Tiruvalla. By then all arrangements must have been made for laying the foundation stone for the Ashram. But where is the land for the Ashram? And who will give it? These thoughts were uppermost. One day M. R. and myself went to the Paaliakkara Palace. When we apprised the then Head, the Koilthampuran, of the situation, he agreed to give land. The very next day he donated an area of land, part of the Karumaali palace premises, and had the transfer registered.

95. The necessary items of work are in progress on the plot of land. The foundation stone is also getting ready. Swamiji had already reached Haripad. M. R. and myself proceeded to

Haripad and had darshan of the Swamiji. We invited Swamiji to lay the foundation stone and returned to Tiruvalla.

96. Day and night we were anxiously awaiting Swamiji's arrival. We decided to celebrate the Annual Day of the Sangh at the local M.G.M. School under Swamiji's Presidentship. The responsibility of writing something about Shri Ramakrishna and reading it out at the function, was entrusted to this humble soul. I had several other responsibilities too. Early in the morning of the day preceding Swamiji's arrival, I got up and scribbled something - God knows what. One fine morning Swamiji and his retinue reached Pulikkeezh ferry in Tiruvalla by a river boat. From dawn, hundreds of people had assembled at the ferry to receive Swamiji. Swamiji was received with due honours and, to the accompaniment of instrumental music, was conducted to M.R.'s house, about 2 miles (3 km) away. Although a cart was available, Swamiji preferred to walk the entire distance.

97. After a brief rest, Swamiji laid the foundation stone of the would-be Ashram at 10 a.m and the function went off auspiciously. He then returned to M. R.'s house, had food and rested.

98. The meeting of the Sangh started exactly at 4 p.m. Some gentlemen like Haripad Subbaraya Iyer were also present. Swamiji arrived punctually by cart at the School premises. Many people had already congregated there. Swamiji sat down. The welcome address was read. The next item was reading of the item on Shri Ramakrishna. I got up slowly, touched Swamiji's feet and read it out. Later Swamiji mentioned to me: "Everyone

was listening with rapt attention to the devotee's write-up. It must be published in book form''.

99. Thereafter Swamiji himself addressed the audience as follows: "If any of you has any doubt on spiritual matters, you may ask me". Several questions were asked. The prompt and majestic replies given by Swamiji in his profound voice practically stunned the questioners. Swamiji was endowed, to an exceptional degree, with the skill of silencing his questioners with his resourceful and profound replies.

100. Even now I recall a particular question that had been asked. It was practically an assembly of scholars in session. A prominent teacher asked, "Can a robber be a God?". Swamiji's reply: "No, never, never. A robber can never be a God". The entire audience burst out into hearty laughter at the nature and sheer force of Swamiji's answer.

101. The same night Swamiji was to leave for Kottayam. That evening also a large number of persons went to M. R.'s house for Swamiji's darshan. After taking leave of them all, Swamiji left by river boat for Kottayam. I too went with him. The next morning we reached Kottayam. Swamiji was to take rest at Shri Padmanabhan Tampi's residence. There also there was a large meeting at 4 p.m. People had come in swelling crowds to listen to Swamiji. Swamiji returned to the residence, had food and left for Bangalore via Ernakulam. I expressed a desire to accompany Swamiji but he rejected it and instructed me to return to Tiruvalla and attend to the construction work of the Ashram. And so I returned to Tiruvalla.

102. Swamiji's next visit to Haripad was for laying the foundation stone of the proposed Ashram there. That was in the Malayalam month of Chingam (Avani in Tamil, August - September in English). I had reached Haripad in advance. On this occasion also, Swamiji would be staying in the Big Palace. Shri Padmanabhan Tampi was First Class Magistrate there. Shri Subbaraya Iyer, Kulathu Mani, Chellappa, myself and a few others were constantly in attendance, serving Swamiji.

103. Meditation Practice used to be conducted every morning at 6 a.m. Only persons particularly interested in meditation were allowed to participate. Swamiji would sit in front in total silence. Devotees interested in acquiring skill in meditation would prostrate before Swamiji respectfully and sit down in silence in their respective seats. The doors would be closed and there would be pin-drop silence everywhere. After some time, Swamiji would conclude the session with a prayer commencing with OM and ending with the Santi Mantra, and get up. The participants too would leave for their respective places. Then after drinking coffee, Swamiji would get busy in other activities.

104. Several persons continued to come, eager for Swamiji's darshan. Sometimes I too used to convey to Swamiji the ideas and requests/prayers of the non-English knowing visitors. Myself and some others also used to accompany Swamiji on his evening walks. I need not specially mention that this life with Swamiji constituted the seventh heaven of happiness, the greatest of blessings for me.

105. Swamiji used to devote special attention to youngsters. When students from Tiruvalla and other places used to come for Swamiji's darshan, Swamiji used to tell me specially: "Look, these are all good boys. You must take special interest in guiding them on the right path". Many of them have since become Sanyasis.

106. The muhurta time for the foundation stone laying ceremony was the morning of the Ashtami Rohini (Janmashtami) day. The preparations of the function were in progress under Swamiji's directions. Dr. Swami - Swami Chitsukhanandaji - donated a good plot of land for the Ashram. Early in the morning, a procession started for that place with decorated elephants carrying pictures of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, to the accompaniment of instrumental music, and with Swamiji himself leading the procession. At the site Bhagavad Gita Paaraayanam and Chandeeapaatham were being conducted. I had been selected to do the Gita paaraayanam. Just as the Gita paaraayanam was over, Swamiji and the procession reached the site.

107. Dr. Tampi, Shi M.R., Shri Velu Pillai and others were also accompanying the procession. The pictures of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were placed at an already sanctified spot in the site. Swamiji himself did the puja to them. Then at the appropriate muhurta time, Swamiji himself, with his holy hands, laid the foundation stone. Hari Om.

108. Every one dispersed after distribution of prasad, and Swamiji and his retinue left for the Big Palace. Arrangements

had been made there for a big feast. By 12 Noon everybody had taken food after which all rested. At 4 p.m. a public meeting started at the School premises under Swamiji's Presidentship. After speeches by Subbaraya Iyer, Padmanabhan Tampi and others, a collection drive for money began. Swamiji started the drive with his contribution of one rupee. A large amount was promised by the participants there itself.

109. After staying at Haripad for a few more days, Swamiji left by boat for Kollam. I too went with the Swamiji. At Kollam, we stayed at Dr. Raman Tampi's place. Swamiji always used to enquire about the comfort of the people accompanying him. After staying for a few days at Kollam, we reached Kanyakumari via Thiruvananthapuram. I have been to Kanyakumari before, but the pleasure one derives in travelling with Swamiji is something unique. At Kanyakumari we stayed in the Choultry (Satram). Daily we would go to the temple and worship Goddess Mother and then go to the Vivekananda rock, sit there and meditate. Eventually Swamiji left for Bangalore via Kollam. He sent me back to Tiruvalla.

110. At Tiruvalla the Ashram building was nearing completion. The time fixed for the installation ceremony at Haripad was in the month of Mesha (April - May). Swamiji had instructed that the installation ceremony at Tiruvalla should also be fixed for the same time. Two birds in one shot.

111. A list of prospective donors has been prepared, for collection of money. We go from place to place for collection

of money. Construction work is proceeding apace under a contract awarded to one Gopala Pillai. By April the building had almost been completed. The building at Haripad had also been completed. Swamiji had also reached Haripad. I too went there. Swami Visuddhanandaji was also with Swamiji. With great pomp and splendour, the installation was got done by the holy hands of Swamiji.

112. After resting a while at Haripad, Swamiji reached Tiruvalla along with Swami Visuddhanandaji. Here too, there were processions and other arrangements. The installation was on Akshaya Tritiya day. Following this there was a very profound speech by Swamiji. Lawyer Shri Kunjirama Menon from Parappanangadi translated the speech very interestingly for the benefit of the non-English knowing audience. Swamiji entrusted me with the responsibility of staying in the Ashram itself - accepting alms (bhiksha); doing one's own cooking (swayampaaka); performing the daily pujas and neivedyam; training young persons to become Brahmacharis; practising Dharmic principles and popularising them among the public; and other multifarious duties and activities. Swamiji then left for Bangalore via Chengannur and Kollam. (1913 AD).

CHAPTER - 6

113. Now I had a place where I could pursue my spiritual life freely and without interference. Whenever I worshipped at the Tiruvalla temple, I used to cherish a great desire to get close to the idol, offer puja to it and prostrate before it inside the Sanctum. All those desires have now been fulfilled. Although I was staying all alone in the Ashram, some youngsters used to come and help - Raman Pillai, Padmanabha Pillai, Govinda Pillai and so on. Swamiji had already instructed me to devote special attention to their training. Guests also used to come frequently. M.R. too used to come with his family and participate in the pujas. In the evenings, at the meditation, kirtan and Bhajan sessions, 8 to 10 persons, and on special occasions, even larger numbers, used to participate. In between, there were special pujas done as offerings by people. On such occasions people used to come from other places like Maannaar, Kaviyoor, etc. and participate in the Bhajan and feeding. On Sundays I used to go to places such as Peringara, Muthur, Mepraal, etc. and instil a sense of devotion to duty among students.

114. Every year we used to celebrate the birth anniversary days of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The Annual Festival used to be conducted generally only when Swamiji used to visit the Ashram. And Swamiji continued to give darshan each year. It was the time that I spent in Swamiji's company that created in me devotion and strength on an ever-increasing scale from day to day.

*“Kilbisham okkeyum pokkuvaanulloru
Siddhoushadham Mahat paada seva
Sraddhyaay cheykilo chitham thelinjaasu
Bhaktiyum Muktiyum Labhyamaakum”*

(Meaning of this Malayalam verse: “The one great medicine that will help in getting rid of all one’s sins is serving the feet of great persons. If this is done with sincere devotion, before long the mind will become pure and one will attain devotion and liberation” - Tr). Swamiji is a pure-hearted person. He is incapable of hiding anything. Whatever is on his mind will come bursting out. Everything was public; nothing was secret. He would always be closely watching everybody’s activities, particularly mine. He would not correct my mistakes then and there. He would scold me severely and correct my mistakes only when there were several people around to witness it. On certain occasions he would even pick up a stick to beat me. I shall cite just one example here. The birth anniversary festival of Swami Vivekananda is in progress. A large public meeting under Swamiji’s Presidentship is arranged at the Girls’ school. After several eminent persons had spoken, in my capacity as Secretary, I too spoke something. Swamiji did not like the tone or tenor of what I said. On conclusion of the meeting we returned to the Ashram. There also there were lots of people. People used to have some affection and regard for me. Immediately on reaching the Ashram, I prepared coffee for Swamiji and approached Swamiji with a glassful of coffee in my hand. Swamiji used to like only black coffee, and it must be piping hot. Swamiji had taught me several times the proper way of making coffee and

tea. Well, I was standing close to Swamiji with the glassful of coffee in my hand. And, looking at me, he began roaring at me like a lion: “Well! you are posing yourself as a Bhakta? You are a false Bhakta. Try to become a true Bhakta. And why do you care for these Ashrams made of stone and timber? Build the Ashram in your own heart and install Guru Maharaj there.” (Translator’s note: The above English version of Swamiji’s words has been given by Guru Maharaj himself, followed by a translation in Malayalam.) What divine words! But I did not quite relish these immortal, honeyed words then. What else but my ego could have been the reason for that? It is only now that I am able to savour and enjoy the flavour and sweetness of those nectar-like words.

115. Swamiji had his coffee and rested. I become engaged in other items of work. After staying here for some days, Swamiji left to visit Maannar, Haripad, Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kanyakumari, and then left for Bangalore. Within Travancore, I used to accompany Swamiji on all such visits. On such occasions I would entrust the responsibility of running the Ashram to some one else before leaving.

116. Although the Ashram building at Tiruvalla offered practically no conveniences for the Swamiji’s stay, he nevertheless used to come and stay there for 4-5 days at a stretch each year. I had become quite distressed at the inconvenience and discomfort to Swamiji. Always I used to think of constructing another more spacious and comfortable building for Swamiji’s stay. Then I happened to run into Veliath Aasaan. He was a member of an old Nair family. He had lots of landed property, but Lakshmi the

Goddess of prosperity, never stays at a place permanently. The land is all in the hands of others now; and all he has got now is an elevated piece of barren land in Thokalassery. The place was ideal for an Ashram. The moment I apprised Aasaan of our requirements, he gladly agreed to donate the land to us. After getting Swamiji's approval we got the registration transferred to us. During one of Swamiji's visits to Tiruvalla, I took him to the site and he liked it very much.

117. And so time moves on, "*Kaalo na yaato vayameva yaataah*". In truth it is not time which moves but we who keep on moving forward and approach death.

118. Swamiji used to write regularly. In one letter he had written: "I intend to escort the President Maharaj to Kanyakumari. All arrangements must be made for his reception and stay at various places in a befitting manner. I shall intimate to you in due course the date of his arrival". I experienced both happiness and trepidation on reading this. The financial state of the Tiruvalla Ashram is deplorable. The Ashram was just limping along somehow. I had no desire to accumulate a corpus fund to finance the daily expenses. "*Artham Anartham*" (Wealth is misery and trouble - Tr). Be that as it may, I was fortunate to send a small amount towards the travel expenses of President Maharaj, I received a letter that, shortly, Maharaj and his retinue would be reaching Alwaye railway station. I reached Alwaye. I think that was in 1916. Padmanabhan Tampi and others had already arrived at Alwaye and fixed up a good house near the (Periyar) river for Maharaj and party to stay.

119. Myself and the others were at the Alwaye railway station, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the train which would be bringing Maharaj and party. The train steamed in around 4 p.m. It is impossible to describe the excitement and agitation of the people. First Swamiji alighted from the train. The Maharaj(*) got down slowly. Everyone prostrated before him. What I am blessed with is indeed the darshan of a Mahatma. He appeared to be the very embodiment of divine peace. Maharaj had brought with him three or four Sanyasis, two Brahmacharis and a cook. Under Swamiji's instructions Kunjirama Menon, Appu Menon, Narayanan Nair and other devotees had assembled *en route*.

120. All of us reached the residence fixed up for President Maharaj. Swamiji tells me: "Look, it is your God who has come. You will now receive your Mantradeeksha and other things". Although I had been with Swamiji for 4 - 5 years, not a word had so far fallen from his lips regarding meditation or Mantropadesa. On hearing Swamiji's words I became radiantly happy and became doubly interested and immersed in serving Maharaj. I also tried my utmost to please and satisfy the other Swamijis in Maharaj's party.

121. With Maharaj, besides Nirmalananda Swamiji, Sankarananda Swamiji, Durgananda Swamiji, Bhoomananda

* This was Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj (who was known as Rakhal and Sri Maharaj), a very devoted disciple of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the first President of the Shri Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math - Tr.

Swamiji and Yateeswarananda Swamiji, and Brahmachari Gopal were also there. Sankarananda Swamiji is the present President. Yateeswarananda Swamiji is now in the Bangalore Ashram.

122. Maharaj is staying comfortably at Alwaye. He is reclining in an easy chair facing the river. Devotees keep on coming for his darshan. Maharaj is always in meditation. He is never in the habit of talking much. Still he used to speak sometimes a few words about the greatness of famous temples and pilgrimage centres and of the holiness of Brindavan and other places. This makes everyone happy. Even his darshan confers great bliss. Just imagine how much more the bliss would be enhanced if the nectar of his speech were to be added to his darshan!

123. It became my habit to go and stand near Maharaj whenever I could find the time. It became physically impossible to pull back my eyes once they had fallen on the physical beauty of Maharaj's body. Once when I was feasting my eyes continuously with the glory of his sight, he beckoned me beside him and asked: "What do you want? What do you want?". All it struck me to request him was that I would like to have the sandals adorning his lotus feet. On hearing this the Master (God) said: "These are leather chappals. On my return to Calcutta I shall send you the wooden paadukas I had been using". And straightaway he instructed Sankarananda Swamiji who was his Private Secretary to arrange for the paadukas being sent to me.

124. After staying at Alwaye comfortably for 2-3 days although it was raining, Swamiji left one night for Kottayam by a special steam boat. Rain and wind were very much in evidence and the

boat started rocking this side and that side. But President Maharaj consoled everybody; and the party reached Kottayam safe and sound the next morning. They stayed in a bungalow arranged by Padmanabhan Tampi. He stayed there only for one or two days. From Kottayam President Maharaj left for Haripad in a special car along with his Private Secretary and Padmanabhan Tampi. Myself and some others left by steam boat. Many people had congregated at various places on the route to receive President Maharaj.

125. Around 4 p.m. President Maharaj reached Haripad, Elaborate arrangements had been made to receive him at Haripad and escort him to the Ashram. It was the ardent desire of the organisers to carry him in a palanquin to the accompaniment of vedic chanting, Poorna Kumbham, Kirtan, Nagaswaram music etc., but Maharaj did not agree to any of these. He said, “What for are these arrangements? Am I being led to my marriage?” At the Haripad Ashram he rested well. Myself and the others reached Haripad around 8 p.m. by steam boat. I went direct to President Maharaj and prostrated before him. After having darshan of the Swamiji also, I ate and slept well.

126. Maharaj stayed in the Haripad Ashram very comfortably indeed. Swamiji was ever around, ready at hand, anticipating Maharaj’s least wish and requirement and having it fulfilled. With what utter devotion does Swamiji treat Maharaj? This can only be understood by actually being there and witnessing things. After allotting the best available sleeping places to the Sanyasis and Brahmacharis accompanying Maharaj, Swamiji would sleep in a

corner of the enclosed verandah. Devotees continue to come for darshan from neighbouring places in batches. Swamiji tells me, “Look, tomorrow morning Maharaj will give you Mantradeeksha. You be ready. It is desirable to skip food at night. In the morning too, you should take even water only after the Mantropadesa. Take a very early bath in the morning and be ready. You must keep flowers and fruits in your hands. If you do not have money, I shall give you”. I was immensely happy. I had some money with me. Swamiji had told similarly to some others too, and all of them also got ready. I too went to the market and procured flowers, fruits, sandal paste, incense sticks, etc. The entire night I spent with this single thought. In the morning, after completing my bath, I kept standing near the puja room. Maharaj had already graced the puja room with his presence early in the morning. Shri Sankarananda Swamiji was standing at the door of the puja room. Our Swamiji too was there with him. Swamiji called me first and directed me to go into the puja room. After prostrating before Swami Sankaranandaji, I went inside the room. What an enchanting sight! Dakshinamurthy himself, rapt in meditation. I prostrated before Maharaj. Under his instructions I remained in the seat fixed for me. After Aachamana and other preliminaries, the Mantropadesa was given to me. I was at the pinnacle of Bliss. After offering the flowers, etc at Maharaj’s feet, and prostrating before him, I stepped out of the room without a care in the world. Then I remained for a very long time in Maharaj’s bed room, immersed in japa and meditation.

127. A grand feast at 12 noon. The very next day, Maharaj leaves for Kollam. I too go with him. Night had fallen by the

time we reached the house fixed for stay by Dr. Tampi. The stay there was for three days. The next lap of the journey was to Thiruvananthapuram.

128. Swamiji had deputed four or five young men to Thiruvananthapuram to make the necessary arrangements there. Maharaj and party reached Thiruvananthapuram by car one evening. And myself and some others reached by bus. That was an auspicious day. The next day was, Trikkartika day. The entire building was adorned by chains of lighted oil lamps. President Maharaj had to do a foundation stone laying at Thiruvananthapuram.

129. There is a place called Vattiyoorkavu about 4-5 miles (6-8 km) from Thiruvananthapuram. There was a beautiful hillock there. Swamiji was keen to get an Ashram constructed atop that hill. Through the persuasions of Shri Banerjee, an Engineer of the State Government and of Shri Ghosh, a Government contractor, the owner of the land agreed to donate the major portion of the area for the Ashram. Mr. Varier of Peroorkada (a part of Thiruvananthapuram city) and Dr. Tampi were also interested in the project. The auspicious time fixed for the foundation stone laying ceremony was the morning of the second day after Maharaj's arrival in Thiruvananthapuram. The previous night itself Swamiji reached the site and performed some homas and pujas. Very early in the morning President Maharaj reached the Ashram site by car. Myself and the others followed, some on foot and others by horse-drawn carriages. Many people managed to reach the site. Public welcome addresses were offered to

President Maharaj in English and Sanskrit. For the foundation stone laying ceremony, Swami Yateeswaranandaji performed the puja under Maharaj's instructions. Thereafter, Maharaj laid the foundation stone with his holy hands. Prasadam was distributed to everyone. A group photo was taken then. A copy of that photograph may be seen even now in some Ashrams.

130. One by one the people disperse. President Maharaj sits down there on a chair. He likes the place very much. I was standing close to him. He tells me; “Devotee, what an enchanting place this is! This is indeed a fit place for Saadhana and Bhajan. You must stay here and make some young men Brahmacharis (tyagis)”.

131. The principal object of Maharaj's Kerala tour was to worship Kumaari (Mother Goddess Parvati in virgin, maiden form) at Kanyakumari. To realise that, after food and a short rest, Maharaj started for Kanyakumari the same day by car. He reached by the evening. Myself and the others joined him a little later. A good house had been fixed up for his stay. His party also stayed there along with him. Myself and the others stayed in the nearby choultry (satram).

132. In the evening itself Maharaj started for the temple on foot to have darshan of the Goddess at the evening Deepaaraadhana (Aarti) time. All of us followed, singing Kirtans and bhajans. Maharaj was totally silent. Swamiji was also near him. We entered the temple and approached the sanctum sanctorum. At the darshan of the jewel-bedecked, bewitchingly beautiful Goddess who sustains the entire Universe, Maharaj stood in a

trance, forgetting everything else. O, Bliss Absolute! All of us felt rewarded.

133. After receiving prasad when Maharaj was about to return to the residence, several maidens (Kumaaris) began to approach Maharaj and extend their hands to him. Swamiji was ever-ready beside Maharaj, with the money-bag. Swamiji began placing coins in Maharaj's hands one after another, and Maharaj started distributing them one by one to the Kumaris. This army of maidens followed Maharaj upto his residence, and then dispersed. This used to happen every day. During the day-time also, children used to come to Maharaj's residence. Sometimes Maharaj used to give them eatables with his own hands. All of us enjoyed Maharaj enacting humorous scenes and laughing and playing with the children as though he was himself a child and was enjoying himself immensely.

134. One day a Kumari Puja was performed there. All the Kumaris were presented with fine clothes, fed well and made happy. These maidens sang and danced merrily and returned to their houses. Through feeding of young ones God is pleased. This is indeed true.

135. President Maharaj and party and his devotees stayed at Kanyakumari for a whole week. Whenever I got the opportunity, I used to be near Maharaj. One day Maharaj graced me with these words: "Ah, what a delightful place! I do not want to go back from here at all. If only a hut of leaves (parasaala) had been put up here, I would have stayed here in perfect contentment for the rest of my life". Consider critically the

mental make-up of great persons. Their sojourn in this world is like a “lotus leaf on water”. *Padmapatram iva ambhasi*. Just as the water does not cling to the lotus leaf, so also material things do not touch their hearts. Can sense experiences ever approach these blessed, fortunate souls who ever revel in eternal ‘Brahmananda’? No, never!

136. Swamiji had only one all-consuming thought - to give complete satisfaction to President Maharaj and party. Whenever Swamiji had a little leisure, I used to go and sit somewhere near him. He knew all the arts and sciences. I have already made a mention of this. One day myself and the others were sitting beside Swamiji. He started calling us one by one and began reading our palms. He called me too, and the moment he looked at my palm, he said; “Bhakta will go into a cave and go on meditating and meditating”.

137. The stay at Kanyakumari was coming to an end. Before leaving Kanyakumari, Maharaj gave Mantropadesa to some persons. One Padmanabha Pillai who had returned from Germany and the present Sukhananda Swamiji were two of those fortunate ones.

138. In those days Shri Thanu Pillai was the P.W.D. Engineer at Nagercoil (a town about 15 miles or 24 kilometres to the north of Kanyakumari - Tr.). He was also a devotee. He invited and took President Maharaj to Nagercoil. I too went along. Arrangements had been made for a grand feast. After food and rest at night at Nagercoil, Maharaj left for Kollam the next morning.

139. This time Maharaj stayed at Kollam for 5-6 days. Dr. Tampi had even earlier received upadesa from Maharaj. He was very keen to carry out Maharaj's wishes. It was here that Maharaj gave Mantropadesa to Swami Agamanandaji and others. And also to an Engineer.

140. Subbaraya Iyer and Brahmachari Chellappa arrived at Kollam from Haripad. They had come with great hopes and desire of taking Maharaj once again to Haripad. Maharaj too was happy to go to Haripad, but he found himself unable to comply with their request as he had to get back to Calcutta without delay.

141. Maharaj was ready to leave for Ernakulam by a special steam boat. I had absolutely no rest for quite some time and my body had weakened. But the strength and power that my mind had received, were something unique.

*“Kilbisham okkeyum pokkuvaanulloru
Siddhoushadham mahat paada seva
Sraddhayaay cheykilo Chitham telinjaasu
Bhaktiyum. Muktiyum. Labhyamaakum
Suddha Bhaktiyum Muktiyum labhyamaakum”.*

(The meaning of this Malayalam verse has been given in para 114)

*“Durlabham trayamevaitat deivaanugraha haitukam.
Manushyatvam, Mumukshutvam, Mahaapurushasamsrayah”.*

(Meaning: All these three things are only rarely got, and then too, only with God's blessings - birth as a human being; desire for liberation; and the company of, and the opportunity to serve, great men - Tr.)

142. This humble soul was engrossed in serving President Maharaj continuously day and night as though it were God Himself that he was serving. I had devotion even for the Maharaj's cook. Once during our stay in Kanyakumari, I happened to notice the cook's clothes lying on the bank of the tank. As soon as I started washing those clothes, Yateeswarananda Swamiji came there. I was washing the clothes voluntarily. Yateeswarananda Swamiji, however, mistook that I had been washing the clothes under the cook's instructions, and he told me: "What are you doing? He (the cook) is taking too much advantage of your leniency." Scolding the cook, he pulled out the clothes from my hands and threw them away. I do not think the cook ever came to know of this.

143. As you know, I am an "Aadyavasaanavesha" (i.e. One who will be on the scene before all others, and will be the last one to leave the scene - Tr). I begin taking food only after all the others have been served and have been satisfied. On some rare occasions when there were more people than had been anticipated and provided for, I would even go without food. On such occasions, I would run up to a hotel, eat and come back. It was very easy to please President Maharaj, but very difficult to please some of the young Sanyasis in his party. This is what happened at Kollam once. One day, single-handed, I was serving

food for about sixteen persons. Bhoomananda Swamiji asked for some salt. By mistake, what I gave him was sugar. It was not that he did not have affection for me, but on this occasion he started scolding me harshly, asking me why I had given sugar when he had asked for salt. Swamiji was sitting next to him. The moment he heard the unnecessary scolding, Swamiji started shouting at him like a lion: “What, have you no eyes to see? Striving and serving, he is reduced to a skeleton. He might have made a mistake. But this is not the way to behave towards him.” All the wild animals became thoroughly quiet. Everybody finished his meal in total silence and returned to his respective place.

144. I have discussed this incident only to illustrate and emphasise Swamiji’s compassion to those who serve him. I am reminded here of Sri Krishna who, totally forgetting his solemn promise, jumped out of his chariot and flew straight to Bhishmacharya, with the Sudarsana Chakra in hand.

145. Well, the next morning President Maharaj is scheduled to leave for Ernakulam by a special steam boat. I had a great desire to go with him to Calcutta. I was sure Maharaj would agree to my prayer. But how could I go without Swamiji’s permission? The moment Swamiji heard me speak of my desire to go to Calcutta, he asked - “If you go away, who would be here to look after my work, the Ashram, etc.?” I had no answer to this. Early in the morning itself, I prepared coffee. Swamiji walked to the boat jetty even before taking coffee. I was stunned. Leaving the coffee as it was in the fire-place, I ran to the boat jetty and

got into the boat. Swamiji asked, “Where is the coffee?” I ran back and fetched the coffee and offered it to everyone. Swamaji was happy.

146. The boat started moving. About 12 noon, we reached Trikkunnappuzha. Subbaraya Iyer and Chellappa were there, awaiting Maharaj’s arrival with food ready at hand. The time approached for me to take leave of President Maharaj and his party and Swamiji. With the blessings of Maharaj and Swamiji, I got down from the boat. Within four to five minutes, the boat vanished from sight. Siva Siva!

147. How can I describe my state? Just like plunging all of a sudden from dazzling light into the depths of darkness in a dense forest! I managed to nibble at some food. Along with Chellappa Swami, I reached the Haripad Ashram and rested.

OM! OM! OM!

CHAPTER - 7

148. The next morning itself I left for Tiruvalla via Pallippaad. At Pallippaad there was a small but beautiful Krishna Temple belonging to the Koikkal people. Earlier I had done Bhajana worship in that temple for a month or two. Once I had conducted a Bhagavata Saptaha also there. The owners of the temple, Shri Govinda Pillai and Shri Velu Pillai, were known to me.

149. I returned to Tiruvalla and continued to look after the affairs of the Ashram. My mind was immersed in the various incidents during the stay and travels of President Maharaj. Immediately after reaching Calcutta, Maharaj had sent me the wooden sandals used by him. I used to do puja to the sandals with great devotion. They are even now in the Ashram at Tiruvalla.

150. Diverse emotions arise in me when I think of Maharaj's words dripping with honey. When will I be fortunate again to hear those nectar-like words and receive his darshan? Once one of the Swamijis was applying oil on Maharaj's body. I too wished to do that. Approaching Maharaj and standing behind him, I too started applying oil on his back. Laughingly, Maharaj asked: "What is Bhakta doing? Painting?" I was applying the oil very gently. What was to be done was to apply the oil and thoroughly massage the area vigorously. I did not know this.

151. Maharaj was always in meditation (Samadhi). Whenever I used to go near him, he would say: "Meditate, Meditate, no

time to lose”. The mind becomes tranquil as soon as Maharaj comes near. Such was the glorious vibration and experience that he used to generate. I used to go to his presence constantly. Once Maharaj was lying down on a cot in the Ashram at Haripad. This scene continues to be ever fresh in my mind.

*“Karaaravindena Padaaravindam Mukhaaravinde
Vinivesayantam
Vatasya Patrasya Pute Sayaanam Baalam Mukundam
Manasaa Smaraami”.*

(Meaning: “I recall in my mind that Baala Mukunda who, with his lotus hand is placing his lotus foot in his lotus mouth, and who is reclining on the back of a banyan leaf” - Tr.) Maharaj was exactly like that.

*“Kotiyugangalilaayi sanchayicheedunna
punyaphalamaanee martyajanmam
Theduvin Sadguru Paadapadmam Punarneduvin
Sowbhaagya Jnaanaamritam”.*

(For the meaning of this Malayalam verse please see para 72 above - Tr.)

152. I was now mostly staying in the Tiruvalla Ashram. Occasionally I used to go to Haripad and Thiruvananthapuram. Whenever Swamiji used to come to Tiruvalla, I used to be with him always, engaged in serving him until the moment of his return. Swamiji used to exert himself very much to complete the Thiruvananthapuram Ashram at the earliest. The inauguration

of the fund raising campaign for that Ashram was held at Thiruvananthapuram one night. Swamiji himself entered his name as the first donor in the donation register and gave one rupee in cash on the spot. At that time itself promises were received for donations aggregating Rs.2,000/-. Peroorkada Rama Varier was one of Swamiji's ardent devotees. He was ready to do anything for the Ashram. Entrusting the responsibility to him and others, Swamiji left for Kanyakumari and from there for Bangalore.

153. Swamiji used to write to me off and on. In one letter, he wrote: "Bhakta, you go to Thiruvananthapuram. They are all sleeping, Wake them up". I went immediately to Thiruvananthapuram, met all the devotees and communicated Swamiji's stricture to them. All of them tried to exert as much as they could. They had already collected the necessary stone, timber and other materials needed for construction work. I stayed at the Ashram site itself for three days. A totally deserted place. Mr. Arunachalam Pillai, the owner of the site, was residing with his family at the foot of the hill. He used to send me food regularly, I used to take food only once a day. I stayed 3 very comfortable and happy days there. On the morning of the third day Shri Banerjee, Engineer, arrived around 9 a.m. Everyone felt happy at this. He inspected the site immediately, identified the exact spot where the building would be constructed, and had pegs driven to demarcate the various areas. The chief of the construction labour was also with him and work started on that day itself. I then went to Kanyakumari, had darshan of the Goddess and returned to Tiruvalla. I apprised Swamiji of all the details. Needless to say, he was extremely pleased.

154. Swamiji devoted special attention to the Thiruvananthapuram Ashram. It was his wish that the installation ceremony should also be got performed by President Maharaj. Swamiji himself used to proceed to various places for collection of funds. Frequently he used to go to Thiruvananthapuram also. The walls were being erected. Large stone pillars, chiselled to fine smoothness, were being hoisted and positioned. I too used to accompany Swamiji and watch all this. A splendid feast was held at Swamiji's residence, in order to enthuse the carpenters, masons and workers.

155. On that occasion, Swamiji happened to stay at Thiruvananthapuram for quite some days. Only I was with him. Although Swamiji used to be involved in all this hectic hustle and bustle, his mind was ever at peace. Swamiji told me with great delight: "Bhakta, look what a deserted and isolated place this is! How much happiness it gives us because there is none else! Here one can remember god to one's heart's content. We can sing aloud; we can dance. Who is there to witness or hear us?"

156. Shri C.K. Krishna Pillai, Magistrate, was also a great devotee of Swamiji's. We went to his residence in response to his invitation. From there to Kanyakumari; and from there to Kollam.

157. A "Yoga Math" had been established at a place called Quilandy in Northern Malabar as a result of the interest taken by some prominent persons there. The principal members and office bearers of the Math were Shri Krishnan Nair, Kelappan

Kidavu, Ittirarappa Menon and others. In 1915 they offered the Math to Swamiji. When this offer was made, I too had been to Quilandy. From that day onwards, the Math became transformed as the Ramakrishna Ashram. Swamiji was looking for a suitable person to run the Ashram and the Sanskrit school under it. And he selected me for the assignment.

158. At that time a few Brahmacharis happened to come to the Ashram at Tiruvalla. Shri Raman Pillai (Sekharananda Swamiji), Raman Pillai (Chitbhaasaananda Swamiji), Padmanabha Pillai (Nirvikarananda Swamiji), Paachu Pillai, Sankara Iyer and so on. One day Swamiji happened to tell Dr.Tampi and others. “I am going to install Bhakta at Quilandy”. A change from my native place Tiruvalla was something I liked. “Then you go to Quilandy today itself”, ordered Swamiji. Telling me not to accept any money from Dr.Tampi even if offered, and giving me ten rupees himself, he sent me to the boat jetty along with another person.

159. From Kollam to Ernakulam by boat and from Ernakulam to Parappanangadi by train. Lawyer Shri Kunjirama Menon was staying there. He was a great devotee of Swamijis and was considerably interested in the affairs of the Ashram. After staying with him for one or two days, one evening I reached Quilandy. An incident which happened immediately after my arrival there is worth mentioning here. The moment he saw me from a distance, a Brahmachari - Aasaan - dashes towards me like an arrow and prostrate before me on the ground. Then he quickly climbed up a coconut tree, plucked a tender coconut,

broke it open and keeping it in his hands, came and stood before me, ready to make me drink the contents. O, the goodness of true love and affection! Then I conversed with Shri Krishnan Nair who was staying there as the Head of the Math, other Brahmacharis, teachers and students, and then rested. After bath, prayers, meditation and food, I slept well at night.

160. I have now to say certain things about the Ashram. I have already mentioned that the Math had already been offered to Swamiji. Despite that, it was Shri Krishnan Nair who continued to administer it. He used to live in the Ashram itself. When I reached there, three Brahmacharis were also staying there. They used to attend to Krishnan Nair; Krishnan Nair used to treat them as mere attendants or workmen. Krishnan Nair also had a wife; she was living in a place nearby, on land belonging to the Ashram. I wondered very much within myself whether my being sent to Quilandy was really not for the purpose of ensuring that the Ashram properties were physically taken over from Shri Krishnan Nair and handed over to Swamiji. There was a small Sanskrit School under the control of the Ashram, for which a small grant used to be received from Government, Swamiji had not sent me here just like that. He had provided me with the necessary strength to attend to all these items of work too.

161. I entered upon my duties right from the next day after reaching Quilandy. I devoted attention first to education. I started befriending the students. The children too were happy with me. And their number increased. I became the Head Master; I started teaching them a little bit of the English language also.

When the Inspector of Schools came for inspection, he too was happy and increased the grant by Rs.25/-.

162. Gradually Krishnan Nair's managership of the Ashram got transferred to me. And eventually Krishnan Nair gave up connection with management of the Ashram and started living with his wife in their own house. Nevertheless he used to come now and then and tried to find out what was going on. Swamiji continued to visit the Ashram once a year. He was very happy.

163. As instructed by Swamiji, I used to attend to the Ashram work personally. Some prominent persons who had all along been nursing the feeling of "I, I, Mine, Mine" towards the Ashram, started nurturing hostility towards me. When they found that they had no voice, they started making efforts to regain control and possession of the Ashram. They tried to get one of their Guruswamis to stay in the Ashram. They sought my permission to do so. As I could anticipate their real intention, I refused permission, saying that no one could be accommodated without Swamiji's prior permission. They did not like this in the least, and I may say that their displeasure and hostility increased hundred-fold. The Brahmacharis who were with me were also on the point of leaving. I was all alone. The students had to be taught; poojas had to be performed; food had to be prepared; things had to be purchased from the market; and occasionally the Post Office too had to be visited. I used to attend to all these diverse functions single-handed without fail.

164. When things were going on like this, one day a student, the son of the priest in the near by temple comes and tells me

in secret: “Swamiji, yesterday lots of people had come to the temple. They are all trying to drive you away from here. They had a tea-party and all that. What they intend to do is to enter the Ashram this evening and take it over by force”. I received this information calmly. My strength is really that of Swamiji’s. “Let them come”, is all that I said in reply to the boy. I had perforce to go to the Post Office that evening. I did not experience any fear. Thinking that, if they came, they should not experience any difficulty in entering, I kept the front gate and the front door to the Ashram wide open. It would take me one and a half hours to go to the Post Office and return. I had a firm conviction, deep inside me that, without my permission, not even a child will enter the open Ashram premises. And it happened exactly like that. When I returned from the Post Office, all was quiet exactly as it was when I had left. The power of truth is something special. The blessings of the preceptor also have indeed a unique power. I used to feel that Swamiji was constantly beside me on those occasions. It is worth mentioning that incidents such as these served to increase my faith and devotion.

165. Various difficulties continued to arise in the working of the Quilandy Ashram. That was the time of the First German (World) War. The prices of rice and other commodities rose very sharply; and there were four or five people to be fed daily in the Ashram. I used to think sometimes that even if one could consume the water in which rice had been washed, one would be fortunate. Tears used to stream from my eyes; and the next moment a solution would be in sight and the problem would be solved. There has been no such incident thereafter.

166. For some time, lawyer Shri Kunjirama Pathiyaar - Swami Chinmayananda - stayed in the Ashram. He was a devotee as well as a detached soul. He used to teach the students in the school. That was of great help to me. His desire was to renounce everything and continue to live in Ashrams. Nevertheless he had to return at once from Quilandy to his native house. Winding up his legal practice, Kunjirama Pathiyaar became the Editor of the Malayalam newspaper “Kudiyaan” (Tenant) in Pattaambi. Later he was Principal of the Pattambi Sanskrit College for a long time. In the end he became a Sanyasi.

167. Swamiji used to send young Brahmacharis to help me when I was alone in the Ashram. Once Ramasaranam Sekharananda Swamiji was staying with me. That would have been in 1919. Swamiji’s letters used to arrive regularly. My desire to go to Bangalore and stay with Swamiji kept on increasing. If I were to ask for permission to do so, it would be denied. One day I sent a letter to Swamiji in the form of a poem intimating that I was leaving for Bangalore to see him. And, entrusting the entire responsibility of running the Ashram to the Brahmachari, I left for Bangalore. By 9 a.m. in the morning, I reached Bangalore Ashram. Swamiji had finished his coffee and was engaged in the garden.

168. It was Swamiji’s practice to get up very early in the morning, finish his morning ablutions, prepare coffee, take it himself and serve the rest to the other residents in the Ashram. The vessels also would be cleaned by him and arranged tidily in their respective places. He would then have a smoke and proceed to the garden, armed with gardening implements.

Swamiji would observe total silence while doing these things - Peace! Peace! “*Yad Yad karma karomi tad tad akhilam Sambho tavaaraadhanam*”. (Whatever I do, O, Siva, it is an act of worship to you” - Tr.). Wise ones could learn this principle from every moment of Swamiji’s life. Is not yoga the skill to do things efficiently and perfectly? Swamiji was indeed a true devotee, Yogi, Jnaani (Knower) and Karmi (Doer). All this becomes fully clear to me only at this late stage in life.

169. Swamiji would finish his work, rather puja, in the garden by 11 a.m. Then he would take his bath; he would wash his clothes himself and hang them out to dry with precision and neatness. Then, imbibing teertha (prasada water) from the puja room, he would go and sit in the place allotted to him for food. All the Brahmacharis and Sanyasis in the Ashram would also sit along with him in formation (in a line). A smoke again after food; then rest. At 3 p.m. after washing himself, he would have tea along with fruit or snacks. That was the time when people would generally come and salute him. He would welcome students with love and affection, talk to them in a profound voice and satisfy them all. After participating in the evening Deepaaraadhana (Aarti), and after finishing food, he would fall into a relaxed slumber. I have been fortunate to sleep beside him in his own room.

“Kilbisham okkeyum pokkuvaanulloru Siddhoushadham mahatpaada seva.

Shraddhayaay cheykilo chitham thelinjaasu Bhakityum Muktiyum labhyamaakum”

(For meaning please see para 114 above - Tr). Well, where am I? Yes, I am carrying some gifts in my hands. I know Swamiji's temperament very well. It is with great trepidation that I am approaching Swamiji. And that too, from the backside. Swamiji is deeply immersed in his work. Once he turned back and looked. I fell at Swamiji's feet. "Who asked you to come here?" he scolds me in an angry tone. And he started repeating excerpts from my poem in a sarcastic voice.

170. I was extremely distressed. At that time I could only understand Swamiji's external behaviour. I did not have the capacity, in those days, of understanding the internal workings of Swamiji's heart which overflowed with love and affection. It is only now that I have been able to realise that these were words of blessings, disguised to make me stronger.

171. I was thinking what I should do - should I leave the place? In any case, I slowly walked up to the door and slowly slipped outside. The sight that I saw there is ever fresh in my memory. An extensive forest area - desolate and deserted surroundings - I am all alone there - None to help me - except God. With this approach, I received adequate strength and intelligence. I returned to the Ashram itself. Swamiji was also enquiring, "Where is Bhakta?" Swamiji was very happy. And I continued to stay there itself, in the Ashram.

172. President Maharaj (i.e. the First President - Swami Brahmanandaji - whom I had served at Tiruvalla and other places) is reported to have said like this about Swamiji: "He is a terrible man. But he is a great devotee as well". To the question,

how exactly can diametrically opposite characteristics like light and darkness co-exist in a person, Swamiji's life furnished a convincing and eloquent answer. I stayed there in near-ecstasy for 3-4 days. One day Swamiji tells me: "Bhakta, why not you go to Tiruvalla and take charge of the Ashram there? They are all yearning for you". This was nothing short of an order. And I accepted that gladly. I decided to leave the next day.

173. Swamiji ordered me to write some letters to devotees in North Malabar. I began to write. Swamiji formally made me sit in his own chair, it was a well-rounded chair, the Swamiji's favourite one. What could I do? I had to sit down in that chair and write the letters. Swamiji stood near me and began telling me the things to be written. Look at Swamiji's motherly affection. When I recall all these things, my mind merges in the Swamiji.

174. Swamiji saw me off at 4 p.m. the next day. Under Swamiji's instructions, a Brahmachari, Veeresan, fetched a horse-cab. Swamiji gives new clothes for me as well as for the others in Quilandy and also money for my travel expenses. There is an Ashram in Salem. He gave me some saplings of Bilva plants for being planted in that Ashram *en route* and saw me into the horse-cart for reaching the station. Brahmachari Veeresan also came with me up to the station. On reaching the station, Veeresan put me in the train and returned to the Ashram. Even in those days, Veeresan was a very clever and competent young person. He is known today as Saambhavananda Swamiji.

175. I got down at Salem the next day. I proceeded to the residence of one of Swamiji's great disciples and delivered to

him Swamiji's letter. He received me with great affection. The same evening I went to the Ashram. As instructed by Swamiji, I dug up the earth, packed the pit with manure; covered up the whole thing with earth and then planted the saplings. I have never been to Salem after that. I hear many persons telling that all those saplings have grown into strong trees.

176. The name of Swamiji's devotee in Salem is Namagiri. He introduced me to several eminent persons. I left for Quilandy after staying there for 2-3 days. I got down *en route* at Pattambi. Just to see Kunjirama Pathiyaar - Swami Chinmayananda - who was so very affectionate to me. From Pattambi I reached Quilandy.

177. It is now the time of Puja (Navaratri; Dusserah). The new clothes given by Swamiji were distributed to all. I narrated everything to the Brahmachari. All of a sudden my mind makes a somersault. Swamiji's instructions were that I should go again to the Tiruvalla Ashram. Tiruvalla is my native place. If I go there, the obstacles in the way of progress in meditation and sadhana will only increase. So the mind is not at all inclined to go there. The scolding received from Swamiji in Bangalore also acts in favour of this. Is it possible to disobey Swamiji's instructions? I deliberated deeply on all these. Immediately I wrote a letter to Swamiji, the substance of which was: "Now I am going not to Tiruvalla but to Gokarnam where I intend to do Tapasya for some time. Whatever I have done was only to please Swamiji. With Swamiji's blessings now I am going. All is false and I cannot rest satisfied until I come face to face with the truth".

178. Having written to Swamiji like this, I myself ran up to the Post Office and posted the letter. It was only when I returned to the Ashram that I began to analyse my action critically. O, what great foolishness? I felt that I had committed a great crime towards such a great, compassionate and affectionate Swamiji. But I could not refrain from going also. Do I not have a false ego still? The thought that I was not going for a bad purpose but only for worshipping God, gave me some consolation. On Durgashtami day Kumari Puja was performed. And on Vijaya Dasami Day I left Quilandy Ashram. The little money and other things that I had, I entrusted to the Brahmachari. I left without taking a single paisa with me. God alone is my refuge. “*Tvameva Sarvam, mama deva deva*”. (O, Lord of Lords, you alone are my everything” - Tr).

CHAPTER - 8

179. About 2 miles (3 km) from the Ashram at Quilandy there is a temple of Goddess known as Saarikaa temple. That night I spent happily in the “Kalathattu” of that temple. Leaving the temple the next morning, I arrived at Udipi in 1-2 days. The temple at Udipi is dedicated to Shri Krishna. After darshan of Krishna, I stayed at Udipi for three days. It looked impossible to walk all the way upto Gokarnam. As I was advised by some people that it would be better to go to Gokarnam by steam boat from Balachi, I walked upto Balachi. I arrived there one evening and sat waiting for the boat to arrive from Mangalore. I had thought that I could travel free. But it appeared impossible to travel without a ticket. The boat arrived at Balachi. All the travellers got into it and I was the only one left. I explained my situation to the Station Master. He said: “Why didn’t you tell me this before? I would have sent you without any difficulty. What is to be done now? Well, how much money do you have?” When I search myself, I somehow discover three rupees on me. The fare to Gokarnam is, I think, five rupees. He made good the deficit himself and got me a ticket. He also gave me 8 annas (50 paise) for buying eatables. I bought beaten rice for 2-3 annas (12-19 paise), got inside the boat and sat down.

180. This was my first ocean voyage. While going to Rameswaram once I had travelled a short distance by sea. I enjoyed the voyage revelling in the various sights. Food is no problem if one has money. All I have with me is some 4-5

annas (25-30 paise) and some beaten rice. I kept the beaten rice immersed in drinking water, and imbibed that mixture off and on. A lunar eclipse was also approaching. Priests had also got into the boat to get hold of persons from different places. Seeing the costly dress given by Swamiji that I had been wearing, they took me to be a rich person and were troubling me also. My telling them any number of times that I had no money on me, did not convince them. One of them stuck to me. He said he did not want any money and that he would take me to his house and make me stay there. The next evening the boat reached its destination. Every one got down. From there the Gokarnam temple is 3 miles (5 km) away. That Brahmin priest took me with him to his house. He invited me to stay there. I deposited the miscellaneous things that were with me, in a room there. It was 9 p.m. then. Nevertheless, I made a general survey of the temple, had my bath and returned to the house. I was extremely hungry and what he served me was cold rice. I went through the motions of eating some of it. I lay down on the verandah and slept well.

181. The next morning I got up early and went out for my morning ablutions. I had left my things in the house itself. That was Full Moon day. The lunar eclipse would begin around 5 p.m. The temple would close around 10 a.m. after the morning pujas. I kept on walking along the beach and reached a lonely, beautiful place. All facilities were available there, with fresh water for bathing and drinking. There was a small temple there, dedicated to Sitarama. Attached to the temple was a small kitchen. This is a fairly elevated place. The sea lies below, hugging that place.

The view from there was simply enchanting. Finishing my bath etc., and worshipping Rama in the temple, I sat in the front verandah of the temple and did japa and meditation. I went to the Brahmin's house around 10 a.m. and had bhiksha. I then made a survey of the surrounding areas.

182. This place is reputed to be the site at which Ravana did severe penance. Even now a small pond is to be seen there where Ravana is said to have answered the first call of nature, the water in it being unfit even to be touched. The deity installed in the temple is Siva. Several thousands of people come from various places to this temple for darshan. Everyone can freely go into the temple and worship. But this freedom is not available to people from Kerala, who are permitted to enter and worship only on payment of a small amount - 8 annas (50 paise) or so. Where do I have any money?

183. I think the eclipse was over by about 6 p.m. Large numbers of people, both men and women take bath in the sea at the time and proceed to the temple with devotion for worship. I am also one of them. The Brahmin priest insisted that he would give me the money for entering the temple. I had no intention of borrowing money. I circumambulated the temple outside singing hymns, and sat in a corner peacefully. I chanted the Mantra imparted to me by the Gurudev and felt deeply satisfied. At night I went to the Brahmin's house, took food and slept there. He should have understood by now that I have absolutely no money at all despite that he allowed me to remain in a corner of the house. But I had not come here just to stay in a house.

184. The next day itself I moved to the Ram Tirtha, the Rama temple, a deserted place. Several mendicants keep on coming to Gokarnam. Among them, there are several from Kerala also. I did not try to get acquainted with any of them. I began living by going from house to house and accepting Madhurika bhiksha. (The Madhurika or Madhukari system of bhiksha enjoins Sanyasis to go at random to 4 or 5 houses, call the name of the Lord in a low voice to make the lady of the house aware that a mendicant has come, and accept whatever is offered. The food so accepted from these 4 or 5 houses should be consumed at the next meal and nothing should be hoarded. If no bhiksha is offered at any of the houses, the Sanyasi should skip that meal, and sip water, chanting the Lord's name. The same, houses should not be visited regularly nor should any prior arrangement be made. The name derives from the practice of honey-bees visiting a few flowers at random and collecting the droplets of honey each flower has to offer - Tr). But from the Rama temple, to go to 2 or 3 houses and return it would take 2-3 hours. Sometimes I would remain for 2-3 days without food.

185. All the materials needed for the puja must be collected well before time - "*Sareeramaadyam Khalu dharma saadhanam*". If the body is not properly maintained, it will get progressively weakened and perish; the mind will not, on its own, be able to carry on its meditation. Madhurika bhiksha is the best; but I found it totally beyond me and also unbearable to go 2½ - 3 miles away for bhiksha. As I have already mentioned, my leg has been incapacitated. So I obtained some money by writing to friends and, with that, I started doing my own cooking. A

mendicant who was an acquaintance also teamed up with me. He used to fetch provisions, etc. from the market.

186. I spent some days like this in the Rama Ashram. I used to keep on sending letters to Shri Swamiji. I was told that there was an Uma Maheswara temple about 3 miles (5 km) away. I went to that place one day. It was an exceedingly beautiful place. On top of a small hill, there was a little temple. One person could just about manage to be there. An ideal place for penance. The sea is lapping its waves down below. Pure, fresh water can be had at the foot of the hillock. There is a small coconut grove and a small dharmashala down below there. A desire arose in me to stay there the moment I saw all these. I returned to the Rama Ashram. I explained matters to my friend. I gave him some money. I decided to live only on green gram (moong dal). After procuring some quantities of green gram, I reached that divine place and started living inside that temple.

187. The Lord makes me do all sorts of things. I proceed to the foot of the hill, armed with a water pan and go about my morning ablutions. After first taking bath in the sea, I have a bath in a fresh water spring. Not a drop of water can be had on the hill top. So I make it a point to carry some water with me in a vessel when I go up. Sometimes I had to collect and carry some firewood also. This was a barren hill with some grass only and without trees.

188. Despite difficulties of this nature, the mind was in perfect joy. I was immersed in japa and meditation. I would cook the green gram and take it once a day. Sometimes I would take

something at night too. Some mendicants who knew me also used to visit me sometimes. I would give them a share of the green gram and eat what was left. But it was sheer happiness. Sometimes Brahmins would come, do Rudraabhisheka and puja and conduct a big feast. They used to invite me also on these occasions.

189. One day, about 4 p.m. in the evening, I was sitting in meditation, enjoying great peace of mind and joy. Suddenly the body experienced a spell of chill. Even that felt pleasant. From the heart some pieces of poetry were emanating on their own. After sometime everything became peaceful and normal. I did not attach much importance to this. The next day too, at exactly the same time, the same thing happened. The chill increased in intensity. Appetite got reduced. Then I realised that it was an attack of malaria. My friend mendicant took me from Uma Maheswaram to the old Rama Tirtha (Ashram). As directed by him, I took some medicines. Nevertheless I was in the grip of temperature and chill. Gokarnam appeared to be unpleasant. So I decided to return to Quilandy.

190. I went to Gokarna temple, entered the temple precincts, worshipped Siva and did some offerings and poor feeding. Then I left by steam-boat for Mangalore. I had written about all this to Swamiji. Alighting at Mangalore, I reached Quilandy Ashram one night. At that time, Saranam Brahmachari and one Aasaan were there. They were pleased to see me.

191. I stayed in the Quilandy Ashram for a few days. Fever was coming regularly but I was not completely bed-ridden. I

used to get temperature on alternate days. After the temperature abated, I could do my normal work. Then I went to Guruvayoor and did Bhajanam worship there for some days. From there I went to the Tiruvalla Ashram. Some Brahmacharis were staying there.

192. Then I received news that Shri Swamiji had come to Thiruvananthapuram. I went to Thiruvananthapuram to see him. Construction work of the Ashram had not been completed. Swamiji was trying very hard to get it completed as early as possible. Swamiji himself goes along with others to various places for collection of funds. I have darshan of Shri Swamiji. Swamiji is annoyed with me a great deal for having left for Gokarnam without his prior permission. I am emaciated and I have gone to Gokarnam and contracted malaria. Now the next trip should be to Mookambika. Swamiji scolded me on these lines. That night I had very high temperature the like of which I had never before experienced. The Brahmacharis there fetched Dr. Tampi to examine me. He made my body perspire profusely. He must have given me aspirin pills. With that the temperature subsided. The next day I went to the General Hospital and remained under his treatment. I recovered fully in about 4-5 days. He gave me an injection. I left the Ashram and stayed with a friend for about a week. Swamiji left from Thiruvananthapuram.

193. From Thiruvananthapuram I reached Tiruvalla Ashram. And from there I again reached Guruvayoor. After doing Bhajanam worship there for 2-3 months, I went to the Quilandy Ashram. My interest in Ashram life dwindled. Then I decided

to go to Mookambika. I wrote to Swamiji. ‘I have made Bhakta free’, was Swamiji’s gracious reply.

194. At any cost I thought I would start for Mookambika. Right then I got a companion (fellow-traveller) too. It was not that I was totally short of money. After resting at intermediate places, I reached Mookambika one evening. Immediately on arrival, I went and had my bath in the river which flows close by, proceeded to the temple, got darshan of the Goddess, and felt deeply satisfied. The Goddess has assumed there a pose to bless everyone - and people from Kerala in particular. Not a few totally illiterate persons from Kerala have performed Bhajanam worship there and become great scholars by Her grace - this is a well-known fact. My stay and worship there were not with any specific object. That same detachment and pure devotion should continue in my heart all the time.

195. Even before I could enjoy the bliss of the Goddess’s darshan for even a single minute, someone comes to me and tells me to leave immediately; the reason is that, here too, people from Kerala had to pay one rupee for darshan. I came out immediately. I lay down on the platform of the temple tower along with my friends and slept comfortably.

196. The next day, after finishing my bath etc., in the morning, I proceeded to the temple, paid the prescribed one rupee, went inside and worshipped to my heart’s content. As there are several Brahmin houses adjacent to the temple, it is possible to spend several days on Madhurika bhiksha. Besides, for four annas (twenty-five paise), one can get several sweet cakes and

dough- nuts (appams and vadas) as prasad from the temple every night. About a mile ($1\frac{1}{2}$ km) from the temple, there is a small Ganesha temple. It is in the middle of a small forest. I shifted to that place for stay. I had engaged as priest a Brahmin from the Shankaracharya Math. Sometimes I used to take food at his place. There was a Pappaya tree there, full of Pappaya fruits. It seems, in those days, Brahmins in those parts were not used to eating Pappaya fruits. Daily I used to take two or three green (unripe) Pappaya fruits to the Ganesha temple, cook them well and eat them. Near the temple and close to the river, I discovered a small cave called Garuda Guha. I moved into that cave. There were several highly poisonous snakes there, but they never troubled me. I continued to go to the Mookambika temple daily. Almost all the people who do Bhajanam worship there are from Kerala.

197. I too stayed there for 4-5 months, doing Bhajanam worship. The birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda is approaching. When I was in the Ashram, that day used to be observed with religious fervour' by offering pujas, conducting feasts, etc. I used to send a small sum of money to Bangalore also. But now I have no money. Still, I sent them just the 4 annas (25 paise) I had. When I had sent the money, the desire to see Swamiji welled up and intensified in me. Immediately I set out for Bangalore. There is a place called Sagar which is in the rural area. There are schools and courts there. I rested for a day or two in the outer front verandah of a Brahmin house. If one goes by bus for some distance from there, then one can catch a train to Bangalore. It seemed impossible to walk all

that distance. I had no money. I explained my predicament to a stranger, a lawyer. He gave me all the money necessary to take me to Bangalore. Why delay any longer? I caught the bus for the railway station. And later, caught the train to Bangalore. The Ashram is a bit far away from the station. Walking slowly, I reached the Ashram around 10 O'clock in the morning, and fell at Swamiji's feet. At any rate now the Swamiji did not begin to scold. After the preliminary pleasantries, Swamiji told me: "You go and have a quick hair-cut". And Swamiji himself gave me the hair-cutting machine. I went to the room of Brahmachari Veeresan. He was also very happy to see me. I started cutting my hair; but when Veeresan noted that the task was beyond me, he took over and gave me an excellent hair-cut. After bath and food I rested.

198. I began to do each and every job in the Ashram. It was a season when there was rush of work in the Ashram. The birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was fast approaching. Swamiji was also very happy. Swamiji Sukhananda too was in the Ashram. He used to perform the poojas. Swamiji told me "You went here and there for penance. President Maharaj stayed here for quite some days. And he gave Sanyasa deeksha to Sukhananda".

199. For Sanyasa, the mere external dress part of it, I had no desire. Let the whole mind become absolutely pure - that was my goal. The birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda also passed off very peacefully. Swamiji contrived to receive invitations from Kerala and he was planning to go there. Swamiji

instructed me to stay on in the Ashram. Accordingly I stayed on there, attending to various items of work. The Ashram had three or four cows. I used to look after them well. I used to take them for grazing to places where good grass and water were available, and bathe them. All this kept me busy till 11 a.m. I would then return to the Ashram and take food. There were a large number of books in the Ashram. I used to read books of interest to me. Around 5 p.m. I used to water the plants in the garden. All this work I used to do on my own, gladly.

200. Swamiji conveyed the information of his reaching Kerala in a letter addressed to me. In Swamiji's absence the Chief for the time being in charge of the Bangalore Ashram was Brahmachari Veeresan. I showed the letter to him. I did not attempt to send a reply to Swamiji. What I did was to make Brahmachari Veeresan send a reply to Swamiji, giving all the information.

201. *“Dinamapi Rajanee Saayam Praatah”* (Day and night; evening and morning; each follows the other in quick succession and so the days roll on - Tr). It was a peaceful life. Some days later, a telegram is received from Swamiji: “Sri President Maharaj has abandoned his body.” Everyone in the Ashram felt distressed. Special pujas and feasts were organised to mark the Samadhi. About a month after that, Swamiji returned from Kerala. Everyone was happy.

202. The Swamiji condescended to tell me: “Well, then. You return to Quilandy”, and made me start for that place. Even now Saranam Brahmachari “Sekharananda” is in charge there. At one stage it became necessary for him to leave for Tiruvalla.

Different persons used to be sent there to stay with me in Quilandy. The affairs of the Ashram were going on smoothly. Shri Kundu Panikkar was the then Munsiff at Quilandy. Through him, reading of the Bhagavata regularly became established. I myself used to conduct Bhagavata reading, with explanation of meanings once a week at his residence, and later at the residence of other devotees.

203. The Kurups of Kuttamathu were famous Zamindars (Janmis). They invited Swamiji to their residence once. It was with great pomp and splendour that they took him in procession from the river jetty to their residence. There were even fire-works displays. I need not specially mention that I was with Swamiji. After staying there comfortably for a day or two, Swamiji left for Bangalore, and myself for Quilandy.

204. I think I stayed at Quilandy this time for about 2 years. Swamiji had told me that he would himself take me to Belur Math, but that has not materialised till now. I applied to Swamiji for permission to visit the place where Shri Ramakrishna practised penance, Dakshineswar, Belur Math and other places. Swamiji sent me a reply granting permission.

205. It was a Brahmachari by name Raman Pillai who was with me then in the Ashram. I entrusted him with the entire responsibility of running the Ashram. After staying for a few days in Guruvayur, I reached Kozhikode (Calicut). Paalaat Parukkutty Amma was a great devotee of the Swamiji's. She used to send money to the Ashram every month. I met her. That noble lady put me in the train for Madras. I reached the Ashram at Madras.

Shri Sivananda Swamiji was then the President of that Ashram. He had opened a Mother's Home also there. In accordance with the President Swamiji's wishes, Parukkutty Amma had also sent along with me a lady to work in that Home. I gave all the details to Sivananda Swamiji. I happened to stay there for about a week. Parukkutty Amma's eldest son, Balakrishna Menon (Sri Tapasyananda Swamiji) was then studying in Madras. As per Parukkutty Amma's letter, he too gave me some money towards travel expenses.

206. My intention was to return to Bangalore for Swamiji's darshan and then proceed to Calcutta. When I apprised Swami Sivanandaji of this in the proper way, he advised: "If you wish to go to Belur Math, you go direct from here. If you go to Bangalore, you may have to stay there itself and then you may as well forget going to Belur Math". There was also another young gentleman who was getting ready to go to Belur Math. Thinking this was the best opportunity, I decided to go to Calcutta directly from Madras.

CHAPTER - 9

207. Srimad Sivananda Swamiji or Swami Sivananda Maharaj, was before there then President of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, was popularly known as Mahapurusha Maharaj. Sivananda Swamiji of Madras gave me a letter addressed to that great and noble Mahapurusha Maharaj. It was Shri Iswarananda Swamiji who had been staying at the Madras Ashram ever since his Sanyasa, that put me in the train to Calcutta.

208. A desire that I have been cherishing for quite some time is about to be fulfilled. I reached the most sacred and tranquil Belur Math comfortably. I got darshan of the great President Maharaj. I submitted to him the letter. He went through it and understood all the details. And he ordered me to stay there itself. The noble President Maharaj was the very embodiment of compassion.

209. I sent a letter to Swamiji at Bangalore. Swamiji's reply was as follows: "You did well to go to Belur Math direct. The great President Maharaj is a compassionate person. As you have already received Mantra deeksha from President Maharaj, no special letter from me is necessary."

210. The Durga Puja Festival approached. This is a Dharmic festival which is celebrated on a grand scale not only in Kerala and Mysore, but all over India in various forms and in different

names. But nowhere other than in Bengal is this festival conducted with so much of devotion, pomp, splendour and expenditure. In Bengal it is a festival in each and every household. Just like the people of Kerala who must even borrow money to celebrate the Onam Festival, elaborately and artistically, so also in Bengal, loans are freely taken and given to make the Puja a grand success and a feast for the eyes. This is a devotion (bhakti) - oriented festival. There is a group of people here who are experts in moulding exquisite idols of the Goddess from clay. About 15 days before the commencement of the festival season, they would start making the idols. By Sukla Panchami they would complete the work and get the idols ready for Puja. The idols are installed at the places selected for Puja under the Agama Rites. All the Pujas prescribed in the Tantric system are scrupulously performed. On seeing such an idol tastefully and devotionally decorated with new clothes, sandal paste, kumkum (saffron), garlands of flowers etc., one would immediately think that the Goddess Herself has descended to the Earth. The Durgashtami day is considered important. The Pujas and feasts on that day are on a very grand scale. An air of festivity pervades the whole region. The people are elated with sheer joy. The President Mahapurusha Maharaj told me several times: “Look, Durga Puja. Nowhere else other than in Bengal is the puja celebrated on so grand a scale. You are lucky to have come here at this time”. On Dasami day the pujas are concluded and the idols are taken ceremoniously and immersed in the Ganga. After that, people embrace one another with affection and joy and go their way. They then go and have a good feast and rest. Suffice it to say

that the people experience the presence of the Goddess Herself.

211. I too spent my days in sheer joy. I used to have darshan of the great President Maharaj twice daily. If possible, and without inconveniencing others, I used to sit down in his room itself and meditate for some time every day. Maharaj was also an adept in cutting jokes. One day, in the presence of the others, he says: “Kambalavantam seetho na baadhate”. It was a little cold then. The question and answer are both contained in the statement itself:

Question : Kam balavantam seetho na baadhate? (which strong person is not affected by the cold?)

Answer : Kambalavantam (i.e. the one with a blanket) seetho na baadhate. (The one who has a blanket is not affected by the cold).

(As will be realised, the humour lies in splitting the word “Kambalavantam” - Tr.). The Maharaj was also an embodiment of compassion. Once I developed fever. He used to make special enquiries about my condition and ensured that I was treated properly and cured.

212. The Maharaj was staying on the first floor. One day I was sitting on a bench on the ground floor verandah. Maharaj happened to come there all of a sudden. I prostrated before him. He asked me what I wanted. My immediate reply was that I wanted a Kashaya vastra (Saffron robe). Maharaj quickly asked: “Do you wish to have this Kashaya vastra of mine?,” I replied;

“This humble soul is awaiting Sanyasa”. One can be free with the Maharaj as though to one’s parents or, I should say, even to a greater degree.

213. That day would have been a Trayodasi (13th day of the fortnight). Taking me with him, Maharaj consults a Panchanga (Almanac) for an auspicious day and tells me: “You get ready. You will get Sanyasa on the Full Moon day (*)”.

214. Is not the Maharaj a limitless ocean of compassion? He instructed Akhanda Maharaj and others to get ready the things needed for the Sanyasa (initiation ceremony). I gave them the money required for the Kashaya clothes. On the day preceding the date set for conferment of Sanyasa, I had the necessary hair-cut and shave and also performed sraaddha. I did not even touch water that day. By 3 a.m. the next morning, I finished my bath in the Ganga river and sat on the verandah doing japa and meditation. Maharaj, after purifying his body, sat in the place fixed for the Viraja Homa. I went there, reverentially prostrated before the Maharaj and sat down on the seat allotted for me. The officiating priest was Swami Omkarananda. The homa was performed. The Sanyasa mantra was imparted to me. I removed all my clothes and abandoned my yajnopaveetha (sacred thread).

(*) The day on which our Guru Maharaj was given Sanyasa Deeksha by the Mahapurusha Maharaj (Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the then president of the Shri Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math) was Purnima day, the Full Moon day in the month of Kritika - in October 1923 - Tr.

Maharaj himself cut off my tuft with a pair of scissors. He gave me new clothes as also the cloth for Bhiksha, Maharaj gave me a “danda” and called me *Purushottamananda*. I prostrated before Maharaj as well as before all the others there, went to the Ganga river and took my bath. I abandoned my danda in the Ganga river. I wore the new clothes. I had become a Sanyasi. I prostrate before the Maharaj again and go to my place of stay in the Premananda Hall. On the way, my dear friend, Shri Gopalanandji Maharaj comes along with some fruits which he slices and gives me. Maharaj called Brahmachari Chinnu and through him sends me piping hot coffee. That day I accepted a fistful of Bhiksha from the Sanyasis in the Ashram and consumed it. I stayed there like this for 2-3 days.

215. In Belur Math, a scholar used to teach the Sastras to the Sanyasis and the Brahmacharis. According to the degree to which the recipient deserved (i.e. according to his “adhikara”), he used to teach the upanishads and the Brahmasutras also daily. I too used to receive from him direct instruction on the Brahma Sutras with Sankara Bhashya. I had grasped, to a certain extent, the Sutras upto “Tat tu Samanvayaat”. Now I have attained Sanyasa too. I wrote to Swamiji immediately. I used to go frequently to Dakshineswar which was the place of penance of Shri Ramakrishna. Now I developed a desire to go to North India to see Haridwar and other places. I submitted this intention to the great President Maharaj who readily granted permission. Seeing my emaciated condition, he ordered; “You must go to Haridwar, and from there, proceed immediately to

Madras.” I decided to start the very next day. The then Mahant in the Advaita Ashrama in Kashi (Varanasi) was Chandra Maharaj. Giving me a letter to the Mahant, President Maharaj bade me an affectionate farewell. *En route* I alighted at Gaya, had bath etc. in the Ganga river and stayed there overnight. The next day I reached Kashi station. From there I reached the Ashram around 9 a.m. in the morning.

216. Chandra Maharaj was afflicted with crippling paralysis. It was extremely difficult for him even to move slightly from one position to another. He had to sit in a chair always. It was from that position that he used to direct the activities of the Ashram with unusual strength, efficiency and despatch. Every single activity was conducted with perfect precision like clock-work. His was a majestic personality and he was a profound devotee of President Maharaj.

217. I submitted President Maharaj’s letter to Chandra Maharaj. He said: “Well, you stay here for a few days”; and fixed the place for my stay. And, with my bundles and packages, I started staying there. At that time, 8-10 Swamijis were staying regularly in Advaita Ashram; although all of them took to me, yet Jagadananda Swamiji had a special regard and affection for me. He was a great scholar. He used to teach vedanta to keen Sanyasis. On some occasions, I too used to listen.

218. I finished my bath and food and rested. That evening itself, one Swamiji took me for darshan of Lord Viswanatha.

*“Gangaa taranga ramaneeyajataa kalaapam
Gauree nirantara vibhooshitavaamabhaagam
Naaraayanapriyamanangamadaapahaaram
Vaaraanaseepurapatim Bhaja Viswanaatham.”*

Even now this verse springs into my memory. That temple is crowded at the time of Deepaaraadhana (Aarati), 8 or 10 devoted Pandits, with their faces smeared with sacred ashes after bath, perform Abhisheka of the Lord. The deepaaraadhana (Aarati) to the chanting of Mantras, is something special to Kashi. The jostling and pushing of the large crowd which turns up at the time of Deepaaraadhana, is ever so intense and severe. I too witness such a deepaaradhana and felt gratified. Then followed darshan of Annapurna.

*“Annapoorne Sadaapoorne Sankarapraanavallabhe
Jnaanavairaagyasiddhyartham bhikshaam dehi
Maheswari”.*

After the darshan, circum-ambulation. Thereafter I too sat down quietly in a corner and did japa and meditation. I returned to the Ashram, had food and rested.

219. In those days every day I would go to the Ganga river to take my bath and have darshan of Lord Viswanatha. A dip in the Ganga always turns one away from bad company, blossoms the mind and creates a supreme awareness in the mind:

*“Namostu te bhagavati Gange dussanganaasini
Tanotubhaktim vimalaam nisreyasasukhaavahaam”.*

There are several ghats there - Dasaasvamedha Ghat; Manikarnika Ghat; Harishchandra Ghat, etc. The Ganga river offers a special sight in the evening - waves continually lap the banks; boats ply constantly carrying passengers hither and thither. Everyone chants and sings in an exuberant mood. At one place Harikatha is being done; at another a bhajan is in progress; and at a third place, chanting of Bhagavata is being done. Adjoining the water, planks have been erected on which devotees, men and women, sit down and do meditation without being in the least distracted by all the rumpus going on around them. I too go and sit down somewhere there and derive bliss by chanting several times the newly acquired Sanyasa mantras. On several days it was to be well beyond 9 p.m. when I returned to the Ashram. Undoubtedly Kashi is not only a holy place for liberation, but also one for devotion.

220. Now it is time for Kaali Puja. As is well-known, this Puja is also of special interest to Bengalis. It is celebrated with particular gusto in the Ashram. Several kinds of delicacies are offered to Goddess Kaali. The entire night is spent in Pujas, bhajans and music. I too participated in all these with dedication. By 4 a.m. at dawn, the pujas come to an end. It is only then that food is consumed. At that untimely hour, I too participated liberally of all that cold food. At 10 a.m. I went to the Ganga for bath. On Dipavali day, one gets, a special darshan of Goddess Annapoorna. People throng for the darshan of the Mother who is tastefully bedecked with gold and gem-studded ornaments. I too had an excellent darshan and returned to the Ashram. A sort of shooting pain started in my stomach. I was also feeling chill

(it was dysentery). Somehow I managed to reach the Ashram. Seeing my sick condition, they sent me to the Seva Ashram for treatment. One could say that a Seva Ashram of this type does not exist anywhere else in India. Although there are several Seva Ashrams such as the one at Kankhal in Haridwar and at other places, run by the Shri Ramakrishna Sangh, yet the extent and speciality of this Seva Ashram at Kashi are something unique. Patients are looked after here with maternal love and care. I too was bed-ridden there as a patient. A Swamiji used to come frequently from Advaita Ashram to ascertain my condition. Despite all this, my illness was only getting worse day by day. It was the month of Vrischikam (November - December). My birth star was approaching. I am ready even to abandon the body. On the bed beside me lies a patient who has knowledge of Sanskrit. After mutual discussion, I kept on awaiting the moment of departure from this world. At that time, the Swamiji brought a famous physician and got me examined by him. He injected some medicines, and there was some abatement of the disease. Gradually I began getting well. Although the Swamiji had been telling me that I should leave the Seva Ashram only after I had fully recovered, it so happened that one day, all of a sudden, I was discharged. On discharge, I returned to the Advaita Ashram. I would take food sometimes in the Ashram and sometimes I would go for Madhurika Bhiksha. The fever and dysentery started troubling me again. Again Seva Ashram became my refuge. I was permitted to stay there until I was fully recovered.

221. The Kumbha Mela was approaching at Prayag then. At Prayag, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain, the Poornakumbh is

celebrated once in 12 years and the Ardh Kumbh once every six years. When the Mela was first organised, it should have been a real “get-together” of great souls. *“Tat chintanam, Tat Smaranam, anyonyam cha tat prabodhanam, tat ekaparatvam cha Brahmaabhyaasam vidur janaah”*. It was to enjoy such bliss that Sadhus used to participate in the Mela. Is not the meaning of the word “Mela” itself “to meet together, to get together?” But now the festival has degenerated to a very low level. Nevertheless, keen, and curious (inquisitive) persons can still hear and learn a lot from these Melas. It is customary for several heads of Maths, Mandaleswaras and others to come ceremonially with their disciples and stay on for a month or two at the Mela site. The Head of a Math, called Bhaagavataananda, invited the Swamijis in the Advaita Ashram at Kashi. Along with them I too reached Prayag. This was a new experience for me. In Kerala what is done is to worship and honour Brahmins and feast them. On the other hand, here it is puja of Sadhus (Sanyasins) and feeding of Sadhus that is considered important. Every day a grand feast is given. It is also convenient to sit quietly in a small room and chant the Lord’s names. Practically at all the Melas in Prayag there are incidents of (catching of) fire. One day a fire started near the headquarters of Swami Bhaagavataananda. The Sadhus joined together and put out the fire. The damage was not much. The mela came to a close. Most of the Sadhus departed. Somebody took me along to stay in the Ashram of Govindagiri Swamiji in Jushi. That is a famous place. Sadhus also stay there permanently. There is a Sanskrit Pathasala belonging to the Ashram. Food is given free to students. I stayed there comfortably. And Maha Sivaratri too came and passed.

222. It was getting hotter and hotter. So I decided to go to Haridwar. I had a desire to visit the birth place of Sri Rama, Ayodhya, also. I had some money with me. I went by train and reached Ayodhya. There I stayed comfortably for 4-5 days. I visited the birth place of Sri Rama and had bath in the Sarayu river and stayed nearby. From there I went to Haridwar. The Shri Ramakrishna Ashram is in Kankhal. I reached the Ashram one evening. Initially the Swamijis objected to my stay there, but when I introduced myself fully, they agreed that I may stay as long as I wanted to. The Mahant in charge of the Ashram there was Sri Kalyananandji Swamiji. Shri Nischalanandji Maharaj was his assistant. It was Swami Vivekananda who had inaugurated this Ashram. This place had also been honoured by the touch of President Maharaj's lotus feet. Attached to the Ashram is a hospital for taking care of patients. This hospital ranks next only to the Seva Ashram in Kashi. After staying there for 6-7 days, I proceeded to Rishikesh by a tonga (a horse-drawn vehicle - Tr). A Brahmachari accompanied me to Rishikesh.

223. Haridwar is also known as Gangadwar - an outlet to attain Hari or Hara: and "Dwar" can also be taken as meaning "door". Several sages have performed severe penance here and attained god-head. In the olden days this was quite a deserted place. *Har-ki-paudi - there is a large platform here. The entire floor is paved with marble stones. The Brahmakund

* Haridwar is also called Haradwar - the "paudi" possibly meaning the steps to the place where Hari or Hara stays - that may be the meaning of the words "Har-ki-paudi" .

is also here. It was here that, according to the Bhagvata, the Vidura- Maitreya dialogue took place. It was here that Brahma along with the gods, welcomed Ganga. That was how the place received the name Brahmakund. It seems Kankhal was the capital of Daksha Prajapati. Daksha Ghat is the place where Daksha performed his great Yagna. There is a Siva temple here. Sitakund is the place where Sita abandoned her body. Even today Sapt Sarovar is a place fit for tapasya (austerities). Was it not here that Duryodhana's father, Dhritarashtra, gave up his body? His wife Gandhari ascended the funeral pyre along with her husband. There are temples of Chandi Devi and Manasa Devi on the hill-tops facing the Brahma-kund and the Ganga. There are Ashrams and headquarters of Sadhus, as also dharmashalas. The Kumbha Mela takes place once in 12 years. This great festival is conducted when the sun enters the Kumbh rasi (Aquarius) and Jupiter enters Mesha rasi (Aries). Sadhus and house-holders come for the Mela in lakhs. On the occasion of the final dip in the Ganga, about 50 lakh people congregate. The greatness of Haridwar defies all description. It is indeed the door of Hari and Hara.

224. Along with the Brahmachari I reached Rishikesh. A large number of Sadhus stay here. Some stay in Dharmashalas; others stay in leaf-huts (parna-saalas) built by them. There are two large temples belonging to Kali Kambliwala and the Punjabi Sindhis. The Sadhus are given cooked rice around 10-11 a.m. I got a place to stay and I stayed there. I used to go to the dharmashala, get bhiksha and live like that. There are also some evening dharmashalas. One can get chapaties and dal from there. The place I first got for stay was a dilapidated one. After some days

one gentleman took me to the Calcutta dharmashala and fixed up my stay there. From there I moved to the Brahmananda Ashram. This Ashram is run under the control and supervision of Kailasa Ashram. Its chief was Swami Prema Puri. He was a great scholar and totally detached. He had a special affection for me. I must have stayed there for a month or two. That would have been in April 1924 A.D.

225. The Triveni Ghat is both sacred and a place of pilgrimage. Maayakund, Vasudhaara, Seshadhaara, Lakshman Jhoola, Bharat Mandir, etc., are also sacred places. It is said that if someone were to sit down for meditation on the river bank in Mayakund, he would not feel like getting up. Now one can see large numbers of men and women everywhere. Much of Rishikesh's greatness has been lost; yet really dedicated persons can even now experience its greatness. Rishikam= Indriya; Risheekaanam eesah= Lord of the Indriyas (sense organs). I am inclined to think that Rishikesh must have got its name because one who meditates there will ere long become master of his senses. Rishikesh is also known as Kubjaamlapuri, it is said. This name is said to have been derived from a crooked (bent) amla tree.

226. I hear Uttar Kashi is a very good place for tapasya. I got an intense desire that, if so, I should go there. I had the necessary clothes and money. I reached Dehradun from Rishikesh by train. I stayed there for 2-3 days. Then I deliberated on what I should do now. I should first reach Mussoorie. Those 13 miles (21 km) constitute a very steep ascent. How is it possible for me to climb all these hills, that too, carrying all my belongings? One

morning, after bath, I sat down and started chanting the Lord's name with this single thought uppermost in my mind. My mind became clear. I decided to start for Mussoorie at once. And I began climbing the hill, toting all my possessions. When I recall that daring, foolhardy act of mine, I burst out laughing. "*Panghum Langhayate Girim*" - this was actually experienced by me [A lame person conquers the hill - Tr]. Suffice it to say that by 4 p.m. I had reached Mussoorie. I secured a place in the Sanatana Dharmashala. I took some food and slept soundly.

227. The next day I briefly went round Mussorie. The administrators those days were westerners. Mussoorie was a resort they liked most. Every nook and corner, road and street, had been kept scrupulously clean. Not a speck on the roads, not even a stray piece of paper. About 2 miles (3 km) from where I stayed, there was a small waterfall which provided good, clean water for drinking and bathing. Sometimes I used to go there and enjoy my bath. I happened to meet a Parsi gentleman who was Headmaster in a school in Bombay. He had developed a certain degree of detachment. He is ready to start on the journey to Uttar Kashi. He has also brought along a servant. He has a good opinion about me. The next morning all of us started for Uttar Kashi after prayers to the Lord. At about 4 p.m. in the evening of the fourth day, we reached Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala and rested.

228. Although there were several obstacles in the way, all of them vanished in the firm resolve to reach Uttar Kashi. I must also specially mention that I had the unstinting help of this eminent Parsi brother. The Lord is the Refuge for all.

CHAPTER - 10

229. After food, all of us spent the night in the Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala itself. In the morning, after bath and food, I began to go round and see the principal sights of Uttar Kashi. First I had darshan of Lord Viswanath and then of Sakti. Proceeding on and on like that, I had darshan of Laksheswara Mahadev also. This is a very ancient temple, situated on the bank of the Bhagirathi river. There is also a Dharmashala here where 8-10 Sadhus can stay in comfort. The place is very enchanting and there is no disturbance from people. The moment I saw this place, my mind took to it. The Mahant there was an "Udaaseena" Sanyasi, Charandas. There were 4-5 detached Sanyasis also there. The Mahant permitted me to stay there. I returned to Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala, had food and rested. The next evening I went to Laksheswara and began to stay there.

230. Daily I must go to the Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala (Satram) for bhiksha - rice, chapatis and dal - and return to Laksheswara - a distance of 1½ miles (2½ km) each way. I then go to the Ganga river bank and eat the bhiksha. There is no dearth of bhiksha and I would keep something for the evening too. Sometimes I would take bhiksha in the evening from the nearby Kailasa Ashram. Days went by like this comfortably. I benefitted quite a good deal from the company of scholarly Swamiji's like Brahma Prakashji. Further Shri Deva Giri Swamiji

was staying in an Ashram near the Kailasa Ashram. He was extremely compassionate and erudite. He knew by heart the entire Sankara Bhashyam of the Bhagavad Gita, word for word. I had not yet acquired even a working knowledge of Hindi. So it was only with Shri Deva Giri Swami who was a scholar in Sanskrit that I could converse freely. I would meet him frequently and spend some time in spiritual conversation with him.

231. As you know, people hardly wear footwear in Kerala. The stones here (in Uttar Kashi) are sharp and pointed and it is impossible to walk here without footwear. I had also put on footwear for walking all that distance from Mussoorie. I used to wear foot-wear even while going for bhiksha. It became not merely difficult but totally impossible to walk without footwear as the soles of the feet would get cracked and blistered otherwise. Once when I was returning to Laksheswara from bhiksha, I happened to see a youth from Kerala on the way. The moment he saw me, he came to me and saluted me. He accompanied me to the bank of the Ganga in Laksheswara and shared the bhiksha with me. The bhiksha that I used to get was more than adequate for one person. This youth was very keen to stay with me and I was convinced that it was the Lord who had sent him to help me; he was of great help to me. So I kept him with me. He himself used to go and get the bhiksha for me. He was young and strongly built.

232. I think it was in May 1924 that I reached Uttar Kashi. As mentioned, Laksheswara is on the bank of the Ganga. Once you reach that place, you can stay there without being bothered

by the heat. Within a few days my legs became alright. So I myself started going for bhiksha. There is no doubt that, if one can live without depending on others, both the body and the mind will become stronger. The rainy season set in. The Parsi gentleman who had come with me was staying in a small hut near the Kailasa Ashram. Near Laksheswara, there was a small cave at a slight elevation. On some days I go and sit in it. Ashtami Rohini (Janma Ashtami) also passes off. I had a fresh bout of fever. Carrying my possessions, I moved to the place where my Parsi brother was staying and began to stay with him. It began to rain heavily. The Parsi gentleman starts on a pilgrimage to Badri Narayana and other places and I am left all alone in that small hut. The fever developed into bleeding dysentery.

233. God's disportations are strange indeed! I lay on the sick-bed like this for 20 days. The hut is situated by the road side. So, on their way to the dharmashala for bhiksha and back, Sadhus used to enquire about my condition. Shri Deva Giri Swamiji also was living close by. He knew some medicines. He gave me some medicines. He would also prepare rice-gruel (Kanji) himself and come and see me once or twice a day and give it to me. There were lots of bed bugs in the hut. Several times I thought of drowning myself in the Ganga, but I could not walk all that distance to the river which was somewhat far away. My friend, Mr. Kewal Ram, the Head Master, sent some medicines from the hospital. I took them and drank some milk. Gradually the fever subsided and I became well, but I had become very thin and weak.

234. That year the rains were very heavy. There was loss of life and property because of floods. I heard later that a Sadhu who had, been doing Bhajanam worship in the cave in which I had been staying, also perished in the floods. In Rishikesh there was a place called Jhaadi - a fit place for tapasya - between the two branches of the river Ganga. It was a very fine place for doing penance. When I was in Rishikesh, I had been to that enchanting place and had desired to live there. But that was not God's will, because, had I been living there, I too would have perished, along with hundreds of Sadhus, in the floods.

235. Slowly I began walking a little. The then Mahant of Kailasa Ashram was a scholarly, detached Bengali gentleman. He extended his compassion to me and also made arrangements for me to take food there itself twice daily. He used to do Bhagavata Parayanam. And I too used to listen sometimes. And I used to get very delicious food.

236. November came. It started getting cold here even in November. Because of his great compassion and affection for me, my friend Sri Deva Giri Swamiji used to press me insistently: "You must not stay here in this cold. You must get back quickly to Madras. This is a place where it rains dew and cold". I listen to all this quietly, but I have no desire or intention of leaving Uttar Kashi. Even if I were to die, let me die here. Seeing my firm resolve, the Swamiji himself permitted me to stay here. A little higher up from Deva Giri Swamiji's Ashram, in a place called Ujjheli, there was a vacant building. It belonged to a vaisya, Charan Das, who was the Swamiji's devotee. The building was in Swamiji's possession. It had all the necessary

conveniences. There were lots of books on the vedas and on religious subjects. In the cold season, Swamiji used to provide food there to several Sadhus. I had not known these details earlier. Anyway, Swamiji made me stay there. He also gave me complete freedom in regard to that building.

237. Time went by very comfortably and happily, I read several books. It was here that I was fortunate to read Tulsi Ramayan for the first time. I could follow it to some extent although it was in Hindi, as I had some knowledge of Sanskrit. The Prasthaana Trayam of our Scriptures consists of the Gita, the Upanishads and the Brahma sutram. I began to understand something of the principles and the truths contained in them. Now I began to develop greater attachment to and interest in the path of Vedanta. And I presented to someone the Bhagvata text that had been with me. There were excellent facilities here for satsang. I used to meet frequently and have darshan of such great souls as Shri Deva Giri Swamiji, Kevala Ashram Swamiji, Siddhashrama Swamiji, Brahma Prakashji, Bhikshu Swamiji, Sankarananda Bharati, Sankarananda Swamiji and others. In addition, a young Sanyasi of the Ramkrishna Mission, Dheerananda Maharaj, was also staying here. He was a degree-holder and renounced. I had become acquainted with him even at Belur Math. Even here we used to meet occasionally.

238. It began to get colder. As I had the necessary facilities to withstand the cold, I did not have to face the difficulties of a cold winter. It snowed continuously for three days. This was the first time I was witnessing snowfalls. A white glare everywhere. The branches of trees crash down. Plantain and other trees

perish. It is difficult to walk on the roads without protection for the feet. A biting cold wind is blowing. It is extremely difficult to venture outside in the open for any work. When one enters the room, closes the door and sits down in meditation, all these troubles and problems vanish in the sheer bliss that results. The mind seems extremely happy. When I think of how I decided to stay on here without leaving, I am all praise for the Lord. The winter passes off like this.

239. Gangotri is over 58 miles (93 km) from here. My desire to visit that place intensifies. Everyone prevents me from going on the ground that the roads and tracks have all been blocked because of heavy rains and landslides. The way was impossible to be negotiated even by very strong persons. That being the case, their fear was that I would not be able to make it. Somewhere on the way I would fall down and perish. But is not my strength entirely that of the Lord? One fine morning, after getting the blessings of Deva Giri Swamiji, I set out with Gangotri as my goal. I had the necessary clothes, waterpot and some money.

240. The way was extremely impassable. All that they had said proved to be right. If formerly, one could reach a spot after walking one mile, it is now difficult to reach that same place even after walking two miles. Despite all this, I decided not to retrace my steps but proceed forward. By evening I reached a Sadhu's, Ashram. After taking food, I rested for the night there itself. The next day, after what seemed to be interminable walking, I reached a place called Gangaani. There I went to the Ashram of Brahmachari Padmanabhan who was known to me. I spent a day or two there happily. He is now seated in the Yoga posture.

Milk and ghee are essential for yoga practice. I had some money with me. Keeping just two rupees for myself, I offered all the balance amount for his use. My intention was to travel without any money. The third day I continued my journey and reached a place called Battuwadi by evening. I spent the night there. Suffice it to say that, the next day, after a long spell of walking, I reached Dharaali. There are small huts here for Sadhus to stay. I too stayed in one of them. The village is nearby and the villagers are generous. They offer madhurika bhiksha to Sadhus with pleasure. There it is also possible to obtain Kali Kambliwala's atta (wheat flour). I had not so far attempted to make chapatis with wheat flour. Here I began to do so, but I could not make them well.

241. A Sanyasi by name Krishnaashramam was staying here, doing tapasya. It is well known that Sri Sankaracharya had fixed 10 Sanyasasrama names for Sanyasis, viz. Giri, Puri, Parvata, Aranya, Vana, Saraswati, Bharati, Tirtha, Sagara, Ashramam.*The Sanyasis belonging to these 10 categories of names are called Dasanaami Sanyasis. Out of these, the "Ashrama" title is specially for "Dandi" Sanyasis. It is accepted and recognised that the Dandi Sanyasis are superior to the others. He too was a Dandi Swami. Dandi Sanyasis who have given up their danda are called Tyaktadandis.*

* *Teerthaashramavanaaranyagiri parvatasaagaraah
Puri Bhaarati Saraswati chadasaite dasanaaminah.*

242. Krishnaashramam too is a Tyaktadandi. He has been doing tapasya here, also living naked, for quite a long time. When I saw him first, in 1925, he should have been over 50 years of age. At present he is staying in Gangotri itself. I had his darshan here in Dharaali. He observes total silence. All the villagers consider him to be God. Every householder will, after preparing food first take a portion and offer it to Krishnaashramam and then only the members of the household will take their food. I too happened to be there at the time he was taking food. With great affection he called and invited me and made me sit near him. And he gave me portions from all the items that had been offered to him as Bhiksha. After spending 2 or 3 days like this happily, I ventured to proceed to Gangotri. Gangotri is 15 miles (24 kilometres) from here. I reached Gangotri. Here too there is a food-station established by Kali Kambliwala. There are facilities there for stay also. On the bank of the river are one or two caves. I stayed in a cave also, for a day. The place of origin (real source) of the Ganga river is still further up from here - Gomukham. From Gangotri I returned to Dharaali and stayed at the same place where I had stayed on the forward journey.

243. A young man who was then staying in the Gandhi Ashram happened to come there. He is also on a pilgrimage to Kedar-Badari. When I was in Uttar Kashi he had come to Ujjheli and stayed there for 2-3 days. When he saw me in Dharaali he stayed there with me for a week or so. He was a good cook too. He taught me how to prepare chapatis. He is ready to visit the 4 dhams at Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath, and Badari.

For this purpose he had procured from Rishikesh coupons (chits or vouchers) entitling him to “Sadaavrtti” (materials for self-cooking) from the Kali Kambliwala chowtries/dharmashalas. At each of the principal food stations (satrams) on the route, on production of the chit, he would be given free rice, dal, flour, etc. for one or two occasions. He had with him a chit for two persons. “If you desire to visit Kedar - Badri etc, please accept these chits from me”, so saying, he offered the chits to me.

244. To tell the truth; I had no great desire to go anywhere. Even to such places as I went it was the Lord who pushed me along. I now started thinking. It was very difficult to get these chits even in Rishikesh. The fact that they became so readily available to me indicated the Lord’s intention. So I got ready for the pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri. Although my friend insisted that he would offer me money also if I needed it? I did not accept it.

245. Now it is also the season for pilgrimage to Kedar- Badri. Many who had returned to Dharaali from Gangotri were also getting ready to go to Budha-Kedar. Most of them were women. There were many among them with their backs bent with age. Thinking that, if these old women could go, I too could make it, I began to follow them. They had several articles of food with them for consumption on the way. But I have nothing with me. It is very interesting to see the sight of 5-6 of them proceeding with sticks in their hands for support. Leaving Dharaali, we reached Battuwadi and spent the night there. The next day we started at dawn itself. Budhakedar is 30 miles (48 Km) from

here. The first 4-5 miles are a steep ascent. When we reached the top of that hill, there was yet another, and then again another and so on. Climbing hills with them continuously, I felt fagged out. Now I have the chits with me. I reached a place where I could get sadaavrtti. There I got all the necessary ingredients. Evening came. After finishing bath, etc. I prepared chapatis and ate them and rested. The Lord is the refuge.

246. The next morning itself I resumed the journey. Walking, sitting down, lying down and resting, somehow by evening I reached Budha-Kedar. It is plain ground here. The deity installed here is Lord Siva. The river flows nearby. There is also a dharmashala. This is a place which affords all facilities to pilgrims and to passers-by to stay. The people here are somewhat educated. They are also relatively more clean. I stayed here only for one night. Starting the next afternoon at 3 p.m., by sun-set I reached another dharmashala where too sadaavrtti was available. By the time I reached there, I had become extremely weak and tired. My leg was aching severely and I could not walk one step further. Somehow I went and procured some flour and other things. With great difficulty I began to cook. When the food was half-cooked, I ate it and, praying to God, lay down and slept. I was considerably upset, thinking what I should do here. I got up in the morning and, walking slowly, reached Triyuganarayana. There is a temple here. There the fire never goes out in the Havan Kund. Pilgrims and passers-by buy firewood and offer it in the Havankund. It is said that the marriage of Siva and Parvati took place here. It is said that this Havan Kund is the one lit up at the time of that marriage. Besides, there are four pure-

water Kunds - Vishnu Kund, Brahma Kund, Rudra Kund and Saraswati Kund. By all standards, this is an enchanting place.

247. From there I left for Kedar. On the way I stopped at Gowri Kund. The water was difficult even to dip one's finger in it. Yet several people take their bath here. I proceeded further slowly and, reaching Rambaada, rested there. It seems that Kedarnath Puri is 3 miles (5 km) from here. One has to climb to reach there. The sight is captivating and pleases the mind. After crossing Mandakini river, if one reaches Kedar Puri, one feels happy indeed. From atop the mountain, the view all round is very picturesque and panoramic. It is very cold here and firewood is very difficult to come by. Pilgrims return immediately after darshan of Kedarnathji. I spent 3 whole days there. *“Namah Sivaaya saantaaya Kaaranatraya hetave”, “Rajatagiri nibham chaaruchandraavatamsam”, “Ratnaih Kalpojvalaangam”, “Parasumrgadharam Krittivaasam”, “Visvaadyam, visvavandyam Nikhilabhayaharam panchavaktram, trinetram”,* - chanting these names of the Lord and meditating on Him, I climbed down to Gowri Kund and rested there. The next day I reached Naali chatti; from there I reached Ookimath. This is also a famous place. During Winter the Kedarnath temple is closed. During that period, pujas for Kedar Nathiji are performed at Ookimath. A very fine temple there. It was here that Ushadevi acquired knowledge from Parvati. And she was blessed that she should get darshan in a dream of Aniruddha. I stayed there for a night. The next day I reached another chatti (market place). It began to rain heavily. Seeing a “Sreshthi” resting place, I tried to rest there. A chatti is a shop (or group of shops) where one can buy

things, with facilities for travellers to sit and lie down. But if one has no money, the owners of the chatti will not allow you even to go anywhere near them. I had spent all the money I had, with not a paisa in hand. The owner of the chatti will only permit those who buy things from him even to sit down there. Come what may, violating his instructions, I sat down in a corner.

248. It is 2 O'clock in the afternoon. I feel very hungry, what is to be done? A rich Seth (sreshthi) from Calcutta had come to the chatti along with his entourage. I solicited bhiksha from that Seth. He gave me a small measure of wheat flour. When I told him that it was raining very heavily and that I had no firewood, he gave me just one anna (6 paise). Taking that I came and sat down, thinking about what to do in the circumstances. I saw an old woman completely drenched in the rain and shivering in the cold, approaching the Seth and begging in a very feeble voice. The Seth talked to her in very harsh tones: "Only just now I gave bhiksha to the man. Now you too want it, is it?" On hearing this, the old woman became extremely distressed and started moving away. I was sitting watching and listening to all this. I hailed the old woman in low tones; "O mother! please come here." She came near me. I gave her the wheat flour and the one anna. She went away in great happiness and I too was relieved. All these Seths are after all willing to spend lakhs of rupees for wrong and undeserving purposes - for name and fame; but when it comes to a shivering, drenched, hungry old lady, they are unwilling to spend even one paisa. May God Himself bless such people.

*“Mrudulam kimuvastu he sakhe navaneetaadapi
sajjanasya hrd
Tadidam dravate svataapanaat parataapaat dravate
sataam manah”*

[Meaning: as given by Guru Maharaj himself: The question is - Is there anything softer than freshly made butter? The answer is yes. That is, noble men's heart. The reason? Butter melts only when the butter itself gets hot. But even when other people's hearts get hot (with distress and grief), the hearts of noble men melt. Noble men's heart melts and melts when they see others' misery. That is the gist.] I continued to sit there. Yes, the “chit” I got that night was for hunger and fasting! That Seth's servants did not fail to give some little bit of food. “Oh Lord, without adequate food, how am I to climb up and get down all these hills in the morrow?” With these thoughts I hugged the lap of the Goddess of sleep and slept well.

249. The next halt was Gopeshwar. I had a comfortable meal there. The next halt was at Chamotsanga. By the time I reached there after crossing the Alaknanda across a bridge, it was dark. This is an important place. There are offices, schools, dispensaries, hospitals and market places here. There are Kali Kambliwala's dharmashalas too. Sadaavrtti is also available. Although I collected wheat flour and other materials, I merely bundled them up and did not try to cook any food. I tried to sleep but could not because of bed-bugs everywhere. This is the one misery I cannot stand in travel. I went near the bridge and lay down on the road side. I got up very early in the morning

and resumed my journey. After I had walked about 6-7 miles, (10-11 km), I reached a “chatti”. I had just one pie (half a paisa) with me. I procured vessels from the owner of the chatti. Vessels are issued only to those who procure provisions or other things from the chatti. The owner must have given me the vessels thinking I would be buying provisions and things from him later. I procured “one pie” (half a paisa) worth of fire wood from him. Making a fire, I placed the dal on it. When I began to mix the wheat flour, the owner of the chatti came running there. He abused me, saying “where did you get this wheat flour? You cheated us, didn’t you?”. He insisted that I return the vessels at once. I simply stood there, not knowing what to do or to say. He did not have the heart to throw away the dal that was cooking on the fire. Unaccountably he showed some kindness suddenly, “All right, please return the vessels soon” so saying; he went away. I finished making the chapatis and dal and ate the food. Then I cleaned the vessels well and returned them to the shop.

250. The next halt was Garuda Ganga where I reached one evening. I went to the Dharmashala and deposited my things in a corner. Then I went to the Garuda Ganga river and took my bath. The water was crystal clear. All my travel fatigue vanished. The mind experienced great happiness. Travellers are in the habit of taking away with them small pebbles collected from the river-bed. It seems snakes and serpents will not come wherever these pebbles are kept. The legend is that it is here that the Lord manifested himself and appeared before Sri Garuda Swami. There is also a small temple of Garuda Swami here. I

worshipped there and returned to the Dharmashala. One can get sadaavritti here. I procured the articles, made chapatis, etc. and ate. There was some wheat flour and other things left over. Sadaavritti is issued only to chit-holders. But people without chits also travel in this area. The Dharmashala building is two-storeyed. I had occupied a portion on the ground floor. When I began to call out whether the wheat flour, etc. would be of use to any poor person, a gentleman suddenly approaches me. He was none other than that noble person who had tended me at Dharaali and had given me the chits. He was returning after completing his pilgrimage to Badri Narayana. The moment he heard my voice, he had recognised me, and he had rushed towards me, all eagerness to meet me. Just as he was, I too was very pleased to see him again. He expressed great concern at the fact that I had become very thin and weak. He also knew that I had no money with me. He said: “Did I not tell you even before that you should keep some money with you? Well, it does not matter, please accept the money now. Along with the money, I have a request too. I know Swamiji’s temperament well. The money is exclusively for Swamiji’s use. It should not be given to others”. I told him that, in that case, I did not want the money, and refused to accept it. But laughingly he thrust a five-rupee note into my hand. It is well-nigh impossible to estimate the value of that five-rupee note. I then went away to my corner in the ground floor, and he went away to his place. Thinking of the strange ways of the Lord, I fell into sleep.

251. Leaving at dawn the next day, I reached Paataal Ganga. After finishing my morning ablutions and bath, I bought sweet-

meats for 4-5 annas (25-30 paise), distributed the bulk of it to others, and ate a small portion myself. There are heavy landslides here every year. Sometimes a large number of travellers perish. After travelling this difficult terrain by the evening I reached Gulab chatti. This is a comfortable place where I took my food at night and rested. The next day I reached Kunwar chatti. From there, one evening I reached Joshi Math. During the six snow-bound winter months for which Badri Narayana is closed, pujas to Badri Narayana are performed here, in Joshi Math. As in Badri, the priest here too is a Namboodiri Brahmin from Kerala. I rested here for a day or two. The priests at Badri temple are known as ‘Rawals’. About 5-6 miles (8-10 km) away are Bhavishya Badri and Bhavishya Kedar. In due course, when the intensity of Kali Yuga begins to be felt seriously, the two mountains near Vishnu Prayag will collapse and become one solid mass of debris. When, at that time, it becomes impossible to proceed to Badri, people must content themselves with worship at Bhavishya Badri and Bhavishya Kedar. It is said that this is where Pandu received his curse. When a Sage and his wife were engaged in amorous sports, in the guise of animals, Pandu happened to wound and kill the male animal (the Sage). It is said that it was due to the curse of this Sage’s wife that Pandu became unable to enjoy his wife Kunti. From Joshi Math I reached Vishnu Prayag. To reach the Ganga, one has to climb down about 150 feet (about 45 metres). The place is beautiful. I then reach Pandukeshwar. There is a small temple here. It is said that the idol in that temple was brought by Arjuna from heaven. There is also a village here. From here I reach Hanuman Chatti which is said to be the last ‘chatti’. There are a Hanuman

temple, a Dharmashala, and shops here. I rested here. The next dawn I started for Badri Nath, One can reach Badri by walking for 5 miles (8 km). On the way, after crossing Kaanchana Ganga and climbing ascents, I became very tired. When one climbs a mountain, one can see the Badri temple a mile (1½ km) away. After resting a while at this point, I reached Badri Nath in great happiness. After proceeding to the front side of the temple and prostrating there, I went to the Dharmashala and deposited my things there. Quickly I finished my bath. Here, in Tapta Kund, the water is always warm. After all this tedious journey, when one takes bath in the Kund, all the weariness and fatigue disappears and the mind becomes relaxed and joyous. After changing clothes, I go inside the temple, worship the Lord and become fortified. The mind is soaked in bliss. Is this not the spot to which Krishna sent Uddhava? One recalls all the episodes in the Bhagavata. It is impossible to think, even in a dream that I who had been stricken with paralysis and was unable even to get up from my sick-bed, would ever reach Badrinath. I was rooted to that place for quite some time, enjoying the bliss of the Lord's darshan and remembering His boundless compassion. People from all parts of India flock to Badri for the Lord's darshan like the incessant flow of a river. So it is impossible for anyone to remain there for long. After darshan, I came out and circumambulated the temple. I worshipped the Lord again at the noon deepaaraadhana (aarati) time. The deepaaraadhana confers indescribable bliss.

252. I went to Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala, took food and rested. I started to visit the important places in Badri. It was my

desire to stay here itself for a long time. On the other side of the Alaknanda, there are 8 - 10 isolated, solitary huts. Suffice it to say that I tried to stay in one of them, but did not succeed.

253. Adi Sankara took out the idol of the Lord from Narad Kund and installed it in Badri temple. The temple is a very small one. There are other idols too inside. The Chief Priest shows to travellers the idols of Narada, Kubera and others. The Chief Priest here is called the “Rawal Saheb”. In conformity with Sri Adi Sankara’s injunction that only Namboodiri Brahmins from Kerala should perform pujas inside the temple, to this day, pujas are being done only by them. The Rawals have special rights, honours and privileges. They were also the Supreme authorities managing the temple. But, latterly, because of lack of proper and right conduct, the temple is under the control of the Government although pujas are even now being performed only by Malayala Brahmins.

254. There is a statue of Narada and also Narada Kund near the temple. Right in the middle of the Alaknanda river, there is also the statue of Narasimha. The spot where Garuda Bhagwan did tapasya is called Garudasila. There is also a small temple of Kedareshwar Mahadev here. Nearby is also situated a statue of Sri Sankara Acharya. There is also the Ramanujakothi, which is the sacred spot of Vaishnavites here. The Koormadhaara is also nearby. Several times I have taken bath there in the spring. The water here is also used for drinking. Gaya pinda has been prescribed for the salvation of the Pitrus (departed souls). For Pindadana to pitrus who do not attain salvation even with Gayapinda, there is a very sacred tirthasthana here called

Brahmakapaalam. It is customary for Pandas to make pilgrims and travellers do pindadana here. Vasudhaara is about 6 miles (9½ km) from here. The sight from here is most splendid indeed. Some Sadhus stay there till the Badrinarayana temple closes for winter. The Muchukunda cave is also nearby. A small temple of Mataji is situated about a mile (1½ km) from the Badri temple.

255. Travellers who manage to reach Badri after undergoing considerable hardships, forget everything else and immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the place. I need hardly mention that I experienced a special bliss. I was fortunate to stay here only for a week. Then I retraced my steps after procuring the Lord's "Prasaadam" and chanting the Hymn:

"Badri Natha Stotram"

Pavanamandasugandhaseethalahemamandirasobhitam

Sreenikata Gangaavahat Nirmala Sree Badrinatha Viswambharam (1)

Seshasamiranakaratanisidinadharatadhyaanamahesvaram

Sreevedabrahma karatayahastuti Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (2)

Saktigowri ganesasaaradamuniuchchaaranam

Yogadhyaana asaaraleela Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (3)

Indrachandra Kuberadinakaradhoopadeepaprakaasitam

Siddhamunijanakaratajayajaya Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (4)

YakshakinnaraKarataKautukajnaamyaprakaasitam

Sree Lakshmi Kamalaachamaradole Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (5)

Sree Badrinaathadeepancharanapaat paapavinaasanam

Sree SiddhaMunijanakaratajayajaya Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (6)

CHAPTER - 11

256. It was with very great reluctance that I thought of returning from this most sacred spot Badrinath. I returned, by the same route I had taken on the forward journey, with great hope in my mind that, if I am fortunate, I would some day come here again and stay for a few days. After passing through Pandukeshwar, Joshi Math and Peepul chatti, I again reached Chammoli chatti. After resting there for the night I reached Nanda Prayag. After continuing my walking from Nanda Prayag, I reached Karna Prayag. There is a beautiful temple here. I bathed in the Prayag. Atop the river bank there is a dharmashala with facilities for preparing food. I stayed there for a day or two. Then I started for Sri Nagar. Sri Nagar is a very beautiful place. One should say it is indeed the city of Sree (Sree means Mahalakshmi - prosperity). There are a number of market places. Crossing the Alaknanda river, I reached the other bank. This place is called Garhwal Sri Nagar. In former times, both these places were under the suzerainty of the Maharaja of Tehri. As the Britishers had helped the Maharaja in war, half of Garhwal including one half of Sri Nagar, passed on to the control of the British. After staying there for some days, I reached Kirti Nagar. On the bank of the Alaknanda, at an elevation, there are some cave-like places with facilities for Sadhus to stay. I stayed there.

257. I have already mentioned that it is very difficult for me to walk in this terrain. Somehow, with the Lord's compassion and blessings, I traversed all these regions and paths. Several

times I had faced situations in which I had felt I would simply fall down on the way. When the pain in my leg becomes unbearable, I would simply sit down on the wayside itself and meditate on the Lord, after which the pain disappears and I am able to resume my walking. It is all the Lord's disportation. And now my stomach is experiencing a lot of problems. I had stayed for 6-7 days at Badri Narayana. There is a custom there for travellers to do puja to Sadhus. One traveler got hold of me and fed me. I had to eat a lot of sweetmeats he had procured from the shops. From that day started the problem with my stomach. Ignoring this, by continuous walking when I had reached Kirti Nagar, the stomach problem became very acute. Whom can I approach? God alone is the refuge. When I was thinking on these lines, and experiencing difficulties, a middle-aged Brahmana came to me and began talking to me. He knew Sanskrit very well. I explained to him about my illness. He also knew some medicines. His house was about a mile away from here (1½ km). On his initiative, I accompanied him to his house and spent a few days there. He tried his best to cure my illness but his efforts did not bear fruit. There is a hospital in Sri Nagar. He himself helped me to cross the river and got me admitted to the hospital. I was in the hospital for 8 - 10 days when I got a little relief. One Sri Tara Dutt, a famous Advocate, somehow happened to hear about my case. He was deeply interested in serving Sadhus. He got me discharged from the hospital and took me to a solitary residential unit which belonged to him, situated on the river bank, and made arrangements for me to stay there. His house was in Paudi. Still, he used to come and stay in this house for rest and relaxation frequently. I must have

stayed there for 10- 15 days. Then he took me to his house. This house was named “Santi Niketan”. I stayed there for a month. Paudi is a hill resort. Even during summer it does not get very warm there. In the garden of that house there were many trees and plants laden with fruits. Oranges were available in plenty in the season. Like Shri Dutt, all the members of the house were also very affectionate towards me. But I did not like this type of living. One day I left without telling anybody and reached Deva Prayag.

258. Just like Haridwar, Deva Prayag is also a pilgrim centre. It is also the abode of Pandas. This is the place of confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Alaknanda. Travellers invariably take their bath at this “sangam” (confluence) and perform libations, sraddha, etc. for the departed souls. All the priests are Pandas. Travellers give them a fee according to their capacity. There is a temple of Sri Raghunatha (Lord Ram) at this place. Things can be purchased from the shops. Deva Prayag has a large Dharmashala of Kali Kambliwala. I procured a place in that Dharmashala. So long as I was in Paudi, I did not have any stomach trouble. I could get milk and fruits whenever needed, and I used to consume them comfortably. As soon as I left Paudi, my stomach trouble began to worsen. I used to move my bowels now and then and I had no appetite. I was in great difficulty. The Ganga flows quite near the Dharmashala. There is a flight of steps paved with granite, for getting down to the river; there would be about 30 steps. I was extremely disheartened because of my ailment. I even thought of jumping into the Ganga. One day, around 2 p.m., I began climbing down those steps and reached

the last step. When I was about to jump into the river, I heard a voice: “There is a good Bengali Doctor here. He has treated and cured several diseases with his injections. He is a good man who is not particularly greedy for money”. When I heard these words, I thought they were intended for me. Thinking that if I acted on them I might get some relief, I desisted from my foolhardy and rash act. I climbed up the steps back to the river bank and made enquiries about the doctor. Then I reached his place and explained to him my case in detail. He showed me a special affection and immediately gave me an injection. After 2 or 3 injections, I became perfectly all right. It was he who gave me milk and other items of food.

259. I now felt perfectly normal and healthy. What should I do now? I decided to go to Uttar Kashi and started for that place. And thus I reached Uttar Kashi again one evening. There I went to my friend and benefactor, Shri Deva Giri Swamiji and prostrated before him. He was very happy. Earlier I had been staying in the hut in Swamiji’s control. That place had suited me very well. The Swamiji says: “Several people have been asking for permission to stay in that hut. If you had not come today, it would have been given tomorrow to others. It is good you have come today”. So saying, he gave me the keys. Immediately after food at night, I went and occupied the hut and rested there. Listening to my travel experiences, every one felt sympathy for me.

*“Anyathaa saranam naasti tvameva saranam mama
Tasmaat kaarunyabhaavena raksha raksha Mahesvara”.*

CHAPTER - 12

260. I was staying there comfortably. Occasionally I used to go to the Visvanatha temple also for worship. One had to go to Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala for food. There are a large number of Vedanta texts here. Shri Deva Giri Swamiji was a Vedantin and also a devotee and I used to enjoy the pleasure of his company. Now a yativarya (great Sanyasi) from Belur Math has also come here for penance and made Uttar Kashi his abode. He was an M.A. degree-holder as also very proficient, devoted and affectionate. I had become acquainted with him while I was in Belur Math and that friendship increased a hundred-fold here. We would sit independently somewhere and discuss at length about the Supreme. He was staying at a place called Jnaansu. We used to meet occasionally. One evening while staying at Ujheli, I experienced a great desire to go to Jnaansu and meet him. Sufficient time was not available to go to Jnaansu and return to Ujheli. But I thought somebody was insistently telling me: "go quickly; go!". I reached Jnaansu which was about 2 miles (3 km) away. It was then the cold season. Dhiren Maharaj, that was his name, was sitting, squeezing himself into the corner of a verandah. The village elders had not given him a room to sleep in. He was a very reserved and humble person. Seeing his pitiable condition, I prevailed upon the authorities to get a room vacated and make it available to him for his permanent stay. He was very happy. Realising the import of the Lord's words, "Yogakshemam Vahaamyaham" literally; I felt gratified

and returned to Ujheli. In the same place Jnaansu, the Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was also celebrated. The whole night was spent in Kirtan and bhajans. No one was aware of the passing of time.

261. It became necessary for me to shift again from Ujheli to Laksheswar itself. Throughout the winter I used to walk the distance of 1½ miles (2½ km) from Laksheswar to Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala for bhiksha. It is difficult to forget the Lord who was giving me the strength to stand the rain and the cold. I was experiencing my second winter here. This year the snow fall was not as severe as in the previous one. One need not particularly mention that the cold season is the best for bhajans.

262. In Jnaansu there was an old Sanyasi by name Siddhaasramam. I happened to stay in his Ashram also for a few days. He used to like partaking of Madhurika bhiksha, but he did not have the strength to go from house to house and get Madhurika bhiksha. So I kept going from house to house, get Madhurika bhiksha for him and thus fulfill his desire. *“Dinamapi rajanee saayam praatah sisiravasantau punaraayaatah”*. In this manner winter passed and so too did spring and again winter started. My health is slowly deteriorating. I started taking one medicine after another. It is said that diseases rear their head in the absence of suitable food. Although there were friends here to look after me, I decided to leave Uttar Kashi so that I would not be a burden to them. I mentioned this to Dhiren Maharaj.

263. One day around 3 p.m., I bundled up my possessions and started to go down. God's disportation is strange indeed. I

spent that night in a Sadhu's Ashram on the wayside. Although he too gave me some medicines, they had no great effect. The next day, by walking slowly, I passed through Dharaasu and reached Dumda Prayag. I had to pass motion every now and then. What can I do? If one crosses the bridge at Dumda Prayag and goes to the other bank of the river, there are small huts there where one can stay. I got into one of them and sat down. There is no relief in the stomach pain. Motions continued frequently. It was such a pass that I could not even sit down for some time at one place and chant the Lord's names. What indeed is the use of a life like this? Death is any day preferable to this. Having decided thus, I again came near the bridge. The river flows with majesty and profoundness. In the middle, at places, boulders can be seen above the surface of the water. I left behind all my clothes on the bank and climbed atop a jutting rock. Then I jumped into the river. As I knew how to swim, as soon as I fell into the water I swam across to the other bank. "*Jeevitaasaa baleeyasee*". (The desire to survive and live is far too strong - Tr). Then, putting on my clothes, I went back to the hut and sat down.

264. I tried to destroy my body but it did not perish. I again decided that the misery arising was unbearable.

265. Thinking that the body should perish for want of food. I kept on sitting there. I never stirred out in search of food. That area was absolutely deserted. Because I had fallen into the Ganga, the body had become very cool. The urge to pass motion frequently became reduced in intensity. I spent the night there,

thinking intently about God. The next day, while I was sitting there with no intention of going out anywhere, a great person came there with Khir (sweetened rice and milk). A good joke indeed! Eagerly I drank all of the Khir. He was a great Sanyasi who was staying a bit far away. I do not know how he came to know about me. He told me insistently: “There is no point at all in your staying here. There are some villages at a little distance from here. If you go there, you may be able to get food of your liking and milk”. So saying, he pointed out to me the direction of the villages and left.

266. Delightedly I reached the village pointed out by him, after crossing a small stream. There was a small temple there. I occupied a portion of the verandah there. Around 10-11 a.m. every morning, I would go to the houses in the village for bhiksha. When I call at 3 or 4 houses, I get adequate food. Uttar Khand is indeed heaven. Sadhus can get food everywhere there. The moment people in a house hear the words “Narayana Harih”, somebody or the other will always come out invariably and offer some food or the other with devotion. I stayed here comfortably for a few days. The hill-dwellers in these parts were not in the habit of cooking rice fully. The rice they cook and eat would be more or less like the “Kozhukkattai” of the south. (balls of rice paste and coconut scrapings semi-boiled in water - Tr). I used to bring the rice with me, mix it with buttermilk, throw away the hard portions and consume the rest. Now my body began to grow thicker and fatter. I could understand that this was on account of accretion of fluids in my tissues (what is called in Ayurvedic parlance in Kerala as “disturbance of the

fluid equilibrium” - Tr). April-May and Vishu (the first day of the Malayalam month Mesha and the Tamil month Chithirai - Tr) were also passed here itself.

267. Deciding that it was not advisable to stay on here any longer, I again started. I came to the place near the bridge. Crossing the bridge, I took the path which leads to Tehri. With the passing of every moment, I was feeling the body to be more and more of a burden. The feeling that somehow or the other, I should destroy the body, was becoming stronger and stronger. *En route* I encountered a forest which I entered. Chopped firewood pieces were lying there. It was noon time. I made a pyre out of those wood pieces. I removed all my clothes and hung them up on the four sides of the pyre. I covered myself up with a dhoti (veshty). I had also a brass vessel with me. I sat down on one side of the pyre, facing myself towards the Ganga. I began to meditate on God intensely. Striking a match stick from a match-box I had with me, I set my clothes alight. The fire started flaring up on all the four sides. When the heat became unbearable, I leapt out of the pyre. The one or two rupees I had with me also got sacrificed in the fire. All that I had left with me now were the dhoti which I had wrapped around me and the brass vessel.

268. The clothes around the pyre were only just beginning to burn, but without caring for that, or without even looking at the pyre or at that place itself, I again reached the wayside. Sheer madness! I am coming across people known to me. They are surprised. I feel terribly hungry. When I reach a Sadhu's

place, he gladly gives me food. I resume walking again. By dusk I reach a village. I did not feel any particular need for food, but how and where was I to spend the night? Clothes are the very life-line of mountain dwellers. They are totally unwilling to lend even one bit of clothing to a Sadhu just for one night. Nevertheless, I was forced by circumstances to ask them for some clothes, but who is there to give me?

269. Noticing that, slightly away from the village, there was a somewhat better-looking class of house, I went there. That was a Christian house. The house and surroundings had been kept very clean. As soon as I reached the house, all the members of the household came out and surrounded me. They had a fair knowledge of the English language too. I explained to them my need. They gladly provided me with a blanket for use at night. I returned to the village and slept well. Considering that I had destroyed clothes costing about fifty rupees, I considered it to be a blessing that I could, although with some difficulty, procure the use of this blanket. The next morning I returned it to them. The next day I continued my journey. The need for frequent motions arose again. Somehow I reached Tehri and went straight to the hospital. The Chief Medical Officer there was Dr. Pandit Vachaspati M.B.B.S. As soon as I talked to him, he admitted me in the hospital as an in-patient. There was a high school there and some teachers from there used to come and see me in the hospital regularly. My illness began to abate. One day I met High Court Judge Babu Ganga Prasadji. Immediately he invited me to his house, took me there and made arrangements for me to stay there with him. My health began to improve with

the good food available there. I must have stayed in Tehri for a month or two. My time was spent in an early morning dip in the Ganga, Japa, Meditation, going out for bhiksha and other connected activities.

270. From Tehri I went to the farm-house of Seth Murli Dhar and stayed there for some days. From there I reached Mussoorie. My illness recurred. I proceeded to Dehradun, and from there by train to Haridwar. From there I went to the Sri Ramakrishna Seva Ashram. At that time the “Bada” Maharaj there was Shri Kalyanandji and the “Chhota” Maharaj Shri Nischalanandji. Both of these great persons had a special affection for me. Shri Nirmalananda Swamiji also happened to be there at that time. I got a separate room all to myself. It was only then that I realised what my disease was. It was piles. They also expressed the opinion that it could be easily cured by a surgical operation. For that one had to go to Kashi or some such place. I did not have a single paisa with me. How can I go there?

271. A Hindustani Sadhu happened to come to my room. After understanding the details of my illness, he told me; “I do not have any faith in medical treatment. All diseases can be cured by meditation and bhajan of the Lord. The best place for doing meditation and bhajan is Brindaban. You go there, stay there and do bhajan”; so saying, he gave me five rupees for expenses. I decided to go to Brindaban. When I reached there, I stayed for 2-3 days in the Ramakrishna Ashram. Piles is a trouble- some disease. It will not let you remain at the same place for some time; one has to go out frequently for passing stools. How indeed

can one perform bhajanam in these circumstances? So I began to think that I must get away to some other place. Without any definite plan in my mind, I reached the railway station. There were several persons getting ready for catching trains there. When I asked one of them he replied he was proceeding to Agra. I decided that I too would go there. I reached there one morning. I had gathered during the rail journey that there was a good hospital there. As soon as I got down from the train I made enquiries about the hospital and reached it. The doctors examined me and asked me whether I was willing to get surgery done. I indicated my ready willingness and they accepted me as an in-patient

272. In the hospital there are a large number of patients at all times. The doctors used to pay special attention to the patients. The hospital was administered by an eminent European lady. All patients had to wear a white uniform in that hospital. I was wearing the Kashaya Vastras of a Sanyasi. That noble and compassionate lady came to me and requested me to wear the white uniform. When I explained to her that to remove the Kashaya Vastra and wear the white uniform would be a violation of Sanyasa dharma, she very kindly permitted me to continue wearing my Sanyasi dress. So I continued to wear it. That noble lady also provided all necessary facilities for my stay in the hospital. It had started raining occasionally but the heat did not subside. I had been allotted a place in the verandah.

273. This is also a kind of tapasya. I spent the time remembering God. The date for the surgical operation was

fixed. On the day prior to the operation, after finishing shaving of the required parts of my body, they gave me an emetic, a medicine for causing bowel movement. I passed motion very satisfactorily. Ordinarily patients are given only milk on that day, but inadvertently, they brought me rice and curries. As I was feeling very hungry, I ate well with relish. The doctors came to know about this, but decided to go ahead with the operation nevertheless. Around 10 AM on the day of the operation, they made me lie down on a bench and carried me into the operation theatre. I felt as though I was being carried into the room of Yama, the god of death, and the persons standing at the door of the room appeared to be Yama's attendants. The doctor was a Bengali gentleman. Some medical students were also standing in the room. After removing all my clothes, they made me lie down on the operation table. They made me smell something. It must have been chloroform. They made me count 1,2,3 I remember having counted up to 4 or 5. After doing something to me they took me back to my old place and made me lie down there. It was only then that I recovered consciousness. Intolerable pain. The patients lying beside me had already become my friends and disciples. They began to fan me. I bore everything courageously.

274. By evening I developed an irresistible urge to pass motion. I evacuated comfortably. Along with the stools whatever the doctors had put by way of stitches also got expelled. This was the result of my taking food the previous day. The doctor came and did all sorts of things.

275. I had to stay in the hospital for 20 days. I could say that I was fairly all right. I was discharged from the hospital with the approval of the lady administrator.

276. Where will I go now? And what will I do? I have a great desire for food. But I have no money with me. Some people happened to tell me, “A well-known Mahatma (Sadhu) lives a little far away from here, by name Aalu Baba. He does not allow any one to stay with him. Anyhow, you go and meet him. He may perhaps agree to your staying there”. I stayed for 2-3 days at some places on the banks of the Yamuna river. It was a time of flood there. It was a good sight to see lots of people standing in rows in the river water, holding aloft flags and jumping and dancing. I reached Aalu Baba’s Ashram one evening. I met him and explained my situation. He permitted me to stay there as long as I wanted. That was a totally deserted place, situated on the river bank. They have also made a cave here. Daily from 5 p.m., spiritual subjects are discussed. Several gentlemen come and listen to this regularly with devotion. I too used to be present there at that time. The Baba used to teach Bhagavad Gita and Panchadasi also at that time.

277. “*Aayuh Satvabalaarogyasukhapreetivivardhanam*”. It is this type of saatvik food (noble and whole-some food) that the Baba takes. I too get the same food, “*Yuktaahaara vihaarasya yuktacheshtasya karmasu yukta svapnaavabodhasya yogo bhavati dukhahaa*” - his life also conformed to this dictum. I live happily here. My piles trouble has not left me completely. Some vaidyas too happened to come there. One of them prescribed a course

of treatment. With that treatment the problem was eradicated completely. After that I have never had that trouble till today.

278. In this manner I spent a few days there. Some of the gentlemen who used to come there to listen to the discourses used to show special respect towards me. One of them told me: “Should you need money for bus or rail fare for going somewhere, I shall give you”. Although I went to Brindaban, I was not fortunate enough to stay there for some days and enjoy the stay. I desired to go to Brindaban, which was the scene of the Lord’s disportations, again. That gentleman gave me some money.

279. The Taj Mahal is one of the principal attractions in Agra. One feels that a special peace reigns inside it. Is not love a divine trait? Not merely the beautiful building but every plant, spring, fountain, stone, flower there announces the glory of love. Nobody would be willing to leave this place soon. I also felt extremely contented.

280. With the permission and blessings of Aalu Baba, I again reached Brindaban from Agra. I stayed there at some place. I would go to the Ashram too occasionally. I visited all the principal places in Brindaban. I visited Gokulam too. I did not at all like to roam about like this. My greatest desire was to stay at one place and do meditation and bhajanam. Ultimately I went to Nandagram. I must have stayed there for a month or more. I stayed at a place called Yasoda Ghat. Shri Krishna’s idol was verily “*Saundaryottaratopi sundarataram*”. (More beautiful

than beauty itself - Tr). I used to go to the temple daily in the morning and in the evening and meditate. Most of the people here are devoted vairagis.

281. There are several sub-divisions or sects among Sadhus. Vaishnavites, Saivites, Sitaramas and others form part of vairagis. They do not wear saffron robes. Even among saffron-clad Sanyasis there are several sub-divisions. Chief among them are the “Dasanaami” followers of Sri Adi Sankara. Then there are several others like Udaasis, Kabirpanthis and so on. In this place, “Maaladhaaris” and white-clad Sadhus abound. Most of the time, Kirtans, japas and grand feasts will be taking place in the houses here. I too used to attend some of these.

282. The offerings of food to the Lord in the temple at noon time are prepared by a different house by rotation each day. After offering the food to the Lord, i.e. after doing the Naivedya, the members of the concerned household and their near and dear ones sit down in the place earmarked for it and consume the items as prasad. Sometimes I too would get a share of these. I generally used to take bath in tanks or ponds. I again became affected by malaria. I needed a change of place. Via Kanpur I reached Unnao. The Sessions Judge there, Shri Gangashankar, was a very noble person, known to me. After staying at his house for about a week and resting there, with the intention of reaching Uttar Kashi and staying there, I reached Dehradun by train. From there I reached the headquarters of a famous Mahant who was a follower of Guru Nanak. All those who came there used to receive “Annadanam” (poor feeding) without

any regard for caste, creed or faith. This establishment had, in the suburbs, a large flower garden, where small residential units were also available for Sadhus to stay. I decided to stay there for some days. Several persons told me that, because of very heavy snowfall that year, the road to Uttar Kashi had become blocked and impassable. I did not have enough clothes with me. I stayed in this garden for over a month. I also visited several places near Dehradun which were quite livable. At last I proceeded from there and reached Rishikesh. I stayed there for a few days. About 2 miles (3 km) from Rishikesh there is an establishment called Svargaashram. This place is very beautiful and affords a lot of solitude. And there are several huts there which are ideal for Sadhus to stay in and meditate. My gurubhais were also staying there. So I too shifted to that place from Rishikesh and started living in a hut. From the main “Annasatra” (food station), I used to get adequate food for one meal a day, around 10 o’clock in the morning.

283. For the evening, I get snacks from another Dharmashala. I got the use of a hut near the river bank for my stay. I continued to stay there, enjoying the bliss of the daily dip in the Ganga and darshan of the river. There is an extensive forest land here. It is also very convenient and pleasurable to go for a stroll and exercise oneself in the evening, enjoying the sight of the river and the forest. Here several noble Sadhus live in separate huts. Their company is also available to me freely. Shri Sivananda Swamiji who has now attained great fame, was there at that time. I was able to become acquainted with him and secure his friendship. He had been practising the medical profession in

Malaysia-Singapore. He returned from there in order to live the life of an ordinary Sadhu and started living in Svargaashram in a good hut facing the Ganga. There is no doubt whatsoever that he was very generous and compassionate by nature. A person who, from birth, is compassionate to others in misery, will evolve spiritually in life and attain the highest state. He was staying here with great determination and was doing tapas. Despite all this, he used to consider it extremely pleasant to treat sick persons and give them as much relief as possible. “Feel, feel for the sick and the poor, the downtrodden and the destitute”. This attitude of sympathy and compassion shone in him particularly. Neither jealousy nor arrogance could come anywhere near him. If not these great traits, what else has made him famous in this world? I too imbibed some good qualities from this great personality.

284. All in all, my stay in Svargaashram appealed to me and I enjoyed it. Occasionally Sadhus used to be given feasts here. One day when I reached the Satram for bhiksha, I was informed that it was a “feast” day and that bhiksha would be delayed. So, instead of returning to my hut, I visited a nearby lonely forest and sat down there and meditated. I enjoyed a special bliss then. “*Eesaavaasyam idam sarvam*”. Some idea of this great truth started sprouting in my mind then. When one develops a sense of identity with everything because of the firm conviction arising from the truth “*Sarvam Vishnu mayam*” and one sees identity even with trees and creepers, it became totally impossible for me even to pluck a single leaf from a tree. Just for a few moments I experienced this state of total identity. *It is only now that I begin to commence my spiritual journey in life.* I felt I am standing

for election to the Lord's Parliament. I mentioned about this to Swami Sivananda also in conversations.

285. Then I went and got the bhiksha, returned to my place and ate the food and rested. From that day I experienced a growing desire to remain inside a forest. The places in Svargaashram where the Gita Bhavan and other buildings are situated now, were all forest land then. Whenever I used to get the opportunity, I used to go to the forest and sit in it. One could see wild elephants also there. Sometimes 3 or 4 of them would come to the riverside to bathe, drink water and play.

For about 20 days I enjoyed the bliss of this stay on the bank of the Ganga and meditation inside the forest. For bhiksha I must go to the food station. That glorious walk in splendid isolation in that divinely peaceful forest is as fresh in my mind even now as it was when I was actually living there. If some people think that it is totally unnecessary to leave home and hearth for the forest in search of God, because God is everywhere, in the home as well as in the forest, what is there one can do about it?

286. While I was thus staying in the forest, one day a stranger came there and fell at my feet. That white-clad person was middle-aged and extremely weak and incapable. He was very insistent that he should also stay near me. I gave all my attention to nursing him -when the river of fate brings along a duty to be done, I am always attentive to it and try to perform it to the best of my ability. It is impossible to describe the boundless happiness and joy he experiences when I bring Ganga water and wash his head with it. The food from the food station used to

provide liberally for his needs too. He had five rupees with him which he handed over to me. With that money, I procured a blanket and gave it to him. For about a week I was constantly attending to him and nursing him. He had all sorts of diseases. Although I told him I would take him to the hospital, he did not accept my suggestion. I saw that my nursing had absolutely no effect. When I realised that he had not improved and that all my nursing was a sheer waste, what I did was to leave that place. What I learned when I came back later was that, after I had left, somebody had come and taken him to the hospital and got him admitted.

287. One day I went for a walk for some distance from my hut in Svargaashrarn. Hardly half a mile away, there is a school as well as a temple. The people here usually give roasted chana to Sadhus. After accepting some chana, I kept on walking along the river bank until I reached a place near a bridge where a Brahmachari, Pyarelal, was staying. He was staying here for some time like a Sadhu. There is an orchard of plantain trees there. I met the Brahmachari and talked to him. As I had the chana with me, there was no need for any other food. It was too late to return to Svargaashram. He showed me a hut, a little away, for my night's rest. I spent the night there comfortably. At 5 O'clock the next morning, he woke me up' and told me, "I am now going to Rishikesh. You also come with me. You can reach Swargaashram early". I did not have the heart to leave that place and go elsewhere - that place, Brahmapuri, was very enchanting. I told him "Swamiji, you kindly go. I have no desire to go". So saying, I continued to sit there, firmly rooted to that

place. He got angry and went away. I performed my morning ablutions, and sat there doing japa and meditation, without any other thought.

288. It is about 10 a.m. 3 or 4 persons arrive at my hut, armed with provisions for cooking food. They had come with the intention of preparing the food and eating, resting for a while, and then going away. They also had milk with them. When they saw me, they were very happy. First they gave me some milk to drink. Then they went and had their bath, came back and prepared food. They fed me first. It was only then that they took food. Then they rested and went away by about 4 p.m. They had not used up all the provisions they had brought. They told me, “Swamiji may, if he needs, make use of all these provisions”. So saying, they left behind all the unused rice, atta, dal, salt, ghee, chillies and other items and went away. I accepted all those things, overwhelmed by God’s infinite compassion. It was summer then. I went in the evening too to the Ganga river had a very pleasant bath, and came back to my place and sat there, immersed in contemplation of God. It started getting dark. Pyarelal came to me in a hurry. He was completely taken by surprise to see the rice and other provisions lying on the floor in front of me. I explained all that had happened and offered all the provisions to him. The Brahmachari was very happy and he also showed respect to me.

289. I stayed there for 3 full days. After that the Brahmachari himself showed me a place. It seems that it was in that place that the famous Shri Rama Tirtha did tapasya. Hence that place

was called Rama Guha. Rama Guha was something like a cave or a mandap made of a single large stone. It was about 20 feet high (6 metres) and deep and had a perimeter of about 25 feet ($7\frac{1}{2}$ metres) at the bottom. The bottom is somewhat hollow. The top is flat, like a sloping roof. This single stone remains in the fine sand, a little removed from the flow of the Ganga river. If one digs out and removes some of the large quantity of sand that has accumulated at the bottom, one can comfortably stay in it as though in a cave. Even in the height of summer, one does not unduly feel the heat inside it. In winter too, it does not get very cold inside it. I decided to stay there itself. I dug up some sand from inside it and threw it outside; then it became possible to sit and lie down inside it. However, one has to be very cautious when one gets up, in order to ensure that one does not knock one's head against the top of the stone.

290. The Brahmachari also told me that, if approached, the organisers of Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala would provide provisions for 15 days at a time to Sadhus. The very next day itself, when I went to Rishikesh and met the Mahant and Manager, Sri Muni Ram of the Dharmashala, he agreed. First I went to Svargaashram and brought all my clothes to Rama Guha. The rations are issued every fifteen days, on the New Moon and Full Moon days. The fortnightly rations - rice, wheat flour, ghee, sugar, etc. would weigh about 10 seers (more than 20 pounds). Brahmapuri is about 4-5 miles ($6\frac{1}{2}$ - 8 km) from Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala. It became a burden for me to bring the rations all the way to Rama Guha. What can I do? *Asaadhyamaayullathil aasa pettaal asahyamaayulloru*

dukhamuntaam”. (Translation of this Malayalam sloka: - “If desire develops in the impossible, then unbearable misery and hardship will befall” - Tr). Consoling myself that all this effort is for ultimate removal of all difficulties and misery, I did not consider all this as a great burden. I carried half the rations to a point midway between the dharmashala and the Rama Guha and kept it safely in a place. Then I walked back and brought the remaining half. In this manner, in 1 or 2 days I completed the transport of the entire rations to Rama Guha. Thereafter, without any other problem I spent my time in contemplation of God. Sometimes, guests used to come. I used to honour them also to the best of my ability.

291. Sri Ramakrishna’s birth anniversary is on the “dvitiya” (second day of the lunar fortnight) after Shivaratri. Here in Rama Guha, I celebrated the pooja excellently. Over and above the Mission Gurubhais, other noted and great personalities like Shri Sivananda Swamiji, Shri Tapovana Swamiji and Govinda Giri Swamiji also attended. They too felt very happy.

CHAPTER - 13

VASISHTA GUHA

292. During the rainy season, the whole of Rama Guha gets submerged in water. I must therefore leave the place when the rains start. From July to October, my stay will, as before, have to be in Svargaashram. So I came back to Svargaashram, When the rains were over, I again went back to Brahmapuri. This time a Brahmachari also came along to stay with me. This boy had somehow reached me in Svargaashram from Travancore. He was keen to learn Sanskrit also. I began to teach him a little. When I was leaving for Brahmapuri, he also came with me and stayed with me. He used to help in bringing the rations from Rishikesh. When I was staying in Brahmapuri like this, a forest department official happened to come and see me. He mentioned to me about Vasishta Guha. He happened to extol the virtues of Vasishta Guha by saying that it was one of the best places for tapasya and that one could stay there in peace at all times without having to go anywhere else. My mind became attracted to Vasishta Guha on mere hearing of its name. And I remained, awaiting an opportunity for going there.

293. It is now June. On June 19, 1928, at 10 a.m. in the morning, we packed all our possessions in a gunny bag and kept the sack covered in a pit which we dug in the sand. We had also consulted people and ascertained the route. What is the route? One has only to go right along the bank of the Ganga

river. The name of the lad who was with me was Madhavan. Madhavan did not lack courage. Since there was no experience of travelling along such a route, at times it became necessary to swim along the river. However, when, with difficulty, we reached Sivapuri, it was already dark. We lay down, tired, on the sand itself, on the river bank. At that time 3 or 4 Sadhus too happened to come there; they too were proceeding to Vasishta Guha. They had articles of food with them. They too lay down on the sand itself. They too had undergone difficulties as they were also not familiar with the route. Vasishta Guha is 4-5 miles ($6\frac{1}{2}$ - 8 km) from here. They decided to engage the services of a coolie familiar with the route. They set off at dawn and we too left with them. Around 10 a.m. we reached Vasishta Guha. My mind experienced great happiness. Jai Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram (That was June 20, 1928 - Tr.)

294. I have never seen a place like this. A tranquil, serene place. By the right side of the Guha, Mother Ganga flows gently along. There are no houses anywhere in the vicinity. At that time an individual was staying in the Main Guha. There is a small “Cavelet” to the left of the Main Guha. There a Brahmachari was staying. First we went to the main Guha and met its occupant. He was a rich house-holder; but indifference to Sadhus was what we saw in him. Next, both of us went and saw the Brahmachari who was staying in the cavelet. He invited us for food. The other Sadhus who had come along with us, had brought along with them provisions with which they started making food separately. We both had our bath, japa, etc.; and ate the food offered with devotion by the Brahmachari; and then rested. The others also rested after taking food.

295. The spot attracted me ever so much. I did not have the heart to leave this place, no. All my things were in Brahmapuri. With the firm determination that, come what may, I shall return here next year and stay here permanently, we got ready to start back for Brahmapuri. The Brahmachari restrained us from leaving. Lovingly he insisted, “Only after all of us have had food tomorrow, must you leave”. All of us accepted; and we spent the night on the sand bank itself.

296. The Brahmachari leaves immediately for the village for bhiksha. The nearest village is at least 3 miles (5 km) away. It is all a series of ascents and descents and the path is practically impassable. See how much devotion he has towards Sadhus; and compare it with the mentality of the rich house-holder occupying the main Guha. It is all God’s disport.

297. The next day the Brahmachari seats us all on the bank of the Ganga and feeds us. That was indeed a grand feast. After food, with the permission of the Brahmachari, all of us started on the return journey. A survey party of officers and staff was camping a little farther away. They had a river craft (row-boat) tied up on this bank of the river for their use. Thinking that the route along the other bank would be more convenient, we crossed the river in that craft. This was the 21st June, 1928. Heavy rains started and I got completely drenched. That also seemed pleasant, some how. By the next afternoon, we reached Brahmapuri. Retrieving our things from the pit in which we had stored them, we started staying in Rama Guha.

298. Some days passed like this. One night we had finished our food. It was around 11 p.m. I was seated on a high rock on the river bank and meditating. The lad who was with me was deep asleep inside the Rama Guha. Just then I heard a peculiar sound. When I looked, I saw that the water was roaring down. It was as fierce as that of an elephant in rut. I got up and ran down to the Guha and roused the lad, collected what odd things I could in a hurry and ran up with the lad to Pyarelal's orchard. It was a sudden flash flood of the Ganga. All at once the Guha was submerged in water. If we had delayed even by a few moments, both of us would have perished, leaving only our names behind.

299. We stayed at this orchard for 2-3 days. Pyarelal was not there. A youngster from Mysore was staying there then. He was a very impulsive and excitable lad. Some dispute and argument arose between that lad and the lad who was staying with me, Madhavan. There were a large number of plantain trees and plantain bunches in that orchard. Pyarelal used to give us plantain fruits several times to eat. It seems Madhavan had plucked a few unripe (green) plantain fruits for preparing a curry. When that Mysore lad saw this, he came running to Madhavan, got angry and abused him and slapped him. Madhavan began to kill him. I prevented him. I not only talked to that Mysore lad affectionately, but also gave him some eatables.

300. The same day I left the place and reached Svargaashram. The Mysore lad became afraid and he went away some where. From Svargaashram we went for darshan to Neelakanta

Mahadev. That is an elevated place where one does not feel the heat of the summer very much. There are dharmashalas too for staying. After darshan and 2-3 days' stay there, we returned to Svargaashram. I decided to spend the entire rainy season in Svargaashram itself. Sivananda Swamiji is also nearby. I stayed very happily in the midst of great Sadhus. In the rainy season, most people here get fever. Sivananda Swamiji treats them all affectionately and with care. I too have been a patient like the others.

301. Now I am spending the time eagerly awaiting the close of the rainy season. From the very first sight Vasishta Guha has been occupying pride of place in my heart. In October 1929, armed with a blanket and other things, I started for Vasishta Guha, alone. Upto Sivapuri there is no place on the way, fit for rest. At night I would lie down just somewhere. "The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed, and food what chance may bring. (what fear has the) Sanyasin bold! Say, Om tat sat, Om". (The Gururji has himself given the above translation in English of the original Malayalam verse, which also he has given immediately after the English rendering. It reads: "Puramukalallo gaganavisaalam, sayyaa bhootalam, etu labhikkurn bhakshanam atu taan. Sanyaasikkoru bhayame illa. Sthira chithan than, Om Tat Sat Om" - Tr.).

302. Starting again the next morning, I reached a village on the right bank of the Siva river near Sivapuri. There is a brahmana there by name Kanniah. I kept my things at his place. After bath I happily ate the "Pahaadi" food he gave me. When these

“Pahaadis” (hill-dwellers) see clothes they will certainly demand them. I presented him with a blanket. He also gave me a clothing in return. After resting a while, I left half my things with him and started for Vasishta Guha with my remaining clothes, etc. By 5 O’clock in the evening, I reached Vasishta Guha. O, what a good fortune (to be here)! I went straight to the Guha. The same person whom I saw last year is still in the main Guha. Along with him he also has a pahaadi as his attendant. I was extremely tired after the arduous travel. I enter the Guha. That person does not even look at me. Whatever it be, I kept all my things there and myself sat down. I told him: “Lalaji, I am extremely tired after prolonged walking. I am feeling extremely hungry and thirsty also. If you will kindly give me some provisions, I shall myself prepare some food and take it”. “There is nothing here”, was the immediate response. One could clearly see tinfuls of provisions stacked there. I had one or two rupees with me. I again told him, “These things here, are they not rice and wheat flour? I do not want anything free. Here, take this money and give me something to eat. - *“Paalam kulungiaalum kelan kulungkayilla”* (Translation of this Malayalam proverb: “Even if the bridge were to shake violently, Kelan will not shake a bit” - Kelan is the name of a very courageous person - Tr). What he exhibited was either extra-ordinary courage or wickedness. I was perplexed what to do. There were no houses anywhere nearby. This person is a total stranger; and night is fast approaching. In this difficult situation; just as on previous occasions, the purport of the Lord’s assurance *“Yogakshemam vahaamyaham”* once again became clear on this occasion too. “Maharaj, please come with me. There you can have food and

take rest” - these words issue from the mouth of the pahaadi brahmin who is the attendant of the occupant of the cave. I felt very happy and asked him - “How far is your house!”. He answered: “Very close by” and I started with him. Telling me frequently, “It is right here, it is very close”, he made me climb up and down hillocks and made me walk not less than 3 miles (5 km) before we reached his house.

303. His house is atop a hill. Nearby is a water-fall. He has fields and cattle. He has an elder brother who is also very generous by nature. I was given milk first. At night I was given good food. I slept well. The next day also I spent there and got rid of my weariness. On the third day in the early morning, I started from there. After drinking the milk that was offered to me at a house on the way, I returned by the route by which I had gone to the Pahaadi’s house.

304. How can I stay in this region in this most enfeebled condition? I came to the conclusion that life in a cave would be impossible. Near the Guha, there was a ferry boat for crossing over to the other bank of the river. I decided that, going by the ferry, I would cross the river and go back to the Svargaashram. The relative positions of the ferry and the Guha may be illustrated diagrammatically like this:



When I reached the Point “A’ some unknown power attracted me strongly back to the Guha and I returned to the Guha itself. I never went anywhere near that Babu. I have already mentioned that, to the left of the main Guha, there is a small “cavelet”. There was no body then in that “cavelet”. I went there and sat inside it.

305. Then I had my bath in the Ganga. Doing Japa and meditation, I stayed on in the cavelet. It must be 12 noon now. Villa, the Babu’s attendant, gave me some food on a leaf. After eating that food and drinking Ganga water, I lay down in the cavelet and slept. I decided that I must stay here itself, come what may. In the morning, after finishing my bath etc, and taking my clothes, I go to the occupant of the main Guha and tell him: “O, Lalaji! I have to cross the river and go to Sivapuri to bring back my clothes. I shall be returning tomorrow. Till then let these clothes be here”. Lalaji replied, “Do not keep them anywhere here. If somebody takes them away, do not ask me”. Nevertheless I deposited the bundle of clothes there itself and crossed the river without a thought.

306. Lakhs and lakhs of sawn timber logs from several mountains are transported up to Haridwar via the Ganga river. There are contractors and several coolies (workers) for this. Some of these coolies swim the river with the help of leather bags. These people are called “Sinaiwalas”. I now crossed the Ganga river by sitting on their back. After crossing the river again at Kottugram village, I reached the house, where I had

left behind my clothes. After having a comfortable meal, I spent the night there itself.

307. The next morning, after crossing the Siva river, I proceeded to the Guha by the same route which I had first followed. It was past noon when I reached the Guha. I went to the main Guha, collected by bundle of clothes which I had kept there, came to the cavelet and, stretching my feet, lay down there. Where can I get food here at this time? In any case there is no dearth of Ganga water!

*“Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare;
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare”.*

CHAPTER - 14

308. The next morning I finished my morning bath. Now where to go? The nearest village is about 3 miles (5 km) away. It is not possible to manage without going. So after remembering the Guru devotedly, I set out for bhiksha. Crossing hillock and valley and after walking for about a mile and a half (about 2½ km), I see a large banyan tree. I sat beneath it for some time, enjoying the pure breeze. Nearby I see a house. Going in front of that house and uttering “Narayana Harih”, I beg for bhiksha. Immediately a tall, dark, middle-aged woman comes out and asks me what I want. I said, “I am feeling very hungry. Kindly give me something to eat”. The woman’s husband was also there. They had a son aged about 6 or 7. Very gladly they brought me some chapatis and rice in a bowl, As I was very hungry, I ate with relish and rested there for a while.

309. The village is still about a mile (1½ km) away. If I go there, I would be able to get bhiksha. So I started for the village. It is a steep ascent. I lost my way. That is nothing unusual. I found myself inside a big forest. Unable to extricate myself and come out, I continued to sit there itself. I should have sat like that for about an hour, I am perfectly at home in meditating on God even inside a forest. Then one gentleman happened to come there. He told me: “How did Swamiji happen to come here? This is a terrible place. There are lots of tigers and bears here”. When I told him I had lost my way, that person himself

escorted me and took me to the correct path. And I reached the village where I wanted to go. It was about 3 p.m. then.

310. Almost all the residents of this village are Brahmanas. Agriculture is their mainstay. They also keep cows and buffalos. Almost all the work is done by the women - such as, climbing big trees and gathering bundles of leaves for feeding the cattle; carrying bundles as head loads over long distances and returning home with them by dusk; grazing the cattle; milking them; churning curd; grinding wheat, etc. The men folk only till the land; all other work is done by the women. Generally there are very few thieves in Uttar Khand. Every one exerts himself to earn a livelihood through hard labour. Even vessels and other articles that may be lying outside Ashrams and residential houses do not get stolen. But now things have changed for the worse. When Sadhus reach their door-steps, these people immediately offer them something.

311. I did bhiksha. That day I received about 4 seers (more than 8 pounds) of materials. This was adequate to see me through for 10-15 days. That night I rested in that village itself. The next morning I reached the Guha. After finishing bath, etc. I prepared chapati and dal and took it. I had also received a small quantity of ghee as bhiksha. When the occupant of the main Guha realised that I had no intention of leaving, his attitude changed and he started becoming favourably inclined towards me.

312. He is an expert cook - what is called a “Nala paakam” (“A veritable Nala in cooking” - king Nala of the olden times

- husband of Damayanti - was an expert cook of wide repute - Tr). And whatever he cooks, he does it in a jiffy. Sometimes he used to invite me also for food, but I used to remain aloof. I did not like to go to him even for borrowing fire when the fire in my cavelet happened to go out. I had no match-box with me, nor was it possible to get one anywhere nearby. Once I had to go in search of fire to the next house - 3 miles (5 km) away. By the time I negotiated all those ascents and descents and returned to the Guha after borrowing fire from the nearest neighbour, 4 hours had gone. When I was sitting in the cavelet, thinking of this total loss of 4 hours in the forenoon, a person comes and sees me after crossing the Ganga by ferry. He had a match box which he gave me. The same afternoon, a noble person from Rishikesh happened to send me six match boxes. And thus I stayed here, clearly seeing and experiencing God's compassion.

313. It was now the month of Mesha (April-May), the harvesting season for wheat. If one now goes from village to village, one can get as much wheat as one needs. The water-mill for grinding wheat is also available nearby. One cannot go anywhere in the rainy season. To the right is the Ganga, in front is the Siva river, and to the left and rear are large forests. So where indeed can one go? Some people not merely told me, but insisted that even now I should collect and store all the provisions needed for the rainy season. The occupant of the main Guha also told me, "I myself shall give you all the provisions you may need for the rainy season", but I did not accept his offer.

314. When I am thus in a mood of indecision, a person acquainted with me comes to the Guha. He was a most affectionate hardy young man. His name was Narayana Giri. He was also very detached. When I was living on Bilva fruits in Brahmapuri, he used to bring me very sweet bilva fruits now and then. Even now he has come with a load of bilva fruits. I was very happy. The next morning I got ready to go to the village for bhiksha. Narayana Giri also expressed a desire to accompany me. He was a great soul and I did not wish to give him any trouble, but he insisted on coming. So I told him that he could come if he would stay permanently with me; he agreed to that. Accordingly, along with him, I wandered in 3 or 4 villages for bhiksha. In one or two days I could get about one maund (37 kilos) of wheat. I had great difficulty in carrying that burden. It was he who carried the entire burden, had the wheat ground into flour, and stored the powder neatly in tins. I thought that he would be staying with me in the Guha but one day when I was returning after bath in the Ganga, I found him missing. It must have been to Rishikesh that he had gone.

315. I continued in the Guha alone. Sometimes some great souls would come there. And in this manner, days came and went and the rains set in. Ganga began to swell. Sri Krishna Ashtami in Simha (August-September) too passed. And the floods subsided.

316. I had run out of salt. I went to the village in search of some salt. The elders in the village leave early in the morning to the fields and other places to begin their work of agriculture,

etc. At that time, there would be only children in the houses, and they had strict instructions not to give anything to anybody even if asked. I had reached a village in the morning. I requested for salt in some houses. None would give me any salt. They used to bring salt all the way from Rishikesh with difficulty and even children knew the value of salt and would not give it away. I then went to the house near the Banyan tree in the village, where I had first gone for bhiksha. Here too there were no elders; only a little boy was there. When I requested him for salt, he gladly brought two handfuls of it and gave it to me. I was very happy with the boy and asked him what he wanted. Unhesitatingly he replied, “I want you to teach me”. Saying I would do it, I returned to the Guha.

317. It became necessary for me to go to Rishikesh soon. While there, I procured a Hindi Primer, a slate and writing paper and returned to the Guha. I went to the boy’s house and showed him the book. He was very happy. From the next day he began to come to the Guha daily. He must be coming after food. I take my food at 12 noon. At that time, I used to give him also a share. He also used to do some petty jobs like fetching water from the Ganga, cleaning the vessels, etc. His father’s name was Murti Ram and his own name was Sivanand. Along with him, his paternal uncle’s son Mukund also used to come. This boy Mukund was very intelligent. I began to teach them all subjects. While I used to teach all subjects in a general way, I used to concentrate on the teaching of language and arithmetic.

318. Lalaji, the occupant of the main Guha, left for his place, Sahranpur. At that time I moved into the main Guha

and started living there. The main Guha had no door or other fittings. Through the open entry, snakes could enter the cave at will. It was very convenient for me to sit down and meditate in the inner portion of the Guha. While in meditation thus one day, when I opened my eyes by chance, I saw a large snake crawling towards my seat. My seat was a bit elevated from the ground. As soon as I saw the snake, I closed my eyes again in meditation without any fear. Thereafter, where did the snake go? I have not seen it again.

319. To sit down on the bank of the Ganga and meditate in silence during summer is a very pleasant experience. Sometimes guests would come. By the time Sadhus reach here from Rishikesh, they would be very tired. They would stay for at least 2-3 days.

320. How is daily life carried on? The answer is - The Lord looks after it. If the Kali Kambilwala dharmashala people are requested, they would, send provisions every month. But I had decided that I would not go there for bhiksha.

321. This decision was not without a reason. While staying in Brahmapuri, once on a New Moon day I went there as usual for bhiksha. It is the attendants there who give the bhiksha. When one sees their attitude and behaviour, one will not be inclined to ask for or accept anything from them. I went near them and kept standing. Who is there to take notice of me? I told the attendants; “Please give bhiksha if you feel like it. I am in a hurry to leave”. They did not like it. Saying in a sarcastic

manner “Hey, have you come on horse back? Let the horse keep standing there”, they gave me bhiksha. I then decided: “Oh, God, please do not take me to such mean-minded persons for bhiksha”. From that day I began to lead an independent life. It is far better to beg from one’s friends who are sympathetic towards one, than from such people.

322. I did not have many friends or acquaintances at that time in that area. An advocate in Sitapur used to take a special interest in me. Once during my stay in Svargaashram, while I was staying in Swami Sivananda’s hut, that advocate happened to come there and Swamiji had introduced him to me. He used to show special interest in me too.

323. His name was Pandit Shri Chandnarainji. It was only later that I came to know fully his qualities and nature. He is a first-rate leading lawyer in Sitapur. He is a Kashmiri Brahmin. He used to like, and was interested in, Sadhus. It was service to Sadhus which he considered most important in life. He has provided countless number of Sadhus with money, clothes and bhiksha. His right hand did not know what his left hand did - so closely guarded were his charity and philanthropy. His life in this world as a house-holder was like that of a lotus leaf on water. While he lived right in the midst of his daily life as a house-holder, none of its problems came anywhere near him or affected him. He had a special affection for me and has taken me to his residence in Sitapur several times. Once while in Brahmapuri, I had happened to request him for some money. He had sent me the money immediately and also written to me

that whenever I needed money in the future, I should let him know. I do not think I have troubled him or others since then frequently for money. “*Yogakshemam vahaamyaham*”. I began to acquire total faith in this dictum. And thus daily livelihood was looked after by Him.

324. I stayed here in Vasishta Guha for all of an year. During that period I used to go to the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Kankhal to participate in the birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

CHAPTER - 15

KASHMIR

325. I think it was in 1930 that I started feeling a desire to go to Kashmir on pilgrimage. I reached Sitapur. From there, via Rawalpindi to Srinagar. Kashmir is considered equivalent to heaven. I do not know anybody in Kashmir. Is not God omnipresent? I stayed for some days in Narayana Math. I learnt about the important places in Kashmir. Then I started seeing them one by one. The beauty of the gardens is something special. There are houseboats in the rivers in which one can live. Life in them is very comfortable indeed. One gentleman took me to the house-boats and gave me an opportunity of staying in one of them. The boat-man rows the boat here and there. The rich can really enjoy. From April-May to October-November, I stayed at many places there. In places like Mattom, Anantnag, Pahalgam etc., Hindus are very few in number. Muslims account for 90% of the population there. One could see Hindus and Muslims staying in the same house.

326. The Kashmiri Pandits are very generous. They have great respect for learned Sadhus. It gave them great pleasure to keep me in their houses.

327. I did not stay in houses for long. Pahalgam is an elevated place. Travellers pitch tents and stay in groups there. I also pitched a small tent and stayed in it for some days.

328. The principal place to see here is the cave in Amarnath. House-holders and Sadhus keep on coming in large numbers to have a darshan of this cave. The principal day for darshan is the Full Moon day in Sravana (August - September). Darshan is possible and can be obtained even in Aashaadh (July-August). During these days, when the ice melts, idols of Siva and Parvati get formed here on their own from the melting ice - so legend has it. It takes about a week to reach there from Srinagar.

329. From Srinagar, a lot of pilgrims join together and travel in a group to Amarnath. They get some little help from the Maharaja. After resting at several places on the way, they eventually reach Amarnath. When one takes bath in the Panchtarini river, and then reaches the cave, one experiences bliss and forgets all problems and worries. In those days there were no secure places for resting on the way. Sometimes there used to be snow falls which used to cause a lot of hardship and damage to the pilgrims. Nowadays, dharmashalas have sprung up at several points on the way and pilgrims are able to reach Amarnath in fair comfort and safety.

330. It was in the month of Aashadh (July-August) that I had darshan of Amarnath. A gentleman took me there. I had a tent all for myself. After a very satisfying darshan of Amarnath, one fine morning I returned to Srinagar.

331. Severe cold sets in Kashmir in November- December; but before that, I left Kashmir. After spending a few days in Lahore, I reached Rishikesh and from there I returned to Vasishta Guha.

CHAPTER - 16

332. I had been away from the Guha for about 6-7 months. Thinking that I had left for good, some Sadhus had occupied it and were staying there. I came to know about this when I reached Rishikesh. They did not really wish to leave the Guha. So, one evening I reached the Guha. Along with me was a student from Sitapur, by name Abhimanyu. When I arrived, there were 3 or 4 sturdy Sanyasis there. They were staying there with the firm resolve that, come what way, they would not go away from there. Without caring in the least for their attitude, I entered the cave, as usual, with a sense of full liberty. I deposited all my things inside the cave and came and sat outside. They did not say or do anything against my doings.

333. They stayed with me for 2 or 3 days and then left. At the time of their departure, I also gave them ten rupees.

334. As usual, Siva and Mukund used to come daily for studies. I have already mentioned that there were very few literates here. By now these boys had picked up the skill to read and write fairly well and to do sums. When they saw the progress made by the boys, the other villagers too experienced a desire to get their boys also taught to read and write. They approached me. Where do I find the time to teach all these boys? Anyway, some more boys started joining the class. I had occasion to leave the Guha for the second time for going somewhere for a long time.

At that time a Brahmachari came and occupied it. On return I stayed in the adjoining cavelet. Then I went and stayed in Bhingni - the present day Anand Kashi. I happened to stay there for two years in a hut made of grass. six or seven children too used to come daily for studies. It was extremely difficult to stay there in the cold season. At that time, when I used to move into the cave in Brahmapuri where I was formerly staying, these children also used to accompany me.

335. Once when I went to Kankhal to participate in the anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, these children also came with me. All the people there used to take delight in meeting these children of the forest. The children had learnt by heart several portions from Tulsidas Ramayana. They happened to sing some portions of it at an assembly. Suffice it to say that everyone was pleasantly surprised at their skill.

336. It must be 1932 A.D. now. There was no way of reaching this hilly place from Rishikesh. All this region was under the control of the Maharaja of Tehri. This place falls within the territory of the Kingdom of “Tehri- Garhwal”. The king’s Minister at that time was one Pandit Chakra Dhar. He was a very brave and courageous person. Under his persuasion, the Maharaja set about getting a motorable road constructed from Rishikesh to Kirtinagar. For any road construction project the very first task is to survey the alignment. The king’s officers had made the survey in such a way that the road would pass through the nearby Lorsi village, about 3 miles (5 km) away. According, to this survey it would become necessary to dismantle and

remove all the houses in that village. The villagers represented their grievances to me. When I went to Rishikesh once, I apprised Babu Ganga Prasad, High Court Judge, who happened to come there, of this matter. He advised me to discuss this directly with Dewan Pandit Chakra Dhar who was expected to come to that village shortly.

337. A dark night. I am seated in the innermost recess of the cave, immersed in thinking about God. It must be around 9 p.m. An overseer known to me comes hurriedly inside the cave and tells me that the Dewan Sahib and his entourage have arrived. I sent him back, requesting him to see that they remain wherever they were. It was indeed a peculiar scene when I came outside the cave, in a few moments. The Dewan Sahib and his entourage are seated there. The moment they saw me, all of them get up, salute me and tell me: “Swamiji, we have all reached your doorstep. It would be a great help if we could be permitted to rest somewhere here”. Telling them that they could rest here itself comfortably, I took the Dewan Sahib and the Chief Engineer inside the cave and made them sit there. I gathered from their conversation that they had no eatables with them. They have come here, very tired, after facing various hardships on the way. Nobody who has visited me in the cave after I started living there, has ever had occasion to go back without food. By the grace of God, I had with me two tinfuls of wheat flour and other materials. I had also with me a large quantity of tapioca roots which had been cultivated by a Sadhu, Krishnananda, of Svargaashram, which he had very kindly sent me - and which is available in plenty in Kerala. I entrusted all these materials

to the attendants of the Dewan Sahib, and, within no time they prepared chapatis, dal and curries. Everyone was satisfied. They praised the tapioca curry wherever they went.

338. The Dewan Sahib and the Chief-Engineer slept inside the cave itself. The Dewan Sahib spoke formal words to the effect that he was highly indebted to me. “We are going to get a large Ashram constructed for Swamiji. If a suitable site for it is shown, to the Chief Engineer tomorrow morning, we can take further steps”. So spoke the Dewan Sahib to me. Although I had no desire at all for large buildings and felt that this cave was quite sufficient, I told the Dewan “yes, yes”. Early next morning itself, he sent the Engineer and an assistant with me for selection of a site. We proceeded as far as Bhingini, settled on the place where I was staying earlier and returned to the cave.

339. The Engineer had a special respect and affection for me. On the way he happened to remark to me, “Swamiji, this Dewan, is a very tricky person. All this is a scheme to get hold of the cave from you”. I too had understood everything. When the Dewan asked me whether a site had been selected, I replied “All that can be considered later”. Thereafter the Dewan left with his entourage to Lorsi village to look into the villagers’ grievances.

340. On the night in which they had arrived at the cave; they had asked me about construction of the road; and I had explained the facts to the Dewan. If the road were to be laid through the village, the villagers would be subjected to great hardship and

loss. I particularly stressed on him that their condition would be the same as if they were to be cast into the sea.

341. The Dewan inspected the village and consoled the people. On the third day morning he reached the cave; carried in a “doli” by attendants, there being no one else with him other than those who carried the “doli”. I went near him and started talking to him. He told me. “If you like that place, I shall straightaway issue orders for constructing a good building”. Telling him “Let us go inside the cave and talk”, I led him inside the cave and sat down. I tell him without the least trace of fear and with courage; “O, Dewan Sahib! what is your real intention? We are mendicants and can stay happily anywhere. If you desire to have this cave, please tell the truth. I am prepared to leave the cave this very moment”. Hearing these strong words of mine, he immediately fell at my feet, “Hey, Hey; Hey. How can I get such a thought? Strange! How strange!”. Mumbling thus, he set off for Narendra Nagar.

342. Whatever it be, Chakra Dhar decided that he would not have the road taken through Lorsi. Pandit Kalanand who was then Overseer; was appointed to survey an alignment for the road along the bank of the Ganga. There was also a contractor Jit Hund to assist him. Today pilgrims traverse this road in large numbers on their way to Badri Narayana, enjoying the bliss of watching Mother Ganga flowing by the roadside.

343. With the arrival of the motorable road, the Guha (cave) and its neighbouring regions, which were practically unknown,

now became quite well-known. Now when pilgrims hear the name “Vasishta Guha” they experience a desire to see the place. By 1933, the road had come up to the top of the Guha. One afternoon at 2 p.m. the Maharaja of Tehri and his retinue reached the Guha. He got acquainted with me in conversation. Later also he happened to come here several times, accompanied by his Rani. This year, a gentleman from Kanpur also came. He pitched a tent and stayed here for a day or two. While leaving, he offered some money too.

344. Now I developed a desire to go to Badrinath. It is only now that my long-standing determination of going to Badri and staying there for several days, doing Bhajanam worship, is about to be fulfilled. Siva and Mukund are engaged in the grocery trade. I gave them some monetary help for this.

345. I started for Badri Narayana one evening taking Mukund also with me. I had some money also with me. If one goes to Badrinath without adequate clothes one would suffer in the cold. It is for staying in that sacred place at least for some months that I was going there. From the Guha, we went on foot. That night we rested in Malakund. The next day we reached this side of Mounichatti. There was a temporary floating bridge to cross the river to the otherside. Crossing that bridge and passing through Vyasa Chatti, Devaprayag, and Srinagar, we reached Rudra Prayag. By that time Mukund developed fever. He could not also carry the bundles. I used to help him on the way in carrying the load. Several times I felt it was a big mistake having

brought Mukund along. We stayed in the dharmashala at Rudra Prayag for a day or two. He was given medicines. When he got well, we resumed the journey to Badrinath. We also took along a coolie to carry the bundles, I need hardly say that it was the pilgrimage season then. Pilgrims go direct from Rudra Prayag to Kedar Nath. As I had already performed darshan of Kedar Maheshwar, I left out that place from my present itinerary. My sole thought was somehow to reach Badrinath.

346. From Rudra Prayag, after crossing Karna Prayag, Nanda Prayag, Chemmali, Lalsanga, Pippalkothi, Joshimath, Vishnu Prayag, Pandukeshwar, Hanumanchatti, etc., one evening we reached Badrinathpuri for the second time. Keeping our things temporarily at a Panda's house, taking bath and doing darshan of the deity and after making some rice and dal (Khichdi) and consuming it, we rested for the night.

347. The next day I started looking for a place for my regular stay. Thinking of staying in one of the solitary huts on the other bank of the Alaknanda, I proceeded there. There I met an acquaintance of mine - Swami Paramananda. With his help I started staying in a nearby hut. I sent back Mukund to his place with an escort. I became free.

348. I would take bath in the morning in Tapta Kund and do darshan of the Lord in the temple. As is known, the priest who performs poojas inside the temple is a Malayali Brahmin (Namboodiri). Seated outside the Sanctum Sanctorum, Pandits will read out in a loud voice regularly the Purushasukta, Gita,

Sahasranama, upanishads, etc. I too used to join them in reading these texts.

349. One used to get bhiksha daily from the dharmashala of Kali Kambliwala, I would keep a portion of that for the evening. With days passing happily like this, I developed fever and cough. The hospital is close by. I went there and began taking medicines, but there was no improvement. One night I saw a Vaidya in a dream. I dreamt that somebody was telling me that this vaidya's treatment would cure me. The same vaidya turned up outside my hut the next day. Recognising him I apprised him of my condition. When I began taking his medicines, I got well. It is worth mentioning that Sri Paramananda Swamiji rendered me all assistance by tending me during my illness.

350. Now Guru Purnima is approaching. The Full Moon day in the month of Aashadh is called Guru Purnima. On this day is worshiped Vyasadeva, the first Preceptor of mankind, by performing pujas to him. In accordance with this, disciples also perform puja to their preceptors on this day, As Adi Sankara has installed the deity in Badrinath, the Rawal Saheb who performs pujas in this temple adopts him - Adi Sankara - as Preceptor and offers puja on this day to the Dasannami Sanyasis who are Adi Sankara's followers. As it is not possible to do puja to all Sanyasis three or four noble Sanyasis are selected and pujas are done to them. On that day, I too was invited for puja being done.

351. The Rawal Saheb himself comes out from the Sanctum Sanctorum to the Puja place. After washing the feet of the

Sanyasis considered worthy of Puja on that day, they are respectfully and with devotion worshipped by offering Arghya, Paadya etc. All the expenses of these Sanyasis for a period of 4 months from that day are also met. From that day, the Rawal Saheb treats them as Preceptors. I too did not have to go to the dharmashala for bhiksha.

352. I stayed on in Badrinathapuri till the Malayalam month of Chingam (August-September), enjoying the bliss of the God's darshan. Janmashtami is also, approaching. There are special pujas and other rites in the temple on that day. I witnessed and participated in all those. Soon thereafter, taking a coolie with me to carry my belongings, I set off for Vasishta Guha. There is a place known as "Aadi Badri", a little away from Hanuman chatti. There too pujas were being conducted by people from Kerala. I stayed there for about a week and then reached Lal Sanga. From there, wending my way over the mountain path along with my coolie, I reached a village around noon, Unbearable hunger and thirst. I prayed to the villagers for some food or for something to drink at least. I had some money with me. I emptied my money-bag before them and told them: "Please take as much money as you want and give me something to eat and drink". They remained unmoved, unmindful of my repeated entreaties. They did not give me even a little watery butter-milk to drink. When I started threatening one of them with the stick in my hand, all at once several of the villagers, from all sides, started bringing me all kinds of eatables. They heaped large quantities of milk, curd, fruits etc in front of me like a hillock. All I wanted was a

small quantity of milk or curd. I offered the price for whatever I consumed, but despite my insistence, they did not accept any money. Resting there for some time, I resumed my journey with the coolie, and by evening I reached the Lorsi village. That night I spent in that village itself. It is here that Siva and Mukund were staying. The next day we started at dawn itself and reached the Guha - Total Peace! (Saantam Prasaantam).

CHAPTER - 17

353. *“Guroh anghripadme manasched na lagnam
tatah kim, tatah kim, tatah kim, tatah kim?”*

Let one have all sorts of greatness and magnificence. All this becomes trifling if he does not have devotion to the Lotus Feet of the Preceptor.

354. I had always a profound conviction that it was only the Preceptor's benign compassion that enables one to achieve effortlessly even the most impossible- looking things. I would like to reiterate again and again that it was Shri Tulsi Maharaj (Swami Nirmalanandaji) who had tried incessantly and made a man out of me. Although this body has been away (from the Guruji) for quite some time now, my mind is always close to the Swamiji himself and not at all far from him. Not that, off and on, I did not experience a desire to have his darshan with my physical eyes. My love for my native land has also been attracting me there several times. But whatever be my thoughts or emotions, all of them disappear or become submerged the moment I step into the Guha. Letters from some dear friends also had the effect of attracting me there. Shri Vaageeswarananda Swami who was residing in the Ashram at Tiruvalla also used to send letters. I also got a letter from him, saying; “If you do not come down here, we will all be starting for the Guha”. My heart had not become all that hard to withstand this expression of genuine

affection. Whenever I used to receive such affectionate letters, I used to make up my mind firmly that I would visit my native place. At the same time, I did not have the courage to give up my stay in the Guha. However, I wrote a reply and posted it to Tiruvalla. I had given in that letter details of my intended date of departure from the Guha, etc. After posting it, I experienced remorse but at the same time I did not wish to nullify that letter. Ultimately I decided to start from the Guha.

355. From the Guha to Rishikesh; from there to Delhi; then to Sitapur. From there, on to Brindavan. After staying in Brindavan happily for a month or so, I proceeded to Kanpur. From Kanpur I reached Calcutta and the Belur Math happily.

356. It was the Maha Purusha Maharaj that had given Sanyasa Deeksha to this humble soul in this very Belur Math. He has since abandoned his body. The present administrative head was Sudhir Maharaj. He too had a special affection for me. After staying in Belur Math for 3-4 days, I reached Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Puri. From the Ashram to Jagannath. For some days I stayed in Jagannath enjoying the bliss of the God's darshan. From there I reached the Ashram at Madras. I had not so far intimated Shri Nirmalananda Swamiji about my travels. It was in Bangalore that the Swamiji had been staying permanently. But for some reason, he had given up his residence in the Bangalore Ashram and he was now staying in an Ashram at Ottappalam in Kerala which had been constructed under his persuasion. I had come to know about this. In fact my main object in undertaking this travel itself was to have darshan of that sacred person. I

sent a letter to Swamiji from Madras. The then President of the Madras Ashram was Swami Saswatanandaji. My stay in Madras too was very happy.

357. I entrain from Madras. I reached the Ottappalam railway station around 8 a.m. one morning. I reached the Ottappalam Ashram, armed with some gifts, around 9 a.m. Swamiji was busily engaged in some activity in the garden. I saw Swamiji even from some distance. Approaching Swamiji slowly, I fell at his feet. Taking me with him, Swamiji went and sat down in the enclosed verandah of the Ashram. He asked me about all my details. “Had you let me know the time of your arrival at the railway station, I would have sent somebody to fetch you”. These and other similar affectionate statements of the Swamiji gladdened my heart. Under Swamiji’s instructions, I went and had tea and other things. It is now the Malayalam month of Chingam (August-September). It is still raining and the muddy water in the Bharathapuzha river is eddying along in full flood. The administrative head of the Ashram was Shri Sukhananda Swamiji. I entrusted to him all the gifts I had brought. After a short rest I went to Bharathappuzha and had my bath and washed my clothes. Sri Ramananda Swamiji who was also staying in the Ashram, also came with me to the river. Brahmachari Damodaran, Sreekantananda Swamiji, Muraharananda Swamiji, Amalananda Swamiji and others were also staying there. After the mid-day meal, I rested. I too became engaged in various items of work in the Ashram.

CHAPTER - 18

358. By the time I had written this much, a fierce doubt assailed me about what I should write about hereafter; so I stopped writing at this stage. Six or seven months passed like this. “*Satyam brooyaat, Priyam brooyaat, Satyamapriyam na brooyat*” - “One must speak only the truth, but it must be pleasing to the person to whom it is addressed. Even if it were to be the Absolute truth, if it would be unpleasant for the person for whom it is intended, it is preferable not to speak the truth, but maintain silence.” - a most appropriate counsel indeed.

359. Some worthy persons happened to go very carefully through the manuscript copy written by this humble soul. I begin to resume the writing of my autobiography on this auspicious Ashtami Rohini day under the repeated persuasion and loving insistence of these great souls.

360. In deference to Swamiji’s wishes, I stayed for a few days in the Ottappalam Ashram itself, doing what work I can. I have already stated that Swamiji had been staying permanently in the Ashram at Bangalore and that this humble soul too had been fortunate to be with the Swamiji in that Ashram for quite some time. One should particularly mention here that it was the culmination of the Swamiji’s selfless, ceaseless and untiring work that the Bangalore Ashram, which to begin with was a mere rocky stretch of land, eventually became an ideal Ashram

with enchanting flower gardens, mango groves, cow sheds, etc. But for certain unknown reasons, the Swamiji put an end to his stay in the Bangalore Ashram and shifted to the Ashram in Thiruvananthapuram. Later, Swamiji began staying in the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Sri Ramakrishna Nagar in Ottappalam.

361. There are several Brahmin families staying around the Ottappalam Ashram. The Brahmin society had unfairly “exiled” or boycotted them. On account of this, they had been leading a very miserable existence. *En masse* they sought refuge at Swamiji’s feet. Swamiji started devoting his attention to uplifting them.

362. Is it not in the young boys and girls that the entire future and welfare lies, whether of society or of a nation? Swamiji used to exert himself to the utmost for the true and real welfare of these Brahmin boys and girls. He used to educate and instruct them in physical training, acquisition of knowledge, meditation and bhajanas, etc. in order to foster the flowering of their physical, mental and spiritual growth. The profound, majestic and stern Swamiji would bring himself down to the level of those children just as a boy of their age group would.

363. Even here the Swamiji used to do hard physical work daily for 2-3 hours. The Swamiji’s disciples who were staying in the Ashram could not also refrain from doing good work. I too used to go near Swamiji and participate in the physical labour occasionally. But when I stood in that raw earth for some time without footwear, my feet would start aching. Swamiji was not

aware of this at first. Later, Swamiji himself had occasion to remark: “Bhakta wants some other work, some literary work”.

364. *“Jananee Janma bhoomischa Swargaadapi gareeyasee”*. My desire to visit my birth place intensified. I apprised Swamiji of this. And, with his blessings, one day I started for Tiruvalla. After reaching Ernakulam and staying 2-3 days in the Poor Home there, I reached Aalappuzha.

365. This Poor Home was established by the Maharaja of Cochin (Kochi). Men and women who had no visible means of support or people to care for them, stay here day and night. They are provided with free food and clothes in addition to shelter. The Government of Cochin had entrusted the management of this establishment to Shri Ramakrishna Ashram. There were some Swamiji’s (of the Sri Ramakrishna Order) there in charge of administration of this Poor Home. There too, we moved in a spirit of friendliness.

366. There is a Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Alappuzha also. I stayed there for 2-3 days. This place had been gifted to Swamiji as Guru Dakshina by the famous lawyer, Shri P.G. Govinda Pillai. There are several persons here who are Swamiji’s disciples. Lawyer Shri Krishna Pillai was one of these important disciples. Another Shri Govinda Pillai, a person of very sharp intellect and deeply interested in me, was at that time a clerk in the District Court in Alappuzha. These persons took me to the famous Sri Krishna temple at Ambalapuzha (about 11 miles or 18 km from Alappuzha - Tr.). Ashtami Rohini was also approaching.

The “Paal Paayasam” (Sweetened boiled rice, milk and sugar - Kheer - Tr.) is famous all over Kerala. Imbibing lots of the “Paayasam” and having darshan of Lord Krishna, I stayed there till Ashtami Rohini.

367. The next day I started for Tiruvalla by country boat. On the way I got down at Ramankara. I reached the residence of Naarakathara Thumbayil Kurup. This is the Poorva Ashrama place of Swami Sukhanandaji. I met his aged mother. After accepting the hospitality of some friends there, I left for Changanassery by country boat and reached there by 3 p.m. one day. From there I reached the vicinity of the new Ashram in Tiruvalla by bus. From there, after walking for a minute or two, I reached the Ashram.

*“Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare;
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare” .*

CHAPTER - 19

368. When I reached the Ashram only Sri Vageeswarananda Swamiji and one Brahmachari were there. It was 5 p.m. when I reached there. The moment I stepped into the Ashram, Vageeswarananda Swamiji felt extremely happy and treated me with considerable affection and regard. I offered to him also the prasad from the Sri Krishna Temple at Ambalapuzha which I had carried with me - small sweet cakes (Unniappam) and “Paal Payasam”. After conveying to him briefly all my experiences, I had my bath, meditation and prayer. I also participated in the evening pooja and deepa-aaraadhana (Aarati) and had my night meal. And, after mentally remembering Sri Ramakrishna, I embraced the Goddess of sleep ardently.

369. Let me say a few words here about this Ashram. As I have already mentioned, I had been staying in the Ashram at Tiruvalla ever since it had been constructed. In those days Shri Swamiji too used to visit the Ashram regularly every year. As that place was very small, I used to give a lot of thought to the inconvenience experienced by Swamiji in staying there. I had been trying to have a suitable and convenient building constructed in spacious premises. By God’s grace, the site where the present Ashram is located, was gifted, together with a registered title deed, by its owner, Shri Veliath Kurup, to the Ashram. I made Swamiji also inspect this Site. Elevated ground; closeness to the river; a public road running quite close; a lonely, solitary place - all in one, the fittest place for an Ashram. Swamiji was delighted.

370. The idea was deep-rooted in me that, somehow or the other, a good and convenient building should be got constructed there. But I could not take any concrete step to give shape to my wish as, very soon thereafter, I had to leave Tiruvalla for the Quilandy Ashram. Suffice it to say that, somehow, a good Ashram building got constructed there. It was all due to Swamiji's blessings. I came to understand later on that the construction proceeded apace because of the keen enthusiasm and interest of Vageeswarananda Swamiji and Nirvikarananda Swamiji. The next day I rested in the Ashram itself. Several persons known to me came to the Ashram. First I went to the Tiruvalla temple and had darshan of Sri Vallabha. There I prostrated before the banyan tree to which I had been most attached. Sitting on the cement platform under that tree and enjoying the bliss of singing Kirtans, I later returned to the Ashram at night with Vageeswarananda Swamiji and rested.

371. The next day I visited my birth place (household). I walked all over the neighbouring areas and accepted the hospitality of some eminent persons. Like this I spent 3 or 4 days in the Ashram at Tiruvalla.

372. In Pullaat, there are some persons interested in me. The most important among them is Vaidyan Narayana Panikkar. Once he came in a car with his family and took me to Pullat; Vageeswarananda Swarniji was also with me. We stayed there for 2-3 days. One evening we went to the temple at Aaranmula (Sri Krishna temple - Tr) and had darshan. As desired by Vageeswarananda Swamiji, we then started from there for

Chengannur. We stayed there in a lovely building on the river bank, for 2-3 days. From there, back to Tiruvalla; from there to Chengannur, along with Vageeswarananda Swamiji. From there, I left alone for Haripad.

373. Is not the Ashram at Haripaad a place which I liked most? That Ashram has also been sanctified by the touch of Shri Maharaj's lotus feet. Was it not there that I was given Mantra Deeksha by that Great One? Chellappa Swami, Chitsukhananda Swamiji and Chitprabhananda Swamiji were all eagerly awaiting my arrival. After staying there for 3-4 days happily I went to the Ashrams at Muttam and Kayamkulam. Chitsukhananda Swamiji was also with me. From Kayamkulam we reached Adoor. Shri Sankaravelil Parameswaran Pillai was Munsiff there. In Adoor too there is a Ramakrishna Ashram but I stayed at Pillai's residence itself. From there we went to Kollam, Sasthamkotta and other places. At last, one evening I reached the office of the "Prabudha Keralam" in Tiruvananthapuram. Niranjanananda Swamiji and others were staying there then. After I had stayed there for a day or two, Dr. Tampi took me to the Vattiyoorkavu Ashram (in Tiruvananthapuram). There too some Swamijis were staying. The then administrative head there was Swami Nirvikaranandaji. Shri Padmanabhan Tampi, who had been Superintendent of Police had taken Sanyasa from our Swamiji (Nirmalananda) and he was also staying there. Sri Ojasananda Swamiji, Sri Sachidananda Swamiji and Sri Amalananda Swamiji too were there. I stayed there only for a day or two. My stay there too was a source of delight - was it not the President Maharaj who had laid the foundation stone for this Ashram too? On that occasion,

I was quite near the Maharaj when, he instructed me: “Look, Bhakta! what an enchanting place this is. When the Ashram’s own building gets completed, you must take some youngsters and train them as Brahmacharis and make them stay here”. I shall remember those words always.

374. Later Dr. Tampi took me to his residence. After spending a day or two there, I left for Kanyakumari. Shri Nirvikarananda Swamiji and Shri Chitprabhananda Swamiji too accompanied me. After darshan at Suchindram and Nagerkovil, we reached Kanyakumari. We took accommodation in the Government Chowltry (Satram) itself. In many respects Kanyakumari was for me an important tirtha centre. We spent 4 or 5 days there, enjoying the divine darshan of the Goddess. The help rendered by Sri Karayalar, the licensee for the salt pans, is worth mentioning here.

375. A personage I liked most, Shri Ambananda Swamiji too happened to come here. After spending some time in the house of his brother, Sri Gopala Pillai, I returned to Thiruvananthapuram.

376. My intention had been to return to North India from Kanyakumari itself via Madurai. I had written accordingly to Swamiji too at Ottappalam. His orders were, however, that I should return to Ottappalam itself. So, I had eventually to return by the same route I had taken on the forward journey.

377. The place I like most is Gurupavanapuram (Guruvayoor). So I proceeded there direct. After doing bhajanam worship for a few days, I left for Ottappalam. Shri Kunjirama Pathiyar was

a gentleman very dear to me. He was then staying at Pattambi. I arrived at Pattambi and stayed there also for a day or two. Leaving Pattambi, I reached Swamiji's presence just before noon one day. Swamiji was taking his bhiksha then. I went before him, prostrated and sat near him. Swamiji was very happy. Swamiji offered me a portion of his food in the same plate off which he was eating. I enjoyed that like nectar.

378. Swamiji obtained from me all the details of my South Indian sojourn, and I stayed with Swamiji for, some days. I happened to go to the Ashram at Quilandy too. Then, along with Swamiji, I reached Sri Krishnan Nair's residence. He was then the District and Sessions Judge. He was a great devotee of Swamiji's. Sekharananda Swamiji was then staying in the Ashram at Kozhikode. After going there also, I again returned to the Ottappalam Ashram.

379. I spent some more days in service to Swamiji's lotus feet. One day Swamiji told me, "You do one thing. Read out the Bhagavatham to the devotees who come here". I accepted this. Just then I remembered Shri Kundu Panickar. He had desired that I should read out from the Bhagavatham for some days in his house. When I mentioned about this to Swamiji he agreed that I might do so. Shri Panickar was then staying in a new building in Cheruppullasseri. His aged mother too was with him. All his family members were known to me.

380. I reached Cheruppullasseri. It is a good place. There is a Sastha (Ayyappa) temple there. A special divinity could be experienced there. I used to visit that temple occasionally,

along with Shri Panickar and do worship. For some days I read out portions from the Bhagavatham to them. Then once again, myself, accompanied by Shri Panickar, his wife and children, in his own car, arrived at Ottappalam in Swamiji's presence. After Swamiji's darshan and taking some rest Shri Panickar and family returned to their homestead. Panickar began to contribute a small sum of money every month, three rupees or so, I think to the Ashram. He continued to do so for quite some time.

381. My desire to return to Uttarkhand intensifies. But Swamiji is not inclined to let me go.

CHAPTER - 20

382. “*Vajraadapi Katthoraani Mrdooni Kusumaadapi*” - Swamiji’s heart was at once harder than diamond and softer than a flower. Whenever he observes any defect or lapse on anybody’s part, he would use the first available opportunity of berating him harshly. Swamiji has even slapped me several times. On several occasions I have witnessed Swamiji working himself to the highest pitch of anger, but all at once becoming as tranquil-minded as an innocent child. In the Ottappalam Ashram Swamiji was staying on the first floor. Once he was scolding not any outsider, but his own disciples. I happened to get a cold. Swamiji had eucalyptus oil with him. None could muster the courage to go to Swamiji when his anger had been aroused, like Sri Narasimha Moorthy. But my pressing need pushed me into Swamiji’s presence. When I went before that inflamed personage and prostrated before him, all his anger vanished and he became calm as a child. At once he got up, opened his box, took out the medicine bottle and cotton and gave them to me with affection. He totally forgot what had happened. Is this not the characteristic of great personages?

383. “*Durlabham trayamevaitat daivaanugraha hetukam. Manushyatvam, Mumukshutvam, Mahaapurushasamsrayah*”.

One has obtained a human birth. Even to get that, instead of spending one’s time like animals in eating, sleep, fear, reproduction, etc., let there be an intense desire to go beyond

the enjoyment of the material and sensual pleasures. Even if one attains these two, the attainment of the ultimate goal is dependent entirely on the blessings of great persons without which nothing is ever possible. If one could serve such great ones with total sincerity, then there is nothing one cannot achieve. I too have behaved towards Swamiji without the least trace of insincerity. But to stay with Swamiji is in itself a terrible penance. Whenever there used to be a conflict in my mind and I used to suffer, I too used to leave the Swamiji and get away. I did not in the least desire ever to serve Swamiji even with a little bit of unwillingness. Here, in Ottappalam too, I stayed for some days carefully attending to the Swamiji's least wishes. One day Swamiji ordered: "You go to the Tiruvalla Ashram itself. You stay there, attending carefully to the affairs of the Ashram". I too agreed readily and willingly.

384. It is good to take birth in "God's house" (daivamandiram) but it is not proper to give up one's body there. This idea of Swami Vivekananda had taken deep roots in my mind.

385. There were several Ashrams in Travancore State. I have visited some of these Ashrams also. Some of the inmates of some Ashrams were carrying on without any regard, respect or devotion towards Swamiji. They had no sense of obedience to Swamiji either. I now began to understand these things a little. I realised only too well that Swamiji was sending me out into an agitated and turbulent situation. Come what may, I decided to carry out Swamiji's wishes as best as I could. I was to start for Tiruvalla, carrying a letter from Swamiji. It was Swami Amalanandaji who wrote the letter as per Swamiji's directions. My entire strength

lay in the Swamiji's sincere blessings and good wishes. The letter ran on these lines: "I am sending Purushottamananda to the Ashram and every one must obey him implicitly".

386. I have no liking for life in an Ashram. My entire idea in complying with Swamiji's directions was to proceed to Tiruvalla, acquaint my brother Sanyasis and Brahmacharis there of the situation, try to bring them round to the Swamiji's view point, restore order and harmony there and then, with Swamiji's permission and to return to North India. I left for Tiruvalla via Kottayam. When I reached Kottayam, I learnt that several of Swamiji's disciples had left for Tiruvalla. They must have heard about my arrival.

387. It was the Malayalam month of Kumbham. (February-March). I could not bear the heat. I reached the Tiruvalla Ashram by bus around 5 p.m. one evening. I deposited the bundle of my belongings there. At that time there was only one Brahmachari there. I entrusted to him the banana fruits that I had carried. Somebody drew adequate water for me from the well. I went to the well and had a good bath. My body got cooled somewhat with the cold water bath. After finishing darshan of the deity, I went and sat in a corner of the Ashram. The deeparadhana was also over; still none else was to be seen. Four or five disciples of Swamiji had assembled there. They too went away on some work and returned around 7.30 p.m. Everybody could see me where I was sitting but all of them pretended not to see me and passed by me. One disciple came to me and made some enquiries somewhat affectionately.

388. It was time for the night meal. A boy came to me and invited me for food. Although I was feeling hungry, I did not wish to take food there. Nevertheless, I thought let me go and see. In any case, how can one refuse an invitation extended to a guest? So I too went there. They were all eating. Something had been placed for me too in a corner. I sat down there and reluctantly consumed a little food. It was the culmination of the supreme and unbounded devotion they had for their Guru and Master that made me the object of all this humiliation.

389. Going back to the verandah of the Ashram, with considerable mental anguish, I tried to get some sleep. In the morning, after finishing my ablutions, I went to the well-side and had a good bath. There is no desire to remain in the Ashram even for a little while. I am extremely hungry. Going to a small shop near the Ashram, I bought and consumed some milk and fruits. I did not show Swamiji's sacred letter to anybody as yet. Nevertheless they have understood everything.

390. I spent some moments, not knowing quite what to do. Thinking that I will consult my friend from my boyhood days, Shri Sankaravelil Narayana Pillai and then decide upon the further course of action, I proceeded to the Paalakka Matham house where he was then staying. I apprised him of everything. After taking bath in the crystal clear water in the pond in that house, I did my meditation and prayer, in peace and enjoyed a good meal and rested. His opinion and advice were that I should not leave the Ashram, but stay there regularly. At 3 p.m. in the afternoon I left his house for the Ashram. I told him that I would

stay in the Ashram only if they permitted me and that I had no desire to get forcible access. He sent his son Ramakrishnan to accompany me. I have two or three tender coconuts also with me. When I reached the Ashram, only the Brahmachari was there. I rested there for some time. The inmates started returning. There were some others also with them.

391. I went to the Brahmachari and showed him the letter. I requested him to show the letter to the administrative head. He declined to do so. I myself slowly approached the administrative head of the Ashram. He does not even look at me. “I have come here under Swamiji’s orders. If you so desire, you may please read this letter”: so saying, I offered to him the sacred letter given by Swamiji. It was with utter indifference that he took that letter and read it. He exhibited utter contempt as though asking - “Which Swamiji? What letter?” and threw away the sacred letter of the Gurudev. Saying “Hey, there is no need to throw it away like this. It is something very precious for me”, I picked up that letter from the floor, placed it on my head reverentially and kept it safely.

392. Now what should I make or suspect, out of all this? It is unthinkable for me to quarrel with brothers. I tied up my bundle and prepared to go to the spot where I could get a bus. Ramakrishna Pillai was a great help. That evening I reached Adoor. The Munisiff there is Shri Parameswaran Pillai, a great devotee of Swamiji’s. He was extremely happy to see me. I told him everything. After taking the night meal, I slept well Hari Om.

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393. What is to be done now? Is it not advisable to return to Vasishta Guha without getting dragged into such squabbles? In any case I wrote a long letter giving a detailed account of everything and posted it to Swamiji. Shri Pillai was very happy. I stayed in his house for a day or two. While expecting Swamiji's reply, I went and stayed in Sasthaamkotta. It is a beautiful place. There is a Sastha(Ayyappa) temple here. (This is one of the few places where, in Travancore, there is a fresh water lake - Tr). All facilities needed for a life of quiet and solitude are available there. While staying like this, one evening Muraharananda Swamiji arrives in a car. What the Swamiji did when he got my letter was to send down Muraharanandaji at once to Adoor. And Shri Pillai sent him in his own car to Sasthaamkotta. Swamiji acquainted me with all the developments. We returned to Adoor. Swamiji himself is preparing to come to Adoor. For that Swamiji's instructions were to proceed to Thiruvananthapuram, pick up Shri Nirvikaranandaji and reach Ottappalam as early as possible in Shri Pillai's car.

394. Now Swamiji's arrival is certain. Preparations are on for Swamiji's stay in Shri Pillai's house itself. I am finding the heat there unbearable. Near Shri Pillai's house itself there is a small woody place, and in its, midst, a temple of the Goddess. I used to go and rest there. I spend the time eagerly expecting Swamiji's arrival. Now the car which went to fetch Swamiji comes back. But

there is none else in the car other than the driver. Shri Pillai had sent a hired car as his own car was undergoing repairs. Swamiji did not like this at all. If it were Shri Pillai's own car, Swamiji could use it as he liked. Swamiji did not like to undertake the long journey from Ottappalam in one stretch. What Swamiji had intended to do was to rest at various convenient places *en route* and do the journey at a leisurely pace. For this reason, he sent the hired car back at once. He had also sent a letter to the effect that Shri Parameswaran Pillai should send the car to Ottappalam after getting it repaired.

395. I was troubled. For so many days, giving up even sleep, I had been eagerly awaiting Swamiji's arrival. Shri Pillai's bungalow was close to the main road. Whenever the sound of an on-coming car was heard, I would run to the road, expecting Swamiji in that car. Now all that was left was disappointment. I had become tired, weak, and listless. How to get out of this place? And Shri Parameswaran Pillai does not permit me to leave for any place. Who knows God's will? A lawyer, who is keenly interested in me is staying in Kanjirappally, which is only a few kilometres away. He had also spent a few months in the Tiruvalla Ashram, engaging himself in spiritual affairs with me. He has now invited me to Kanjrappally. Shri Pillai also agreed, and I reached that place.

396. I wrote and posted a letter to Swamiji on the following lines: "Seeing the present state of Ashrams in Travancore, I find it difficult to stay anywhere there. With Swamiji's kind permission, I am leaving for North India, only to come again

whenever Your Holiness wants me”’. (Guru Maharaj has himself reproduced the above extract from his letter in the English language, and also given below it a Malayalam Translation in somewhat more flowery and elaborate language but with no additional point. Hence the Malayalam passage has not been translated here - Tr.)

397. In Kanjirappally there were a few gentlemen known to me, such as the then Munsiff there. After staying there for four days, via Madura, I reached Madras. I did not intend to go this time to the Ashram at Madras. On the earlier occasion of my stay there, the President of the Madras Ashram had abused Swamiji. I did not wish to listen to the same type of abuse all over again. After staying comfortably in a doctor friend’s house for three to four days, I entrained from Madras one evening. As I was just boarding the train, I saw the President of the Madras Ashram also in the station. We travelled together in relative cordiality. One gentleman was waiting at the Rajamundry station, expecting me. I got down there and accompanied that gentleman to his house.

398. He was an ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. His name was Venkita Raju. He was a teacher. I stayed there for about fifteen days. We celebrated the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary festival also there itself.

399. Here several gentlemen became well acquainted with me. One day I left for Hyderabad State by steam boat along the Godavari river. I had heard a good deal about a very famous

temple of Shri Rama on a hill top on the bank of the Godavari river in that State: Ramadasa was an official of the then Nawab. I had heard stories of how Ramadasa built a temple for Rama using Government moneys entrusted to him; how the Nawab had him thrown into prison for this offence; how God himself, taking human form, returned all the money to the Nawab and got Ramadasa released from prison, etc.

400. Let me narrate that story here in brief:-

According to the Brahmanda Purana, there is a tall mountain called Bhadrachalam situated on the bank of the Godavari which, in ancient times was called the, Gomati river. Now there is a beautiful temple there. The idols consecrated and installed in the Sanctum Sanctorum are those of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. The story runs as follows: A very devoted lady by name Daamaakya experienced a dream in her sleep, revealing to her the place where the idols of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were lying hidden, buried deep in the earth; directing her to have those idols dug up at once and installed properly in a temple at Bhadrachalam; that the idols should be worshipped and pujas offered to them with devotion until a great devotee by name Bhakta Ramadasa comes along there. That lady carried out all these instructions faithfully and was performing pujas to the idols.

401. Bhadrachalam was part of the then Mughal empire. The Administrator of that area, one Nawab Abdulla, had two Hindu Ministers. Gopanna was the sister's husband of one of them. He was a great devotee of Sri Rama. He was appointed

as the Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam. Because of his boundless devotion to Sri Rama, he had the temple at Bhadrachalam constructed very beautifully and the idols of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana installed in it with great ceremony. He got the idols also decorated with costly pearl necklaces and garlands. Where did Ramadasa, viz, Gopanna, get the money for all this? What he had done was to take away six lakh gold mohurs from the treasury for this purpose. For this misconduct, the Nawab had Ramadasa imprisoned. He endured a lot of hardship in jail for twelve years. Even in prison Ramadasa continued to pray to his Ishta Devata (favourite deity). In the end he was making plans to get rid of his body and was awaiting a suitable opportunity to do so. Sita Devi then took pity on the true devotee and prayed to her husband regarding Ramadasa's release from prison. Rama and Lakshmana, taking the guise of two soldiers and carrying six lakh gold mohurs with them, appeared before the Nawab in his bed chamber at midnight. Seeing these two handsome youths, the Nawab was stunned. When questioned by the Nawab on the reason for their arrival at that unearthly hour, they answered that they had brought with them the six lakh gold mohurs appropriated by Ramadasa and requested that he be released from prison immediately. So saying they opened their money bags and showered all the six lakh gold coins on the floor. Completely overwhelmed by surprise, the Nawab accompanied the two youths then and there to the prison and set Ramadasa free. The youths disappeared. When the Nawab got up the next morning, all this looked to him like a dream. He had not gone anywhere from the bed chamber. The six lakh

gold coins were, however, still lying on the floor. The Nawab sees a special brightness in the room. The Nawab got Ramadasa there and acquainted him with all the details. Congratulating himself on his good fortune in having been able to see Rama and Lakshmana, the Nawab appointed Ramadasa himself, again as Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam. He also gave the six lakh gold mohurs to Ramadasa himself to be used as he thought fit.

402. My desire to visit that holy place is now getting fulfilled. There were one or two Sadhus also with me. After having darshan of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and staying there for one or two days, I started by rail again for North India. I rested for a few days in the residence of a gentleman at Kanpur who was known to me. From Kanpur I went to the Gita Press in Gorakhpur. They had invited me even earlier. At that time a non-stop japa (akhandajapa) of the divine mantra “Hare Rama Hare Rama, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna” day and night to the accompaniment of instrumental music was in progress. Devotees had congregated there from various places, prepared to stay there for the whole year for which the japa would be, in progress. I too stayed there happily and participated, for 8-10 days. I took part also in the Sri Bhagavata Saptaham. A scholar used to read out the Bhagavata with great devotion. Suffice it to say that somehow I became the object of affection of everyone there.

403. From Gorakhpur I left for Lucknow. A gentleman by name Babu Ishwari Dayal, had visited me in Vasishta Guha during his pilgrimage to Badrinath. My idea in going to Lucknow

now was in deference to his wishes. I had also written to him in advance. He was therefore waiting for me at the station. I went with him to his house. His parents and brothers were extremely happy. I too participated in the Kirtans and other activities. I stayed in the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram also for a day or two and got to know many persons.

404. From Lucknow I reached Sitapur. Leading lawyers like Shri Santa Narain Harkoli and other principal Citizens of Sitapur were eagerly awaiting my arrival. After resting there also for some days, I proceeded via Haridwar and Rishikesh and eventually reached the Guha.

CHAPTER - 22

405. Mere sight of Mother Ganga itself purifies the mind. But the greatness of a bath in the Ganga, has to be simply experienced. *“Punaatu Bhagavatyambaa Gangaa Dussanganaasinee Tanotu Bhaktim Vimalaam Nissreyasasukhaavahaam”*. “O, Mother Ganga, who destroys bad company! After completely removing the mental impurities of this humble soul, please grant me that pure devotion which alone is the cause of supreme bliss” - this alone is my wish and entreaty.

406. The nature of my life here (in Vasishta Guha) undergoes a change. Bath in the Ganga, life in the Guha, a life of solitude, beholding divinely scenic beauty, all these help considerably in affording peace and tranquillity to the mind. *“Guhaayaam Nihitam Tatvam”*. The Supreme Truth is hidden in the Guha (the cave of the heart). Although this vedic utterance pertains to the cave of the heart, yet, external “mountain caves” are also of considerable help to saadhakas to realise and understand and experience this profound vedic statement. So far as I am concerned this is literally true. Just like a ship caught and tossed about in a fierce storm and about to capsize in the sea, consider the tragic state of a mind caught up and tossed in the raging storm of greed, lust, anger, etc. Even in such terribly frightening situations, if you just enter inside a cave and consider yourself, all the undesirable emotions in the heart vanish just like darkness at sunrise. And one then feels compelled to continue

remaining there for ever. One forgets the very existence of the world outside. The mind experiences utter tranquillity. Right from the recesses of the heart emerges the sound “*Dhanyoham, Dhanyoham*” (O, fortunate indeed am I! I am indeed extremely blessed! - Tr). Right then I happen to remember Bharthhari’s beautiful sloka -

*“Dhanyoham girikandareshu vasataam
Jyotishpadam Dhyaayataam Aanandaasrukanaan
Pibanti Sakunaa Nissankamankesayaah”*

The blessed ones remain seated in the mountain caves, meditating on that Supreme Jyoti (Effulgence) and experiencing Bliss Absolute. Sitting on their laps without the slightest trace of fear, birds taste the tears of joy shed by these fortunate ones. Learned readers should not misunderstand me here. I have not been able to attain this state or come anywhere near it. All I have been able to achieve is to guess a little bit of what such a blissful state could be!

407. “*Moksham Icchasi Chet taata vishayaan Vishavattyaja*” - “If you earnestly aspire for liberation, you must necessarily shun sensual pleasures as though they are poison and totally abandon them:” All this solitary life is for the purpose of attaining complete and total detachment from the senses and the sense objects. It is also necessary to peruse good spiritual texts. What I am reading more and more these days is the “*Yoga Vaasishtam*”. I used to peruse through and make a survey of spiritual texts when I was staying in Uttar Kashi, particularly texts on Vedanta. With the increasing attention to Vedanta texts,

my affinity for texts such as the Bhagavatham started declining correspondingly to the point of total cessation. I gave away to somebody the copy of the Bhagavatam text that I had with me all these years. Now I spend the time in bath, meditation, Japa and reading of Vedanta texts. People keep coming and going; one or two persons used to stay with me in the Guha as though permanently.

“Saalyannam Saghratam Payodadhiyutam yey Bhunjate maanavaah teshaam indriyanigraho yadi bhavet Vindhyah plavet saagare” (If one were to consume daily sweet rice, mixed with ghee and together with milk and curd too and still one could attain control of the senses, then surely the Vindhya mountains will plunge into the sea - Tr). Once when I had been in Sitapur, all I could get were milk and fruits. By consuming them, the stomach felt very light. If the truth were to be told, all the spiritual exercises such as meditation, etc. start with the stomach and remain there.

408. *“Aahaarasuddhau Satvasuddhih, Satva-Suddhhau Sthiraamatih, matilabhye sarvagranthinaam vipramokshah”* (Chhandogyopanishad) - Bodily purity lies in the purity of the food one takes. In bodily purity lies steadiness of the mind and intellect. In such steadiness of the mind and the intellect, all the knots and bonds of attachment and bondage get torn asunder once and for all.

409. I have now adopted *“Ayachaka Vritti”* (i.e. not requesting or begging anybody for anything in life, including food -Tr).

“*Yogakshemam Vahaamyaham*”. As I had attained complete faith in this assurance of the Lord, I do not experience the need to ask others for anything. My personal expenditure is so little. But Brahmacharis, Sanyasis and householders (pilgrims and travellers) keep on coming and going and so the expenditure keeps on increasing. Everything is looked after by the Almighty.

CHAPTER - 23

410. It was in 1936 A.D. that I returned to the Guha after my Kerala sojourn. By then the road upto Kirti Nagar had been laid, which could carry buses. This new convenience induced me to go often to Badrinath. It had become possible for me to stay in Badri independently for as long as four months every time I went to Badri. I was acquainted with the then Maharaja of Tehri.

411. When desire, greed and lust rear their heads in the mind, the propensity to neutralise and destroy them is also the trait and characteristic of the mind. But I had understood and learnt from the Swamiji that a heart can really be considered to be extremely pure only if it does not at all give room for these emotions even to be generated in it. The object of my pilgrimages and spiritual sadhanas was to attain this state of mind. Although I have felt several times that I have been able to attain such a state, when I mix with worldly people, all this seems to get lost.

412. Brahma Shamsheer Jung Bahadur, the Crown Prince of Nepal once happened to come to Vasishta Guha. He became a good friend of mine. The famous Pasupati Natha temple is in Nepal. Outsiders cannot enter Nepal without special permission. But on Sivaratri day anybody can visit the temple for darshan of Pasupatinath without let or hindrance. Several Sadhus and

house-holders go there on that occasion. For the convenience of pilgrims, dharmashalas have been established at various places. Food is also provided free to the poor.

413. I went from Lucknow up to Raxaul by train. There was nobody with me. I used to prefer travelling alone to travelling in company. As soon as I reached Rexaul, I gave information to the Prince over the telephone. Through some officials he made all the arrangements for my stay. After staying there for two or three days, comfortably, I continued the journey by rail. The railway line was there for nearly 100 miles (160 km) more. After that one can go by bus. The last 20 miles (32 km) had to be covered on foot. One can also travel in a “Daandee” carried by four persons. The Prince had also sent a person to escort me. Going by Daandee, I reached Nepal one evening. The Prince was expecting me there, along with his friends. He sent me by his car for stay in an Ashram about 2-3 miles away (3-5 km).

414. Heavy materials like motor cars etc are moved from the railway station near Nepal to Nepal by a ropeway.

415. Nepal is a tableland plain. It is convenient to move around by car along roads. Most of the people are poor. Only persons belonging to the royal family live in good buildings. It is only they who own luxury items like motor cars, etc.

416. I spent the night in the Ashram comfortably. The next day the Prince himself came to the Ashram and took me to the Pasupatinath temple. Thus I was able to get darshan of Pasupatinath also. Several elements of greatness have been

attributed to this idol. The idol is not just an ordinary linga as is usually seen in Siva temples. The idol is about four feet tall. On each of its four sides as well as on the top, there is a separate face of Lord Siva. The Sanctum Sanctorum has got four doors, one on each side. Pujas and other rites are performed on all the four sides. Devotees throng at all the four doors at that time.

417. Is not Paramasiva a five-faced God? I have already mentioned that Pasupatinath here has five faces. I append below the slokas in the stotra pertaining to these five faces.....

ATHA PASUPATI STOTRAM

*Samvartaagni tadit pradeepta kanaka praspardhi tejorunam
Gambheeradhvani saamaveda janakam taamraadharam sundaram
Ardhendudyutilolapingalajadaabhaara-prabadhoragam
Vande Siddha Suraasurendra namitam poorvam mukham soolinah 1*

*Kaalaabhra bhramaraanjanadyuti nibham vyaavrttapingekshanam
Karnodbhasita bhogimastaka mani prodbhinna damshtreaankitam
Sarvaprotaakapaalasuktisakalavyaakeernavakshoragam
Vande dakshinameeswarasyavadanam chaatharvanaabhodayam 2*

*Praaleyaachalachandrakundadhavalam goksheeraphenaprabham
Bhasmaabhyaktamanangadehadahanajvaalaavaleelochanam
Brahmendraadimarudganaarchitapadam Rgvedanaabhodayam
Vandeham sakalam kalankarahitam sthaanormukhampaschimam 3*

*Gauram kumkumapanka gandhasalilavyaapaandugandasthalam
Bhuvikshepakataakshaveekshanalasatsamsaktakarnotpalam
Snigdham bimbaphalaadharaprahasitam neelaalakam sundaram
Vande yaajusha vedaghoshajanakam vaktram harasyottaram 4*

*Vyaktaavyakta nitoopitam cha paramam shattrimasatvaatmakam
 Tasmaaduttaratavamaksharapadam dhyeyam sadaa yogibhih
 Omkaaraadisamasta mantrajanakam sookshmaadisookshmaat param
 Vandeham parameswarasya vadanamkhavyaapitejomayam* 5

*Sarvathaa yat pasoon paati taischa yabhramate saha
 Teshaamadhipatiryascha tasmaat pasupati smrtah.*

Iti Sri Pasupatistotram Sampoomam

418. After finishing darshan and touching of the deity comfortably I started staying in a dharmashala adjoining the temple. All the food items for me were being sent from the palace. Daily conversations and discussions were held on religious matters. I also visited the other famous places there. And thus Sivaratri too passed. Now all the pilgrims were in a rush for getting back. It is not usual for pilgrims to stay there for more than seven days without the special permission of the King. I too decided to get back. A royal attendant brought me up to Raxaul. From Raxaul I again reached Lucknow.

419. After spending a few days in Lucknow and Sitapur, I once again reached Vasishta Guha. In Lucknow I was staying mostly in Shukla Ghat. A rich landlord of Lucknow, one Shri Devi Prasad Shukla, had constructed a very beautiful two-storeyed building on the bank of the Gomati river, as a memorial to his dear departed wife. He became a good friend and devotee of mine. He used to spend his money cheerfully on good things, in good deeds. Everyday religious and spiritual activities

used to be carried on in the house. Abhisheka to Siva, puja, chanting of the Gita and Srimad Bhagavata Parayanam, as also a Gitayagna under my supervision and leadership were conducted with great care, devotion and faith. He had also established an English Middle School. Then he developed it into a High School. I performed the foundation laying ceremony as well as the inauguration of the High school building. Whenever I used to visit Lucknow, I used to visit that High School and speak a few words of advice to the students. Now the High School has grown into a good intermediate college. After the passing away of the founder, it is his brothers who are now discharging that responsibility. Whenever I used to stay in Lucknow, bhajans, Kirtans, Parayanas, Pujas and havans used to be conducted regularly.

CHAPTER - 24

420. Back again to life in the Vasishta Guha. The goal of all mankind is to attain incessant joy. This joy resides in nothing else but peace of mind and tranquility. The moment I step inside Vasishta Guha the mind becomes calm and tranquil. It is for this reason that even if I go far away from this Guha, I rush back to it always in a hurry. Whatever emotions, thoughts or feelings I might be having, the moment I enter the Guha, all of them disappear. It is impossible to say to what a great extent my life in the Guha has conduced to my spiritual upliftment. It is 2 p.m. in the afternoon. I am sitting in a state of meditation inside the Guha. I felt as though I was hearing a voice say: “Now begin for a school” - do something to propagate literacy and knowledge. This area is the dwelling place of unlettered people. Ninety nine out of hundred among them do not know even to affix their signature. I have mentioned earlier that, even when I started life here, I had started teaching a few children of the locality. Now I have been given this ideal also. I came out of the Guha. At that time there were some persons there who were interested in me. I explained my idea to them. However their reaction was: “Without the active help and co-operation of the people here, it is impossible to start a school here, so please give up your idea”. So saying they thoroughly discouraged me.

421. I had understood quite well the mentality of the local people. Not only can no help be expected or would be forthcoming from them, but what is worse, one would have to incur their hostility and displeasure. They do not have the least desire to get their children educated. Their main vocation is agriculture. It is very difficult to do agriculture properly in this hilly terrain. If the children are sent away to the school, then who will do all the work? Here every one possesses land fit for cultivation. As all the land is the property of the king, the villagers who till the land and who feel as though they own it, have no right of selling away the land. Nobody here starves for want of food. Everyone cultivates the grains he needs. Wheat, paddy, pulses and lentils, vegetables, etc., are grown here. They depend entirely on the rain-god for their agricultural needs. Should the rains fail, the area used to come under the grip of famine. But nowadays, since roads have been laid, in critical times, the Government sends the necessary food items from other areas by road.

422. It was in such a place that I got the “inducement” to get a school established. I tried my best to desist from this endeavour but did not succeed. On the other hand, the more I tried to abandon the idea, the more did it gain strength and goad me. Why labour the point? For achieving this objective, the very next day I reached the Raj Bhavan in Narendranagar. The then King, Sri Narendra Shah, used to know me well. There is a beautiful building, about a mile (1½ km) away from the Guha, on the bank of the Ganga, for the use of the Maharaja whenever he used to visit this area. He would also come and see

me in the Guha whenever he used to come to that bungalow. I discussed with him regarding the proposal to establish a School. He agreed to establish a primary school. And ere long a Tehri Government Primary School was established there.

423. I experienced considerable relief. Soon, under pressure from some leading persons there, I started corresponding with the Tehri Government regarding the establishment of a Middle School there. Orders were passed that if we could get a building constructed for the purpose on our own, the Government would accord permission for a Middle School. They also sent me the plan for the building. We started collecting funds. Some money was collected without too much effort. We also got from the Govrnment the timber needed for the building. After collecting construction materials such as cement, lime, iron rods, etc., construction work began. In three months, a hall and a room on either side of it, were more or less ready. What remained was doors and windows, verandah, and plastering. The Middle School has begun to function. In the Primary School building itself, classes 6, 7 and 8 were begun. The Government also appointed three teachers. All the money collected has been spent and so the work was suspended temporarily. My body also became very weak. Owing to the recurrence of the pain in my legs, I could not walk as much as was needed.

424. Now what is to be done? Thinking, let this body perish, I was compelled to go away from the Guha. For some days I stayed at the Ramakrishna Ashram at Haridwar, undergoing treatment. From there via Delhi and Madras, I proceeded to

Kanchipuram and stayed in the Narayana Seva Ashram for a month or two. When I underwent ayurvedic treatment such as Pizhichil and Kizhi, I got some relief. From there I went to Kalahasti and worshipped at the famous Siva and other temples. When I was staying there comfortably; all of a sudden I got a telegram: “Badly ill come soon”, Shri R.C. Shukla M.B.B.S. is a long-time friend of mine. Even when he was studying in the Middle School in Lucknow, he used to come to me regularly. He has come to the Guha also several times. He is a person with a special devotion towards me. As soon as I got his telegram, I gave up all other thoughts and plans and started immediately by rail for Nagpur. This was in 1949. He was waiting in the Nagpur station. He looked to be very ill. We reached his house. His wife and two sons are staying with him. Hearing about his illness, his father too has come there. All of them were totally nonplussed. He is a Principal Instructor in a Medical School in Nagpur, with a monthly salary of Rs.400 or 500. The disease was a form of epilepsy. They have faith in me. Within 2-3 days of my arrival, he got complete relief. I stayed there happily for a few more days.

425. Now I am receiving letters continuously from various places. I did not wish to return to the Guha. Still, because of the persuasiveness of these letters I reached Lucknow. All my friends there felt happy. From there, I started once again for the Guha. We resumed the construction work in the School building; and students started attending classes in the new building.

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426. The year 1950 A.D. is indeed a most memorable one. The fierce struggle for independence by the national organisation under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, the nation's father; the gaining of Independence for Bharat Varsha by peaceful, non-violent struggle based on "Ahimsa (Non-violence)" without having resort to either arms and weapons or feelings of hostility; was not the year 1950 the one in which we attained full independence?* All the independent native states which had then been administering themselves through their rulers, became part and parcel of unified India. The State of Tehri merged with Uttar Pradesh and its ruler remained a King only in name.

427. *"Maalikamukaleriya mannante tholil maaraappu Kettunnathum Bhavaan"* (This is a quotation from the famous Malayalam spiritual poem entitled *"Jnaana Paana"* composed by the famous Poonthanam Namboodiri and means - "It is but You who, in a split second, bring the King reigning supreme from his palace to the ordinary street like a common man and make him carry a burden on his back". - Tr). An undivided India now became split into two portions. The area claimed by and allotted to the Muslims became known as Pakistan. I do not

* Swamiji is mentioning about the new Constitution of Indian republic from 26 January 1950

think it is necessary to describe here the fiendish and devilish acts of terror and violence and rampage and havoc wrought all over Bharata Varsha, particularly in Punjab and in East Bengal: In a moment lakhs of rich land-lords in those areas were forced to seek the streets, begging for their very food. Things, properties, houses, land, which they took pride in as their own possessions, in seconds came under the control of others. Somehow, bearing unimaginable hardships, they reached partitioned India for refuge. And the Government of India magnanimously gives them shelter and help. I am now in the Guha. There too some refugees happened to come. These persons too, instead of begging, took up whatever work or activity they could and eked their livelihood thus. Mahatma Gandhi had tried his utmost to bring unity and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. In the end he too became reduced to a mere name.

428. Work on completing the School building is continuing. The Queen of the Maharaja of Tehri also gave some donation. Almost all the rooms, barring a few ones, and the verandah have been completed. It was possible to construct the building without undue difficulty because of the help rendered by several gentlemen.

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429. In 1952 an important official of the Railways took me to Bombay in his saloon. Pandit Hans Raj Nagar was also with me. We reached a very beautiful bungalow in Malabar Hill in Bombay. I happened to stay here for about a month. In the evenings I used to proceed to the beach, take a bath in the sea, rest there itself and then return home. I visited the important temples and places there. I also visited the Sadhus and Mahatmas. I returned to the Guha via Lucknow.

430. I happened to go to Simla in 1953. There too I stayed for a month. That stay improved my health somewhat. From there, via Delhi, I reached Lucknow. After staying there for some days, I again returned to the Guha.

431. The Purnakumbh in Prayag was in 1953. It is the ancient Prayag which is now called Allahabad. This is a famous place for Hindus. The confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna is here. Mythology has it that the Saraswati River, in an invisible form, also joins these two rivers at this point. It is the point of confluence of the three rivers that is called Triveni.

432. There are 12 Signs of the Zodiac (Raasis). Jupiter(Guru) takes one year to move from one rasi to the next: The, Kumbh in Prayag is celebrated when Jupiter comes into the Makara Rasi (Capricorn). Jupiter passes through Makara Rasi only once

in 12 years. Thus Purna Kumbh comes regularly once in 12 years. At this auspicious time, lakhs of Sadhus, Mahatmas and householder pilgrims come to Prayag for bath in the Triveni Sangam. Dasanami Sanyasis, Vairagis, Udaasis, Sadhus and Mahatmas of these and other religious faiths congregate on the banks of the Ganga and live there in tents or even in the open, engaging themselves in bhajanam and other spiritual and religious pursuits. Prayag has a speciality in the month of Maagha. Householder couples also come here for bath in the Triveni in Magha and camp there. This type of stay where the couples stay in separate huts or structures, imbibing only limited food and engaging themselves in Bhajans, Parayana of sacred texts, etc., is known as “Kalpavaasa”. This type of Melas takes place in Prayag every year. I too have performed this type of Kalpavaasa four or five times. The bath in the confluence at Triveni is so delightful and refreshing. Many diseases get cured totally thereby. Even on occasions when I had been racked by severe rheumatic pains, the Triveni bath has afforded me considerable relief.

433. This year, the Mauni Amavasya day was a very special day for a dip in the Triveni. Prime Minister Nehru, President Rajendra Prasad, Governor Shri K.M. Munshi and other prominent personalities had also come there on that day. The crowd of Sadhus and pilgrims was very much larger than what had been anticipated. Because of inadequate control and supervision by the Police, thousands of pilgrims met with a tragic end; caught in the terrible squeeze. What had happened was that, if some persons happened to fall down in the pressure of

the people, the others who keep on moving from behind like a surging tide, trample over those bodies and grind them to death, not caring in the least to see whether they are men or women. Several fell into the flood of the river. I finished my bath very early in the morning in the Triveni and came and sat in my place. Many officers such as the District Collector and others were quite well-known to me. There were also 8-10 persons who had travelled with me from Lucknow. This tragic incident occurred at 8 O'Clock in the morning. The Supreme Being does so many things. *“Ghoratara samsaarasaagarathilninnenne traananam cheytedane taarakabrahmade”* (O the Supreme Being who helps people to cross the ocean of Samsara! Please protect me from that terrible ocean of Samsara” - Tr).

434. From Prayag I returned to Lucknow. I developed some kind of fever and pain. My stay was in Shukla Ghat. I was indifferent to medical treatment. Nevertheless all my friends brought various doctors and Vaidyas. I became all right within a few days. Sivaratri that year, was spent there itself. Travelling via Bareilly, Moradabad and Delhi, I reached Rishikesh and then, going by bus from there, I reached the Guha.

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435. In August 1951, I arrived at Delhi from the Guha. I stayed there as the guest of a gentleman for a few days. From there, I suddenly reached Madras. I stayed comfortably in the Sri Ramakrishna Mission for 6-7 days. When I used to go to the beach daily for my bath in the sea some students also used to accompany me. They used to attend the Ashram daily. Every night, after dinner they used to have Satsang also. On the way to Madras, I happened to rest for a few days in the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Rajamundry. A friend of mine, Shri Ramakrishna Rao, took me to the Godavari delta. This place is very picturesque. There are several coconut trees also here. At first sight it would look like Kerala itself. There is an ancient Siva Temple here. The legend behind that temple is as follows: In olden times, these places were all occupied by dense forests. A poor Brahmana happened to get caught one evening inside the forest. A tiger followed him. The man climbed atop a large Bilva tree and escaped from the tiger. The tiger continued to stand at the foot of the tree, awaiting the man's descent from the tree. The Brahmana, however, spent the whole night, sitting on the tree, chanting stotras and doing japa. With the Bilva leaves he performed archana (puja) also. All these leaves fell on top of the tiger. What the Brahmanas saw when the sun rose was not the tiger but a Siva Linga in its place. He climbed down from the tree and worshipped that

Sivalinga by offering puja. He apprised the residents of the town of this fact. The people, completely overwhelmed by surprise, visited that place in large numbers and had darshan of this Sivalinga. They also built a temple there. I felt a desire to stay there for a few days. That did not materialise immediately. From Madras I went direct to the Ashram at Ottappalam. The person who established this Ashram, Swamiji Nirmalanandaji, has also since attained Samadhi. (Swami Nirmalanandaji attained Samadhi on 26.04.1938.) The late Swamiji had spent his last days in the Ottappalam Ashram itself. There is thus a special sanctity for this Ashram. I could stay there only for a night. Shri Kundu Panickar was a person who was most interested in me. He came to know about my arrival at Ottappalam. Immediately his dear son comes to Ottappalam Ashram with their car, to take me to their residence at Cheruppullassery. When I reached there Shri Panickar his wife and sons were very happy. I stayed there for three days. Kundu Panickar is not an ordinary person. Although he suffered from several bodily ailments he always kept a smiling face. He is unable even to change his posture or to turn round without help. When he sees me he gets a special strength. He gets up and sits on his bed and stands up on the ground on his own. A Bhagavata Paarayanam was in progress in a nearby Ayyappa temple. At the request of several prominent persons that I should also participate in that function when I was proceeding to the temple in the car, Shri Panickar also accompanied me. That noble person is now no more. Time annihilates everyone, but nobody realises this fact. What can be more surprising or strange than this.

436. From that place, along with Kunjikkaavamma, a great patriot, I reached Ottappalam Ashram by car in one night. The

noble lady, Palaat Parukkutty Amma was a great devotee of Shri Swamiji when he was alive. On the way, I called at that noble lady's house. My friend, Shri Chinmayananda Swamiji, is now staying in the Ashram: He took me to the Swamiji's Poorvashrama. We went mostly on foot after crossing the Bharata puzha. On the way we accepted the hospitality of some noble gentlemen in Paruthippally. I spent a day or two in a temple of the Goddess also. Then the Paaliathu Cheria Achchan took me to his residence. There, in the upper portion of a solitary mansion, I spent 2-3 days comfortably. His daughters were specially proficient in music. I still recall with pleasure the sweetness of their devotional kirtanas(songs). He has also several temples belonging to him. I am going to say something about one of these temples, situated about 3 miles (5km) away. Several persons came to me from that temple and, to the accompaniment of bhajans and music and drums, they escorted me to that temple. Here, any Hindu could do pujas without any regard to caste or creed. It is a beautiful place. After spending a night in that temple, I returned to the Achchan's Mansion. Then Shri Damodaran Nair, B.A.,B.L., Vakil(Advocate) from Palakkad, took me there. An Ashram by name "Vijnaana Ramaneeyam" had been established under his auspices. Several gentlemen used to come there daily and do meditation and other spiritual exercises. Attached to it there was also a small library. After spending two days there, I proceeded direct to Guruvayoor by car. Damodaran Nair, Swami Jnaanaananda and Sadhu Balaramji were also with me. On the way we visited some schools. We reached Guruvayoor at 8'O clock in the night. The temple

authorities gave us all the necessary help and facilities. After darshan of the Lord and after taking a little food, I rested in a building owned by the temple. Sadhu Balaramji also stayed with me. The others returned by car then itself to Palakkad.

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437. Early next morning, I went to the nearby Mammiyoor temple and had my bath, etc. there. This is a solitary place. So I had my meditation there itself. Then I had darshan of the deity at Guruvayoor and returned to my place of stay. Many persons came to see me there. Items of food used to be sent to me from the temple itself. The then Manager of the temple was a close friend of Retired Judge Shri Krishnan Nair. Shri Nair had already written to him about me. The Manager fixed up a very good and convenient building close to the temple, for my stay. I stayed there only for three days. On two days, in the feeding hall, discourses were given by me on religious matters, at the request of the temple management. On the fourth day, at 8 O' clock in the morning, I left for Trissivaperur (Trichur). Kunjikkaavamma, Janaki Amma and Sadhu Balaramji were with me. By 10 a.m. we reached the Ramakrishna Ashram at Trichur. The Chief there at that time was Swami Iswarananda. He was very happy. Attached to the Ashram was a High School and a Sarada Mandir. I visited them all. In the evening, here too I gave some discourses. The third day I started for Ernakulam. After accepting a gentleman's hospitality in Ernakulam, I reached the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Vaittila. The Chief there was Sri Puranjanananda Swamiji. This is a beautiful place. The affairs of the Ashram are going on smoothly, there is also a dispensary attached to this Ashram. Here poor patients are supplied free

medicines. I gave some discourses here also. Sri Nirvikarananda Swamiji, President of the Kozhikode Ashram, happened to come (to Vaittila) along with a few gentlemen. In accordance with his wishes, I gave Mantropadesa to some gentlemen while here. Here too I stayed for three days comfortably.

438. From Thiruvananthapuram, I used to receive letters very frequently from Swamiji's devotee, Shri Sankaravelil Parameswaran Pillai. His dear wife is also one of Swamiji's devotees. She was lying bedridden then. Along with her husband and their two children, she had come and stayed for 6-7 days in the Sri Nirmalalaya near Vasishta Guha. She is extremely desirous of seeing me. So, one fine morning I left by bus from this Ashram for Thiruvananthapuram. Kunjikkavamma, Sadhu Balaramji and a householder Sri Raman Nair, were also with me: We reached Thiruvananthapuram at noon time. From the bus stand we reached Shri Parameswaran Pillai's residence.

439. I am unable to express in words the happiness of the bedridden patient. It was she herself who first saw me. Although bedridden, she sat up suddenly on seeing me. At that time Shri Pillai, his two sons and his daughters were there. I had my bath and rested for a while. It was not convenient for all of us to stay there. The persons who accompanied me had come with the intention of proceeding to Kanyakumari. By Pillai's car, we reached the chowltry in Kanyakumari by 9 p.m. The next day was Amavasya (New Moon day). Many people had congregated there for bath in the sea and for worshipping the Goddess. We had great difficulty in securing a place to stay.

Here too, with the assistance of the Executive Officer of the Temple, we got a suitable place to stay. We stayed there for three days, having bath and darshan of the Goddess. My friend and class mate, Shri Pranavananda Swamiji was staying there. He has stayed with me in the Guha too. He too started with me one evening for Thiruvananthapuram. After resting for a while at Suchindram, we continued the journey. When we reached the Thiruvananthapuram bus stand it was 10 O'clock at night. From the bus stand all of us reached the Ramakrishna Ashram in the city. The Chief there, Swami Tapasyananda, welcomed all of us with great joy and extended all hospitality to us. All the others who were with me left for different places. Only Sadhu Balaramji stayed with me in the Ashram.

440. I then went to the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Vattiyoorkaavu in Thiruvananthapuram established by Shri Swamiji and stayed there happily for 2-3 days. This is indeed a beautiful place. A fit place for tapasya. Swami Tapasyananda also came there when I was staying in that Ashram. It was through him that all the expenses of this Ashram were being met.

441. A young person, Srinivasan by, name, who had become acquainted with me at the Ashram at Madras, also came to see me at the Vattiyoorkaavu Ashram. Several gentlemen used to come from Thiruvananthapuram town. In accordance with their wishes, I left for the Thiruvananthapuram city, for a few days' stay. I stayed in the residence of Shri Narayana Pillai, Chief Physician of the Dhanwantari Matham Ayurvedic Oushadhaalaya (Pharmacy). Going to Sri Padmanabha Swami temple, I had darshan of "Ananthasayanam" too.

442. Here, in Thiruvananthapuram, there is a Hindu Religious Library with the name of the ruler Sri Chithira Tirunal. Its Curator was Sri Seshadri, B.A.M.L. I went to the Library and auditorium and gave discourses on two days. Our respected Dr. Tampi is now seriously indisposed. He was then staying in his bungalow in the Thiruvananthapuram beach; his wife was also there attending on her sick husband with devotion. His son Dr. Kesavan Nair is the present Chief Medical Officer in Thiruvananthapuram. One night I went to his house in the beach and stayed there. Dr. Tampi was the backbone of the Shri Ramakrishna Sangh in Travancore State. He certainly does not deserve to be in this sad state of health. Let God give him peace.

443. Shri M.R. Narayana Pillai, who was one of the most prominent followers of Swamiji, has also ceased to be in this world, leaving behind just a name. Along with Sankaravelil Shri Parameswaran Pillai, I went to his (late Narayana Pillai's) house and met his wife, sons and others. I also accepted the hospitality of some gentlemen. My stay in the Dhanwantari Matham was very happy and pleasurable indeed. From here, I proceeded to Chengannur in the Physician's own car. On the way I visited the Sadananda Ashram also. I then visited Karunakaran Nair's house in Adoor. There I had food, etc. and rested. I happened to go to the Ramakrishna Ashram there, where I met Swami Narasimhananda.

444. I reached the front entrance of the Chengannur temple at about 4 p.m. in the afternoon. While I was fixing up arrangements

to stay that night there, Vaidyaraj Narayana Pillai arrived at Chengannur by car from Aaranmula, and he took me and party also along with him. After darshan in the temple, I stayed at his house.

445. Vasu Pillai, the son of Pullat Vaidyan Narayana Panickar also happened to come there. The next morning Vasu Pillai took us to his house in Pullat. I stayed there for 2-3 days. I went to the High School belonging to the Vaidyan and talked a few words of advice to the students.

446. One morning around 10 a.m. I reached the Ashram at Tiruvalla from Pullat. Sekharananda Swamiji was the then Head of that Ashram. Niranjanananda Swamiji, Vaageeswarananda Swamiji, Nirvikarananda Swamiji, Dharmananda Swamiji and others were also staying there. Here too I stayed happily for 3 days. I went to the Tiruvalla temple and worshipped Sri Vallabha. The Dewaswam Chief (i.e. head of the department administering temples in Travancore State), Sri Raman Namboodiripad, was acquainted with me while in Thiruvananthapuram. He came to the Ashram and took me to the local Hindu High School. I gave some advice to the students. I had a great ambition to establish a Hindu School and had made great efforts also towards that end. Now that ambition has been realised through others. From there, Namboodiripad took me to the Chengannur temple. After bath in the Pampa river and darshan of Goddess Parvati and Lord Siva, I returned to Tiruvalla. Accepting Nirvikarananda Swamiji's mother's invitation, I went to Maaveli House. I particularly enjoyed the bliss of the nama-sankeertan which was

in progress there. After taking bhiksha there I returned to the Tiruvalla Ashram in the night itself and rested. I also accepted bhiksha at Thevanamkottu Namboodiri's residence. A gentleman by name Sudevan called on me at the Tiruvalla Ashram and accepted the advice given by me to him in spiritual matters.

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447. The authority to perform the pujas in the Badri Nath temple is vested exclusively in Namboodiri Brahmins from Kerala. They have also to be brahmacharis so long as they perform the pujas there. The custom is for the Maharajas of Travancore and Cochin, at the specific request of the Maharaja of Tehri, to scrutinise suitable candidates and select and send one of them. These priests were entitled “Rawal”, and the honorific title “Rawal Saheb” was used for them customarily out of deference. Govindan Namboodiri who now stays in Talavadi near Tiruvalla in Kerala was one such Rawal Saheb. I became deeply acquainted with him even at Badri. As he wished to see me in Talavadi, he happened to invite me to his residence, there. I went by country craft by the waterway. Srinivasan and Sadhu Balaramji were also with me. The Rawal himself had sent the country craft to take me. Leaving Tiruvalla at 3 p.m. one afternoon, we reached Talavadi around 5 p.m. That was the time of floods there and the Rawal’s house was completely surrounded by water.

448. The Rawal Saheb was very happy. I spent the night there happily. To speak the truth, that place was inconvenient in all respects, but because of his extremely good heart and his excellent treatment, I forgot everything and remained there happily. The next day after the mid-day meal,

I left by river craft and reached the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Haripad around 5 p.m.

449. The Chief of this Ashram was Swami Chitsukhananda. Accepting his warm and very cordial hospitality, I stayed there for a day or two. Chitprabhananda Swamiji also treated me with great cordiality. Even in my boyhood I used to visit as many temples as possible. In accordance with this custom I worshipped Lord Subramanya at the Haripad temple and sat in the Mandapam there and did meditation and japa for some time. Accepting prasada from the temple, I returned at night to the Haripad Ashram along with Swami Chitsukhananda.

450. Harikathas used to be performed even before. But the present day Harikathas have undergone a change in their nature and content. In the Ashram I witnessed a Harikatha performance in which there were also songs and dances by young girls.

451. A little farther away from the Ashram there is a Bhattathiri's (a Malayalam Namboodiri Brahmin's) residence. The Kuzhikkaat Namboodiris of Tiruvalla were very famous. They were called "Tantris" as they were in charge of the tantric rites of certain temples. Everybody used to respect them. One of the Kuzhikkaat Bhattathiris has his residence at Haripad. I went to his residence at his request. I gave several discourses there about the subject of religion. Everyone was happy. The next day myself and the other inmates of the Ashram had bhiksha there.

452. Under Chitsukhananda Swamiji's supervision, in addition to the Ashram at Haripad, there are also two other Ramakrishna

Ashrams, one each at Muttam and Kayamkulam. When I was living in the Guha several persons used to stay with me there from time to time. A young person from Mankuzhi near Kayamkulam was one such person. His name now is Balananda Swami. He has been expecting me for quite some time now. From Haripad Ashram I reached the Ashram at Muttam, where I stayed comfortably for 2-3 days. Balananda Swamiji reached there. And via Kayamkulam Ashram he took me to his place. It was only now that I was able to visit the famous place called Ochira. Balananda Swamiji desired to set up an Ashram at Ochira too. While I was staying thus with Balananda Swamiji, the Chief of the Muttam Ashram came with a car and took me to that Ashram. There too I spent the time happily with all of them for 3-4 days.

453. An incident which happened while I was there is worthy of mention. About 2 O'clock in the afternoon one day, a small boy aged seven is seen there. The moment I saw him I experienced a special affection for him. The boy too experienced affection for me. At that time certain satsangs were in progress there. Obeying what I said to him, the boy too sat down near me on the floor and started meditating. A special fervour-bliss is to be seen on the face of the boy. He continued to sit like this in this "Jnana" state for about 10-15 minutes. Not only myself but all the persons there experienced considerable joy and bliss. The boy's name was Bhaktavatsalan. His father was a Namboodiri Brahmin from Peria Mana Illam house. He was a teacher in the Government School at Haripad. I went with that boy to Peria Mana Illam too. They all received me with hospitality. The boy's

father was very happy. Although Bhaktavatsalan was a Nair boy, yet there was a special Brahmana chaitanya on his face. Is not his father a Brahmana? Not only that, the people in this household, for generations past, would give their daughters in marriage only to Brahmanas.

“Soodraayaam Braahmanajjatah

Sreyasaa chet vrajaayate

Asreyaat sreyaasim Jaatim gacchatyaa saptamaat yugaat

Soodro braahmanataameti Braahmanaaschaiti Soodrataam”.

According to this passage in Manu Smṛti, this boy is certainly a Brahmana boy. I explained this fact to the boy’s father. I also insisted that the boy be given Gayatri Mantropadesa and his Yajnopaveeta dharana ceremony also be held. His father did not resist my suggestions but at the same time, he did not have the courage to go against traditional customs and practices. Whatever it may be, there is no doubt that this Bhaktavatsalan is indeed an extremely fortunate boy.

454. From here(Muttam) along with Balananda Swamiji, I reached that famous place Ochira via Kayamkulam. God Almighty who is ever affectionate towards His devotees - what indeed does He not do for His devotees? Here it was that He appeared before the servant of a Brahmana who was devoted to Him in the form of a he-buffalo and patiently carried all the burdens of that servant for him - this story is very famous. I am visiting this famous place for the first time. I stayed here and there in that place together with Balananda Swamiji for 1-2

days and then returned to the Ashram at Muttam. After staying there for 2-3 days, I proceeded to Chengannur.

455. Some gentlemen had specially invited me to Chengannur. The conveniences available there in such matters as suitable accommodation for stay, water facilities and generally facilities for a comfortable stay, attracted me to Chengannur. I stayed there in a building belonging to the temple for 2-3 days. I went to the temple every day. On some occasions, I gave discourses on spiritual matters. From there I went to Kaviyoor where I stayed at the residence of the famous Parvathi Narayana Pillai as his guest. There too I worshipped at the temple. I also visited the High School there and spoke some words of advice to the students. From there I went once again to Tiruvalla. Shri Maadavana Raman Pillai, Inspector of Schools, took me from Kaviyoor to his house.

456. Balananda Swamiji was constructing a small building for a small Seva Ashram at a place near Kayamkulam; and the construction work has been almost completed. He invited me to perform the inauguration of that Ashram. That was a time when I was valiantly trying to wind up my Kerala sojourn and return to North India. But in deference to his wishes, I once again went via Muttam to the Seva Ashram. Chitsukhananda Swamiji had also specially accompanied me from Haripad. After participating in the inauguration ceremony, the next day I reached Alappuzha by bus. And then Ernakulam by steam boat, one night. I spent the night in a gentleman's house. The next day I reached the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Vaittila which

is at a little distance. After staying here comfortably for 2-3 days, I reached Kaladi, the birth place of Srimad Adi Sankara. At Kaladi, now there is a Shri Ramakrishna Ashram and a High School attached to it. The Chief there was Agamananda Swamiji. I was meeting him after a very long time. After spending 2 or 3 very happy days there, I proceeded to the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Puthukkad. Here the Chief was Swami Amalananda. I went to that Ashram because of his affectionate insistence. There I gave Sanyasa to one of his disciples. From there again to Trichur Ashram. I happened to tell the Ashram people at Trichur that I would be visiting them again on my way back from Kanyakumari. Iswarananda Swamiji was very pleased at my return. I stayed there for a day or two during which I gave some spiritual discourses also.

457. Many people in Kozhikode were eagerly awaiting my arrival there. Particularly, Nirvikarananda Swamiji had also reached Kozhikode from Trichur. In Kozhikode too I gave some discourses. From there I went to Shri Kundu Panickar's residence in Cheruppullassery. He was eagerly expecting my arrival. After staying there for a day or two, I once again returned to Ottappalam. Kunjikkavamma, Sri Krishnan Nair and Chinmayananda Swamiji were also with me. On the way we also went to the house of Kunjikkavamma. Once that very devoted mother had even come to Vasishta Guha. One Janaki Amma's house is also near this place. We spent the night there. The next day was September 8. Close by, the Divine Life Society people were celebrating the birth anniversary of Swami Sivananda. I

too participated in that function. From there, I reached the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Ottappalam at 10 a.m. in the morning, and rested.

458. The Head of this Ashram was Swami Kailasanandaji. Not only he, but all the others in that Ashram too had compelled me to return to the Ashram on my way back to North India. It was in compliance with their wishes that I had now gone again to Ottappalam. I stayed there for a day or two. It was difficult to get a seat in the train. I could not meet Sukhananda Swamiji on this occasion. He is Chief in the Kanchipuram Ashram. I went there with some young persons. I also went to the Narayana Seva Ashram there. After staying in Kanchipuram Ashram for a day or two I returned to Madras. And then I reached Lucknow by train.

459. I now developed a slight illness. I stayed in the Shukhla Ghat itself, there, for some days. When I regained my usual health, I started for the Guha. I am staying happily in the Guha.

CHAPTER - 30

- 460.** *Buddhya visuddhayaa yukto dhrityaatmaanam niyamyacha
 Sabdaadeen vishayaamstaktvaa raagadveshauvyudasya cha
 Viviktasevee laghvaasee yatavaakkaaya maanasah
 Dhyaana yogaparo nityam vairaagyam samupaasritah
 Ahamkaaram balam darpam kaamam krodham parigraham
 Vimuchya nirmamah saanto Brahmabhooyaaya kalpate
 Brahmabhootah prasannaatmaa nasochati nakaamkshati
 Samah sarveshubhooteshu matbhaktim labhate paraam
 Bhaktya maamabhijaanaati yaavaan yaschaasmitatvatah
 Tato maam tatvatojnaatvaa visate tadanantarm.
 - *Srimad Bhagavad Gita - 18th Chapter, Mantras 51 - 55.**

(Meaning as given by the Translator)

In union by purified intelligence, of steady self-control,
 renouncing sound and other objects of the senses, rid of all
 likes and dislikes, resorting to solitude, in diet spare, in body,
 speech and mind controlled, ever practising Yoga of meditation,
 firm of detachment,

Free from “I-ness” and “My-ness”, mightiness and arrogance,
 rid of desire, wrath and possession, become calm, such a one
 is fit to become the Brahman. (51-53).

When one has become the Brahman,

When one is serene in soul,

He neither grieves nor desires,
Equal to all beings, he gets supreme devotion to Me (54)
By devotion he comes to know Me,
Who and What I am in Essence,
Having thus known Me, into Me he enters. (55)

461. Even when I had first started reading the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, I had given particular attention to the portion extracted above. Vasishta Guha is a fit place for leading such a life. What can I say about my great good fortune in being able to come here and stay here continuously? It is all God's compassion. Even on those occasions when the mind has impelled me towards sense-oriented acts, it is this Guha that has saved me. It is not that I have not been forcefully directed into wrong paths involving the gratification of the senses. I have not sullied my genital organs in any way which is either unnatural i.e., against nature, or even in accordance with the normal and accepted sense of nature. Is not the entire world running after women for the gratification of sexual pleasures? I do not know anything at all about this subject. Now, in the month of July 1955, I have, just completed 75 years of age. Nevertheless age has not touched my heart in the least. When others who are very much younger than me talk to me about their old age - "I have become very old; now what should I do?" When they express their misery like this, I simply am unable to resist my laughter. Despite this age of mine, my heart continues to be still like that of a child! What should I say about Brahmacharya?

*"Anumodaamahe Brahmacharyamekantanirmalam
Dharmyam yasasyam aayushyam Lokadvayarasaayanam"*

The austere life of a Brahmachari, just like an invigorating ayurvedic rasaayana which rejuvenates, confers happiness and health in both this world and in the hereafter.

462. Not withstanding all this, the mind has on several occasions, turned to sensual pleasures. But I never had occasion to rub shoulders with persons addicted to sensual pleasures - I must say that all this was due to the compassion of the Almighty. It was in my 18th year that I got the severe attack of rheumatism. Navarakkizhi and Pizhichl were done regularly five times. I had to take ghee, milk and Kashayas every day. Are not all these conducive to nourishment of the senses and the genitals? It was the spiritual texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavatam that enabled me to steer clear without sliding into the path of the senses. Even from a young age, the “Vaasanas” for the senses and the “Vaasanas” for the Lord were undergoing a severe mutual conflict. I had also a deep-rooted desire that I should have great devotion to God. God’s blessings which resulted from this thought and desire were the only things that protected me.

463. I used to carry on prayers, reading of spiritual texts and meditation regularly. I have never spent the sandhya times at morning and evening (i.e. dawn and dusk) without doing prayer and meditation. Even while travelling by train, I used to sit in a corner quietly without talking to anybody and do my prayers and meditation. This has become a habit with me. My greatest ambition was to become God’s foremost devotee. But now all I desire is that “He should grant me the place of a servant to His devotees’ devotees”.

“*Mama Maaya Duratyayaa*” - Are these not the great words of the Lord? Sri Vivekananda Swami has compared Maaya (Delusion) to rheumatism. When you try to drive away rheumatism from the head, it migrates to the neck; from the neck if you try to drive it away; it goes and resides in the back region. From there, in the hands, legs or feet. You cannot totally and permanently drive out Maaya from the system. Although temptations were too many, God’s blessings and compassion prevented me from getting lost in them.

“*Dhaavannapyaavartaakshah skhalati nakuhachit
Devadevaakhilaatman*”.

God Himself takes personal care of His devotees at all times. Even when a bhakta(devotee) has to run blind folded or with his eyes covered with his hands along a path full of holes and trenches, God sees to it that the devotee does not fall into a pit. After all, who am I but an inadequate and insincere, false devotee? When he has looked after even me to this large extent, if one were to have true and total devotion, that person is not a mere human being - but God himself.

“*Tvatbhaktistu kathaarasaamrtajhareenirmajjanenaswayam
Sidhyantee vimalaprabodhapadaveemaklesatastanvatee
sadyassiddhikaree jayatyayi vibho saivaastu me tvatpada
Premaproudhirasaardrataa drutataram vaataalayaadheesvara*”
(*Naaraayaneeyam - 2.10*)

CHAPTER - 31

464. *“Satye na labhyastapasaahyeshanaatmaa samyag
Jnaanena Brahmacharyenanityam” - Sruti (Veda)*

If one should get elevation in the spiritual field, one must possess these four virtues necessarily - Integrity (sincerity); Tapasya (austerity and penance); Samyag Jnanam (true knowledge); and brahmacharyam. To the word “Satyam” the meaning I have assigned (or the manner in which I have taken that word to mean) is “Sincerity” or “the state of being totally free from falsehood or hypocrisy” (Nishkapatabhaava). As I have stayed in various parts of Bharata, I have been able to understand the Hindi language to a very little extent. I have also had occasion, many a time, to read that inimitable suggested Ramayanam by that most divine person, Shri Tulsidas. Shri Tulsi Maharaj (Sri Nirmalananda Swamiji - My own Guru Swamiji) himself has, within my hearing, praised Shri Tulsidas Maharaj’s Ramayanam in the most laudable terms. Just as “Upamaa Kalidasasya” so also the alankaras (figures of speech) of Tulasidas Maharaj have a majesty, grace and uniqueness of their own. I give below just one or two examples:

*“Raama naama manideep dharu Jeeha dehareem dvaara
Tulsi bheetaru baahiraehu jaum chaahasi ujeeaaruu”*

- (Balakanda-21)

Sense: A lamp placed on the door-step of a room lights up both, the outside and the inside. The door to the body is considered to be the mouth. If one places a jewelled lamp on this pedestal, both the outside of the body as well as the inside get light. This jewelled lamp is the Ramanama - go on chanting the Rama nama - then both outside and inside, everywhere, there will be the light of knowledge - yes indeed the lustre of knowledge.

*“Naath na rath nahim tanu padu traanam
Kehi bidhi jitab beeru balavaanaa”*

Sense: Vibhishana asks Sri Rama: “O, Master! you do not have the chariot, horses and other equipment necessary for warfare. Ravana is very courageous and strong. That being the case, how will you defeat Ravana?”

*“Sunahu sakhaa kahu krpaanidhaanaa
jaheem jaya hoyi so syandanu aanaa”*

Sense: Sri Rama, the embodiment of compassion says: “O, friend! The nature of the chariot one needs for getting victory is something different. Please listen to its greatness:

*“Sauraj dheeraj tehi rath chaakaa
Satya seeludrdhu dhvajaa pataaka
Balvivek dam parahit ghore
Chchamaa krpaa samataa raju jore”*

Sense: Courage and valour are the two wheels of that chariot. Truth and good conduct are the flagmast and the flag of the chariot, strength, discrimination, self-control and interest in

the good of others are the four horses. Tolerance, compassion, affection, constitute the strands of the rope which is attached to the chariot.

*“Esubhajanu saarathi sujaana
Birati charma santosh kripaana
Daanu parasu buddhi sakti prachamdhaa
Khar vigyaanu lathina Kodandaa”*

Sense: Worship of the Lord alone is the skilled charioteer. Detachment is the armour. Happiness is the sword. Charity is the axe. Good intellect is the strong spear. Noble knowledge is the hard and powerful bow.

*“Amalu achalu manu thronu samaanaa
samu jamu niyamu sileemukha naanaa
kavachu abhedu bipru guru poojaa
ehi samu bijay upaayu na dooja”*

Sense: Pure and steadfast mind is the bow - control of the senses and mind, discipline, control of anger, these are the arrows. Worship of Brahmanas and the Preceptor, these are unpierceable armour. This indeed is the way for victory, none else.

*“Sakhaa dharmamaya asa rathu jaake
jeetana kahu ena kathahu ripu taahem”*

Sense: O, friend! He who has such a chariot, what difficulty can he have in vanquishing his enemies? In fact how indeed can enemies be there at all for such a person?

*“Mahaa ajaya samsaara ripu jeeti sakala so beeru
Jaakem asu rathu hoi drdhu sunahu sukhaa matidheeru”.*

Sense: The enemy who is really invincible is “samsaara”, the unending cycle of births and deaths. O, courageous friend! If one has such a chariot, one can effortlessly defeat even this enemy samsaara (Ravana’s defeat is a mere trifle compared to this.)

The most compulsive advice given by Tulsidas Maharaj is that one must do everything without the least trace of insincerity or hypocrisy. *“Manukramu vachanu bhajanu drudhunemaa”*. With discipline, one must serve and worship with the mind, through action and in speech. *“Manasyekam vachasyekam karmanyekam Mahaatmanaam”*: great and noble people act consistently (and truly) in thought, speech and deed. Insincerity and hypocrisy are the causes of destruction. I too have tried my utmost to eliminate totally all insincerity from my life.

*“Kaitavam Vittu Bhajikkunnavarkulla
Yogavum kshemavum poorthi cheyvaan
Kamsaariyaakunna Paarthante saarathi
Sarvadaa ettamaduthiruppoo -”*

(Sense in English given by the, Translator - To completely grant yoga, i.e., attainment of things one does not as yet possess; and kshema, i.e., protection of the things one already has, to those who serve Him with total sincerity without the least trace of hypocrisy, the Lord (Krishna) Parthasarathy who is Kamsa’s annihilator, is ever beside them, just as He steered Arjuna’s chariot and also cleared all the confusion in his mind.)

465. In, October 1954, at the request of a gentleman, I had been to Prayag. I happened to stay there in a very beautiful house on the bank of the Ganga for about 3 months. That building belonged to Shri Shayam Nath Kak. There every day, religious activities used to take place. Shri I.K. Taamini, a college professor, used to bear almost the entire expenditure. Many gentlemen from Lucknow and other places also used to come and stay there for several days. It was Dr. Taamini's wife who used to take a leading part in Havans, pujas, etc. The programme was somewhat like this:

466. From 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. in the morning - Homa, puja, stotras, chanting of the Gita, chanting of the Devi - Saptasatee: Lunch at 12 noon; my talks and discourses to people who come to see me, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the evening. Several gentlemen used to come regularly for this. Dr. Taamini used to note down the questions and answers covered during these sessions. I am not covering those subjects here as they will all, ere long, be published as a book. My 76th birthday was also celebrated there itself with great ceremony. I gave discourses at several places in Allahabad. From Prayag I went to Kanpur. There I stayed as the guest of Shri A.K. Watal M.A LL.B. for 2-3 days, and then reached Shukla Ghat in Lucknow. There I stayed happily for some days; and then, in February I returned to the Guha - Peace - Absolute Peace.

467. From the time I started hearing about Shri Ramakrishna, my mind started becoming drawn to that divine person. I have already stated earlier that I started reading all the issues of the

magazine “Prabuddha Keralam” right from its very first issue. I could also perform pujas, japas, meditation, etc. for 10-12 years in the Shri Ramakrishna Ashrams at Tiruvalla, Haripad and Quilandy. My main object was indeed to gain spiritual upliftment. It was Shri Ramakrishna whom I had adopted as my ideal for that purpose. All the divine nectar of that exemplary person’s utterances are the very essence of the Gita and the Upanishads. When I used to ponder over those nectar-like words of his, I always used to experience peace and happiness. These undying and ambrosia-like words of his helped me immensely to model my spiritual life and to give it some sort of a shape, form and direction. I think it was in 1910 A.D. that Sri Swamiji once ordered me while at the Tiruvalla Ashram: “You please compose a poem about Shri Ramakrishna in the form of a song”. I give below the first song I composed.

Pallavi

*Sree Ramakrishna saranaagata janapaalanalolupa maamaka
deivame*

Charanas

*Ghoratara samsaara saagarathil ninnenne
Traananam cheytedane taarakabrahmame - Sree Rama*

*Nityamallaateyulla vastuvilonninkalum
Ettarutenmanam uttamapurusha - Sree Rama*

*Kaama Krodhaadi doshamaakave vedinjunin
Paadabhajanam cheyyaanekane anugraham - Sree Rama*

Sattu chittaanandathileppozhum muzhukiyum

Mathanaayi charippathinethumo bhaagyam mama

- Sree Rama

I happened to compose a few more songs and stotras also later. “Brahma Keertanam” which I composed for the noble mother of Sankaravelil Shri Parameswaran Pillai, has since been published. 3-4 years ago, when I was on my way to Kanyakumari and back, I happened to accept the hospitality of Sri Pullaat Vaidyar. There too I happened to sing a song: -

Jnaana Kummi

Kalyaana moorthiyaam kaarmukilvarnante

Santaapanaasamaam satcharitam

Chintichu chintichu satgateduuaa-

nente madikkunnu maalokare

- Ningal Ente Madikkunnu Maalokare (1)

Kaalam Kalayaate Paalaazhimaatinte

Maanasachoranaam Raadhesane

Aapaadamastakam dhyaanichu dhyaanichu

Maana mohaadiye Pokkiyaalum

- Seeghram Maanamohaadiye pokkiyaalum (2)

Kilbishamokkeyum pokkuvaanulloru

Siddhaushadham mahat paada seva

Sraddhayai cheykilo chittam thelinjaasu

Bhaktiyum Muktiyum labhyamaakum

-Noonam bhaktiyum muktiyum labhyamaakum (3)

*(Another version: “Buddhisaktiyum Muktiyum
labhyamaakum”)*

*Kuttikaloppam Manassinnu Suddhata
Nissangabuddhiyum Vannuvenkil
Thattikkalayaamee Samsaarabhaarathe
Pettenu Ningal arinjitenam
- Pettenu Ningal arinjitenam (5)*

*Koopamandookamaam Jeevithatheppokki
Aakaasatulyam perukitatte
Maanasam enthoru soukhyam labhichidu-
Maayaasamenniye Sarvakaalam
- Ningalkkaayaasamenniye Sarvakaalam (6)*

*Krishnante Roopavum Leelayum Orthorthu
Krishnanaaythanne Bhavikkaventoo
Trishnakalellaam nasichitu sarvavum
Krishnamayamaayi Vannukollum
- Sarvam Krishnamayamaayi Vannukollum (7)
- Sarvam Brahmamayamaayi Vannukollum)*

*Klesaikanaasana! Naaraayana! Hare!
Mokshaprada! Madhusoodaneti
Bhaktiyaa Japikkuvin Sarvarum Santatam
Melkkumel Soukhyam Bhavikkumallo -
Satyam Melkkumel Soukhyam Bhavikkumallo (8)*

*Kevalam Bhakti kontonne Labhichidoo
Kesavan Tannute Paada padmam*

Aasayaadheesanilaasayellaam vachu
Svasmin Mahimayil Ethiyaalum Vegam -
- Svasmin Mahimayil Ethiyaalum (9)

Kaitavam vittu Bhajkkunnnavarkulla
Yogavum Kshemavum poorthiyaakkaan
Kamsaariyaakunna Paarthante Saarathi
Sarvadaa Ettam Aduthirippoo -
- Sarvadaa Ettam Aduthirippoo (10)

Kotiyugangalaay Sanchayichidunna
Punyaphalamaanee Martyajanmam
Teduvin Sadguru paadapadmam punar
Neduvin Sowbhaagya jnaanaamrtam -
- Punar Neduvin Sowbhaagyajnaanaamrtam (11)

Kowtukamaatmaswaroopam Dharikkuvaan
Mechamaay Naalkkunaal Vardhichenkil
Ullathilettam prakaasichu kaanaakum
Brahmasatyam Jaganmitthyaabhaavam -
- Brahmasatyam Jaganmitthyaabhaavam (12)

Kampamillathoru sthaanam Labhichidum
Ghoramaam Bhookampamadhyathilum
Tatvamasyadham Srautavaakyangale
Tatvamarinjullil Dhyanicheedil - Nityam -
- Tatvamarinjullil Dhyanicheedil (13)

Kashtame Kashtame Etranaalo Param
Chithabhramathodalanjirunnu

Sree Guru kaarunyameki Purushanu

Nirmalaanandamaam Saantisowkhyam -

- Sree Nimalaanandamaam Saanti Souihliyam (14)

(Translator's Note: This poem was composed "extempore by Guru Maharaj. It reveals exquisite literary beauty, the loftiest vedantic ideas, the greatness of devotion and the compassion of one's Preceptor. Readers will note that the stanzas start progressively with the letters "Ka", "Kaa", "Ki", "Kee", "Ku," "Koo", "Kr", "Kl", "Kay", "Kai", "Ko" "Kau" and then again "Ka" and "Ka". The last stanza No.14, is a fond and grateful remembrance of the Guru Maharaj's Guru, Swami Nirmalanandaji, who moulded his spiritual life and to whom this work has been dedicated. The last two "lines of stanza 14 mean "It was indeed the Benign and Boundless compassion of the Sri Guru(Preceptor) that gave to Purusha(i.e to Purushothamananda) peace and happiness that are the essence of Pure Bliss(Nirmalananda) - which is a reference to Sri Nirmalanandaji - Tr.).

468. While I am staying at Brahmapuri I also happened to compose a "Nirguna Stotram". I give that below:

OM

Nirgunoham Nishkaloham Nirmamoham Nischaloham

Nityasudho Nityabudho Nirvikaro Nishkriyah

Nirmaloham Kevaloham ekam evadvateeyam

Bhasvaroham Bhaskaroham Nityatrupta chinmayah (1)

*Poornakaamah poornaroopah Poornakaalah poornadik
Aadi madhayaantaheeno Jananamaranavarjitah
Sarvakartaa Sarvabhoktaa Sarvasaakshee sosmyaham
Sarvavyaapee madvateeto naastikimchana kvaapyaho (2)*

*Aanandohamanantoham
Sadroopaschidrasopyaham
Aham Brahmaasmi Brahmaasmi
Brahmaivaaham sadaasivah Om - (3)*

I wrote thus far. What for have I written so much? - I have felt like this on many an occasion. Now should I stop here?

*“Alamati vitatairvachah prapanchai
riyamuchiteha sukhaaya drshtirekaa
Upagamitarasam samam manoanta -
ryadi muditam tadanuttamaa pratishihaa” -
- Yogavaasishtham*

Sense: What is the use of this profusion of words? The mind should acquire disinterestedness in worldly affairs. It is only then that one can get firm detachment. Then the mind, without agitation or problems, merges happily in the Atman. This type of realisation of the Brahman is the best and most desirable.

*“Na dhanam na janam na sundareem kavitaam
vaa jagadeesakaamaye
Mama janani janmaneesvare bavataat -
bhaktirahaitukee tvayi*

Sense: My mind does not seek a beautiful woman, wealth, poetry or a noble birth. Let me have as many births of whatsoever kind - in each of those, always, Lord, may I be blessed with true devotion to Your lotus' feet.

“Tat te anukampaam susameekhamaano

Bhunjaana evaatmakrtam vipaakam

Hrdvaagvapurbhi vidadhannamaste

Jeeveta muktipade sadaayabhaak”

- (Srimad Bhagavatam, 10th Skandha

- Chapter 14, Verse 8)

Sense: O, Lord! No one is capable of understanding completely Your full glory and greatness. So, those fortunate ones who, while continuing to undergo their “Praarabdhakarmas” without interruption and at the same time, counting Thy divine compassion alone as being of paramount importance, offer their body mind and speech in Thy service and get immersed. In such service they alone deserve to be free of this eternal cycle of births and deaths which constitutes “Samsaara”.

“Maatr devobhava Pitr devobhava Aachaaryadevo

bhava Atithih devo bhava” - Srutih .

“Aastam taavadiyam prasooti samaye durvaara soolavyathaa

Nairuchyam tanusoshanam malamayee-sayya chasaamvatsaree

Ekasyaapi sagarbbhabharabharana klesasya yasyaah kshamo

Daatum nishkritimunnatopi tananyastasyai jananyai namah”

*Gurur Brahmaa Gurrur Vishnu Gurur Devo Maheswarah
Gurur saakshaat param Brahma Tasmai Sree
Guruve Namah''*

*''Asato Maa Sat Gamaya
Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya
Mrtyor Maa Amrtam Gamaya''.*

*''Aaviraavi mayi Edhi Rudra, yat te dakshinamukham,
Tena Maam Paahi Nityam''*

Om Santih Santih Santih

19-09-1955

Note by the Translator

Here ends the memorable autobiography of Guru Maharaj, or the story of Divine Compassion, as he chooses to call it. This stirring narration is studded with glowing examples of Divine Compassion which manifests itself at every turn of life. Guru Maharaj has subscribed the date “19-09-1955” at the end of this narration as well as to the ‘Dedication’ of this great work to Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj.

Guru Maharaj decided to abandon his physical body at 10.50 p.m. on February 13, 1961. He entered the Jyotir linga during the “Lingodbhava Muhurta” or in the Second Quarter of the Mahashivratri Night, which is considered to be very auspicious.

The narration ends

..... But the Jyoti remains ever bright and effulgent to guide each one of us in our spiritual journey.

Prostrations unto that Mahajyoti.

Om Santih Santih Santih



The Sage of Vasishta Guha **The Last Phase**

By
Swami Nirvedananda



The Sage of Vasishta Guha

- The Last Phase

Dedication

What is Thine own, O Master!

I offer unto Thee alone

त्वदीयं वस्तु हे नाथ

तुभ्यमेव समर्पये॥

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Preface

The Sage of Vasishta Guha, the Most Revered Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj, attained Mahasamadhi in the year 1961. This little volume covers the last two years of his sojourn on earth and is being presented to the readers as a complement to “The Story of Divine Compassion” published in 1959. More than twelve years have elapsed since Swamiji’s Mahasamadhi and it is only now that details could be collected and put in the form of a book. Since long there has been an insistent demand for this from the disciples and devotees of Swamiji, but it was only a year ago that the work could be commenced.

Much time was needed to collect the details about Swamiji’s journey to various places and also about his last days. The absence of any record of events and the blurring of memories with the passage of time made it particularly difficult to gather information.

I confess my incompetence to write a book of this kind. Yet I have had to make an attempt because no one else has come forward to do this so far. Though I am fully conscious of the deficiencies of this work, there is one satisfaction: the details of Swamiji’s life has been put on record. This and the previous book together will give a fairly adequate picture of Swamiji’s life. These may perhaps provide the source material for any competent author to write an enlarged biography at a future date.

As in the earlier book, care has been taken to avoid exaggerations. In spite of it, if some chapters seem hyperbolical, I am helpless for, just as the sun cannot be thought of minus his brilliance, a Mahatma sans his greatness is also quite unimaginable. So in a book on the life of a Mahatma, mention of at least some of his great qualities are unavoidable.

As far back as 1953 Dr. K.M. Munshi visited Vasishta Guha and what he wrote of Swamiji may be of interest to the readers. To quote a few lines from his work:

“He is, I discovered, a deep Vedantin and his ways are simple, innocent, almost child-like; he smiles and smiles all the time. Loneliness, starvation and a hundred other aches mean nothing to him; he lives a real life, possessed of God which gives him perpetual Joy and Peace. He has won this state after, years of Sadhana.

“Before we parted, he admonished me. He asked, had I not had enough of life? It was high time I realized what I really was. ‘I wish I could.’ I replied.

“Such knights-errant of the Spirit are to be found in all countries, but perhaps more in India than anywhere else. Whatever the modern world may say, such men will continue to be found in all ages, men who, not content with their everyday life, will insist on climbing the Everest of the Spirit with cheerful confidence. While we search for the mirage of happiness, they seek the Holy frail with courage and faith; and they are the

men who convert the rose of the world into the mystic rose that Dante sang of.”

(City of Paradise & Other Kulpati’s Letters - P69)

Swamiji’s Brithday Message of 1959 and two poems composed by him are also included in this book, in the Appendix. Of the two poems included, one is in original: the other one is a translation of his Malayalam work. The short introductory note to each poem given the period, place, etc. of these compositions. It is hoped that these will be welcomed by the readers.

“The Life of Swami Purushotamananda” was written by me under the pseudonym, ‘A Disciple’. It not only evoked a curiosity in the minds of disciples and devotees of Swamiji to know who the author was, but created some misunderstanding also. Someone else who was presumed to be the author was criticized, for what some people felt were omissions and commissions. To avoid all such confusion. I have thought it wise to give out my name in this book and to disclose the indentity of ‘A Disciple’ through these lines, although my ardent wish was to remain anonymous.

I offer my grateful thanks to all those who co-operated with me in this venture by supplying information, offering suggestions, etc., and also to the friend who very willingly went through the manuscript and improved it.

May Sri Swamiji’s blessings be upon them all!

20th February, 1974
(Mahasivaratri)

The Author

CHAPTER I

THE COMPASSIONATE GURU

शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो वसन्तवल्लोकहितं चरन्तः ।
तीर्णाः स्वयं भीमभवार्षाणं जनान् अहेतुनान् यानपि तारयन्तः ॥

There are good souls, calm, magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever¹.

- Vivekachudamani, Sl.37*

Yes, there are good souls, Mahatmas, whose compassion knows no bounds. A passing glance of theirs is enough to convert even a confirmed sinner. And what to say of the faithful ones! Such great souls are to be found all over the land: only some are known far and wide; others remain in an obscure corner. The sage of Vasishta Guha, Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj was one such Mahatma whose love and compassion mitigated the miseries of many a troubled heart, and kindled hope and a new enthusiasm in the spiritually dejected. There are many amongst us who, even today, after more than a decade of Swamiji's leaving the physical frame, feeling his loving hand of protection in every walk of life and uplifting touch in the

* Tr. by Swami Madhavananda (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati)

spiritual path. One often hears the accusation that Mahatmas shower their love only on their favoured ones. This allegation has no meaning, for a Mahatma is a great soul whose compassion knows no limits. Such allegations are often the result of a limited understanding of the human intellect. Instances are not wanting of people approaching saints and sages without any introduction or recommendation, and deriving immense benefit. Let us look at a few such instances that reflect Swami Purushottamanandaji's love for his disciples, grace for a devotee and compassion for an afflicted stranger:

After his birthday celebrations in November 1958 Swami Purushottamanandaji was leading a quiet life in Vasishta Guha. Every year he used to go to Lucknow and other places during winter but that year he had decided not to go, while in Lucknow devotees were making arrangements for his stay. They had found that the building on Shukla Ghat was usually crowded with devotees and Swamiji could stay peacefully in a newly built hut. In the meantime they came to know of Swamiji's decision. Some devotees wrote letters praying that he should grace the new hut; others felt that it would be a great blow to many of them if Swamiji did not pay his usual visit and so on in that vein. These appeals and telegrams moved him and finally he started on a tour. Leaving Vasishta Guha on the 1st of January 1959, he spent a week in Delhi. From there he proceeded to Lucknow. The joy of the devotees knew no bounds. As usual, devotees from Sitapur, Bara Banki and other towns came to Lucknow to have Swamiji's darshan and to serve him.

A young disciple of Swamiji, an Auditor in the Defence Accounts Department, posted in Poona, had come to Kanpur on official

duty. When he read in the newspapers that Swamiji had arrived at Lucknow, he rushed there for having his darshan. At Swamiji's bidding he stayed there for a Bhagavata-Saptaha¹. He was to be the 'Vyasa'². He had once done the Saptaha reading, the first in his life, during the Birthday celebrations of Swamiji at Vasishtha Guha only a few weeks before. His clear pronunciation, accent, etc. were appreciated by everyone, including Swamiji. For all that he was not a professional 'Kathavachak'². But he had a fair knowledge of Sanskrit; in addition he had a devotional temperament too.

The truth of the saying 'मूकं करोती वाचालम्'³ was experienced by him on that occasion for, as he narrated later, he had not read beyond three or four cantos of the book before. So it was not only his first Saptaha reading, but it was also his first reading of the complete book! It was only Swamiji's grace that enabled him to acquit himself so creditably on his maiden performance. And for all that he was then neither a disciple of Swamiji nor a long-standing devotee. He had first visited Vasishtha Guha only two or three weeks before the Birthday celebrations commenced. He was there only for a few hours, but that was enough for Swamiji to divine his temperament and knowledge. And when Swamiji asked him to come again for the Bhagavata-Saptaha he

1 Reading of the whole of the Bhagavata within a week.

2 i.e. the 'Pundit' who reads and explains the Puranas.

3. (The Lord's grace) makes the mute eloquent.

became nervous as he had no previous experience of doing this. But Swamiji assured him that everything would be all right, and that gave him enough strength and courage to undertake the job. That day he returned to Meerut, where he was then working and came again just in time for the Saptaha. And it was only after the conclusion of the Bhagawata-Saptaha that he received initiation from Swamiji. This incident is narrated to show how a Mahatma's grace works wonders.

Now, when Swamiji bade him to do the Saptaha in Lucknow also he considered it a blessing and carried out the job with Sraddha and devotion under his guidance. Swamiji had a busy programme there. Satsang was held every day. The devotees took him to their houses and there were Bhajan - Kirtan programmes in some places. After spending three weeks there, Swamiji returned to Vasishta Guha in the first week of February. The devotees of Lucknow and neighbouring towns felt blessed by Swamiji's darshan.

(ii)

Now let us turn to witness an example of Swamiji's compassion for an afflicted stranger:

It was the summer of 1959. One day in the hot sun a well-built person of dark complexion came to Vasishta Guha for Swamiji's darshan. He looked like a poor peasant or a labourer, and he had an awkward look on his face. He was suffering from piles and was wandering desperately in the hills. Swamiji advised him to go to the hospital run by a well-known Ashrama in Rishikesh where

he would be attended to. The man left then, but was back again after a day. The surgeon after examining him, sent him away as it was not ripe for surgical-operation. He said he was desperate because of acute pain, etc. and did not want to go anywhere. He wanted to stay in the Ashrama and do some Seva (service). He believed that service to the Mahatmas alone would cure his ailment. He would not listen to any advice, and was adamant. He knelt down before Swamiji and implored him to be allowed to do Seva. Swamiji, laughing, asked one of his disciples, the present author, to fetch a stick lying nearby, as if to beat him. The man immediately offered his own heavy lathi and bent down to receive the blow. Swamiji simply laughed and laughed. It looked as if he enjoyed the play. He ordered the disciple to bring an orange from his room, and then began peeling it himself. When the man extended his palms to receive the prasada, Swamiji, by gestures, asked him to open his mouth. When he did so, Swamiji put a piece of the fruit into his mouth. When he had eaten it, another piece was put. Thus he put three or four more pieces of the fruit into his mouth. While doing so, Swamiji's face was beaming with love and affection. Then the man prostrated himself before Swamiji and went away as advised. This time there was no pleading from him for being allowed to stay in the Ashrama. On reaching the road, he started clapping his hands and dancing with joy, uttering, "I am blessed", "I am cured," and so on. What was it that this absolute stranger received from Swamiji? Nothing but compassion and unalloyed love!

CHAPTER - II

A SANNYASA CEREMONY

Swamiji had not given Sannyasa in the usual manner to anyone in Vasishta Guha during the years of 1957 and '58. On the 29th of November '58, however, he gave Sannyasa Mantra and ochre robes to a lady disciple, Brahmacharini Krishnapriya, in Vasishta Guha and renamed her Swami Subhadrananda. But there had been no regular Sannyasa ceremony with Viraja Homa, etc. during the two years.

There were some Brahmacharins in the Ashrama, qualified for Sannyasa. One of them, Madhusudan, had received initiation from Sri Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and the others were Swamiji's own disciples. There was one more candidate in Rishikesh - a well-known scholar, writer and poet of Kerala, whose life had been dedicated to learning and teaching of Sanskrit and Vedantic texts. A bachelor aged 64, he had come to Rishikesh the previous year in pursuit of further knowledge in Vedanta and was studying some texts on the subject at Kailas Ashrama. He used to visit Vasishta Guha every now and then and discuss the subject with Swamiji. During the latter half of 1958 Swamiji had initiated him into the vows of Naishthika Brahmacharya and given the name, Rama Chaitanya. Now Swamiji decided to take them a step higher and the opportunity came soon.

Mahasivaratri, which fell on the 7th March 1959, was the day selected. On that day the Brahmacharins were made to undergo all the preliminary rites connected with Sannyasa. And, on that night (i.e., in the early hours of 8th March - about 3 a.m.), the fires of Viraja Homa were lit again in Vasishtha Guha after a lapse of two years. After performing Viraja Home and other Sannyasa rites the Brahmacharins received ochre robes and new names from Swamiji, as is customary. Those who received Orders on that day were:

1. Br. Vedagiri - Swami Nirvedananda
2. Br. Raghava Das - Swami Raghuveerananda
3. Br. Rama Chaitanya - Swami Rameswarananda
4. Br. Madhusudan - Swami Shambhavananda

Three days later, i.e., on the 11th March, on the auspicious occasion of Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti, Swamiji initiated six inmates of the Ashrama into Naishthika Brahmacharya. They were:

Ramakrishna Das, Gopal Das, Umesh Chaitanya, Mano Chaitanya, Deva Chaitanya and Krishna Chaitanya.

CHAPTER - III

PUBLICATION OF BIOGRAPHY

One of the notable events of 1959 was the publication of Swamiji's biography in English. Swamiji was reticent about his spiritual struggles and achievements. He was averse to publicity also. Yet he wrote a book on his life in Malayalam, entitled **Atma-Katha Athava Iswara Karunyam**. This he did with some hesitation so as to keep the promise given to the devotees of Kerala who had entreated him to write an autobiography when he visited Kerala in 1951-52. Since then, the devotees of Northern India had been praying for an English version of the book as they did not know the Malayalam language. At long last, spiritual aspirants the world over were all favoured. Swamiji commanded, a monastic disciple to render the '**Atma-Katha**' into English, but the latter felt it was beyond his capacity to make a verbatim translation. So with Swamiji's permission he wrote a 'Life', based mostly on the '**Atma-Katha**'. And Swamiji was pleased to give his permission and blessings to publish the book, which came out during the last quarter of 1959. The book, entitled "The Life of Swami Purushottamananda ", was received with enthusiasm everywhere. Spiritual aspirants considered it a boon that they could get at least a glimpse of the Sage's life. It was indeed a gracious act of Swamiji to have given permission to publish the book for, as everyone knows, he was averse to publicity.

The book was reviewed by newspapers and periodicals and this brought in more seekers to Vasishtha Guha. Many a spiritual aspirant received guidance or initiation from Swamiji. His eightyfirst birthday, celebrated on the 8th December 1959, was attended by more people than ever before. As on previous occasions, there was a Bhagavata-Saptaha which culminated on that day, followed by a Havan for world-peace. Then Swamiji delivered his message¹, an extempore speech, which was listened to attentively by the vast multitude. Then there was a grand feast in which a large number of visitors, Sadhus and home-holders, were fed sumptuously. People who had come for the function from Delhi, Lucknow, Allahabad and other places started leaving for their homes from the following day and within a week's time Vasishtha Guha was once again the quiet haven of peace it used to be.

¹ See Appendix for the text of the speech.

CHAPTER - IV

ARDHA-KUMBHA AT PRAYAG

साधूनां दर्शनं पुण्यं तीर्थभूता हि साधवः ।

तीर्थं फलति कालेन सद्यः साधुसमागमः ॥

The 'darshan' of Mahatman is meritorious for they have become one with Holiness. Pilgrimage to Tirthas (holy places) bears fruit in due course of time (i.e., in another birth), but association with saints confers its result immediately (in this very birth).

The Kumbha Mela at Prayag is a well-known festival, occurring on the sixth year after a Kumbha. It is 'Ardha' (half) only in name: The number of pilgrims reaching there for a holy bath during the period and for darshan of Mahatmas, Sannyasins and Sadhus of various denominations such as Vairagis, Udasins, Naths, etc. that congregate; shops, exhibitions, etc. that are put up in the Mela area, and the arrangements made for the Mela, are all on the same scale as for a Poorna-Kumbha. The congregation of Mahatmas is a special feature in such Melas. Ardha-Kumbha was due in 1960 and devotees of Swamiji reminded him about it. He consented to visit Prayag for the occasion. Accordingly, someone went ahead to Prayag to make arrangements for his stay on the Mela grounds. And Swamiji left Vasishta Guha on the 1st of January 1960 for Delhi where he stayed for a week.

Whenever he visited Delhi, Swamiji's stayed with his disciple, Sri B.K. Kaul, I.C.S. This time also he was put up with him. Sri Kaul, his mother and all members of his family were devoted to him and they always provided the maximum comfort to Swamiji and to those who accompanied him. As usual, many people came for Swamiji's darshan and some of them took him to their houses also for Bhiksha or Satsang. A lady who used to visit him for darshan and Satsang invited him to Agra, where her husband was the District and Sessions Judge. Swamiji readily accepted the invitation and directed her to inform a particular disciple in Agra to make arrangements. When he received the information the disciple was flabbergasted for, he had no place of his own. His sister's house where he was put up, was damp and therefore unfit for Swamiji's stay. Mrs. R. Kakkar, who was the Regional Inspectress of Girls' Schools, was a devotee of Swamiji. When he informed her of Swamiji's programme, she expressed her eagerness to serve him and within an hour or two she made all arrangements to accommodate Swamiji in her spacious bungalow. In the meantime, the judge made arrangements in his bungalow also. When Swamiji reached Agra after a busy week in Delhi, he stayed with the Judge. He visited Mrs. Kakkar's place also and made her happy. An interesting story is narrated by a lady disciple of Swamiji about his visit to Agra. To quote her:

“Arrangements had been made for his stay in the bungalow of the Judge Saheb and Mrs. Kakkar's place. But I had an earnest desire that he stayed in our place...

“My brother, Mrs. R. Kakkar, her brother and certain others, were awaiting Swamiji’s car near a bridge in the hope of welcoming him and conducting him to the bungalow. But Sri Guru Maharaj’s car came and stopped in front of our house! My daughter and I were the first ones to be favoured with his darshan. He was gracious enough to step into the house and spend a few minutes. Our house was sanctified. Then he asked me to take him to the bungalow of the Judge Saheb. My daughter and I accompanied him in the same car.

“On Guru Maharaj’s bidding my daughter sang some Bhajans. In the meantime, a friend of my son, finding our house locked, reached the bungalow. He was surprised to find that Sri Maharaj had already arrived and that we too were there, whereas my brother and others were still waiting for him on the Delhi Road! Soon he rushed and brought them to the bungalow. They were all astonished as to how Sri Guru Maharaj managed to give the slip to all of them and reached our house first. I am unable to recollect the date, etc. All that I do remember is Guru Maharaj’s grace”.¹

The above incident is cited to show how the compassionate Guru favours sincere devotees even though their prayers remain unexpressed.

After spending a couple of days in Agra, Swamiji proceeded to Brindavan. Brindavan was not a new place to him: he had spent

¹ Translated and edited by the author from a letter received in Hindi.

a number of days in that holy place years ago. After visiting some important places of worship, he left for Kanpur. After two or three days' stay there, he left for Prayag.

Arrangements had been made for his stay on the bank of Ganga. The Mela authorities provided accommodation and all other facilities, free of charge. Some of his monastic and lay disciples stayed with him. It is a general practice with pilgrims to have a holy dip in the Ganga or Triveni Sangam - (Confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati) and go round the camps to have darshan of Mahatmas. Apart from such casual pilgrims, sincere aspirants came to Swamiji for spiritual instructions. Many Sadhus who had heard about Swamiji, also came morning and evening for it was not possible for everyone to go to Vasishtha Guha for his darshan. Thus, Swamiji's camp was always crowded with visitors. So to say, there was perpetual Satsang in the camp. Yes, sincere aspirants are never tired of Satsang (association with Holy Personages) for that is an essential part of Sadhana. Is it not said, “प्रथम भक्ति संतन कर संग” ?¹

Not only in the Kumbha Mela camp, but wherever Swamiji went, the programme of Kirtan, reading of religious texts, and Satsanga was there. Devotees approached him with their doubts regarding spiritual matters and got elucidation; some others needed guidance in the path, and certain others came for mere darshan. This programme of Satsanga has been referred to in

¹ Ramacharitamansa, Aranyakanda.

many chapters of this book. Some of the lay readers are likely to become eager to know the value of it. To satisfy their curiosity we give a free rendering of a famous poem of Bhartruhari, on the glory of Satsanga:

Ignorance, it does remove;
Truthfulness, it brings in speech,
Elevates the mind and sets at naught
All sinfulness.
Confers Peace of mind on you
And spreads your fame in all quarters.
Tell me what is not attained
By men at large thro' Satsanga.

During the period of Mela there was a Religious Conference arranged by a certain organization on Makara Sankranti Day. Many Sadhus were invited and our Swamiji was also requested to address the gathering. Swamiji delivered a short speech in English, exhorting the audience to be sincere in spiritual Sadhana and devotion. As there were many who did not know the English language, Swamiji's speech was rendered into Hindi by his disciple, Swami Bhoomananda.

The hubbub of the Mela, however, was too much for Swamiji. Therefore, after the main bathing day, he left the Mela grounds and stayed with his disciple, Sri R.K. Vatal at Lukerganj, a quiet locality, for a short period. From Allahabad he moved on to Lucknow. A week's stay there and thence he returned to Vasishta Guha during the first week of February, 1960.

CHAPTER - V

A NEW KUTIR

Ever since March 1957 Swamiji had been staying in the terrace-room of the building constructed after the October '56 floods. The open terrace in front of the room afforded ample sitting accommodation whenever visitors came in large numbers. The view of the Ganga and the hill on the other bank of the river was grand and charming. Sitting on the terrace one could very soon forget the surroundings and dive deep into meditation, viewing the Ganga. Despite all these and other advantages, the room suffered from some disadvantages too, the foremost one being the exposure to the chill winter blast. Another inconvenience was that Swamiji had to come down in the early hours of the morning to answer the calls of nature, etc. which obviously meant a lot of discomfort during the winter season. But Swamiji was oblivious to all these, and had he wished, better arrangements could have been made. Even though he was now in his eighties, he considered these discomforts trifling because he had undergone many a hardship during his days of Sadhana. As Dr. K.M. Munshi, the then Governor of Uttar Pradesh, when paid a visit to Swamiji in the year 1953 observes, "Loneliness, starvation and a hundred other aches mean nothing to him; he lives a real life, possessed of God which gives him perpetual Joy and Peace."¹

¹ See "City of Paradise & Other Kulapati's Letters" (1955), P. 69. (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay).

Although that was his real secret, devotees could not remain passive spectators. An octogenarian disciple of Swamiji, Sri Ram Chandra Khanna, who was staying in the Ashrama during the winter of 1959-60, was witnessing the trouble that Guruji was undergoing day after day. An old man himself, it pained him much. One day he made a resolve to construct a new Kutir for Swamiji with bath-room facilities, and approached him for permission. Noticing the earnestness of the disciple, Swamiji consented to the proposal and himself selected the site for the purpose. Construction work started soon and the new Kutir, with a bath-room just in its front, was ready before the summer of 1960. Since then Swamiji started using the new Kutir also. The construction of a Kutir, in itself, may not appear to be of any importance to the readers. Why mention has been made of this is that this new Kutir gained prominence early next year as Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi in this very Kutir. And soon after, it became a temple where a photograph of Swamiji was placed on a pedestal and regular worship started. Thus, this Kutir has become doubly sacred to Swamiji's disciples and devotees.

CHAPTER - VI

ON A TOUR TO THE SOUTH

A significant event took place during the summer of 1960. That was Swamiji's sudden decision to visit Kanyakumari and other places in the South. And in Kerala it rains heavily during July - August, making travel most inconvenient. Not that Swamiji was unaware of these things; yet he decided on a journey to the South. As it turned out, this happened to be his farewell visit to his land of birth. Did he venture the journey in that odd season fully knowing that he would be leaving the world within a few months? His devotees, no doubt, consider so. They say in one voice that their Gurudev, an embodiment of love and compassion, out of his grace and magnanimity, came all the way from the Himalayas only to bless them all. And they have good reasons to say so: He did not prolong his stay in any one place, save Kanyakumari; but at the same time he did not omit any familiar place from the itinerary, thus affording an opportunity for every devotee to visit him. So to say, he hopped from place to place. The reader will observe this fact as he goes through the following pages. Another striking point was that hardly two years had elapsed since his previous visit to Kerala and Kanyakumari and he was starting again so soon.

The decision itself during that period of the year was unusual. What was more, he announced to his disciples in the Ashrama

that whosoever wanted to accompany him was welcome; only three or four of them were barred - they had to stay behind. Who would not love to join him? The next day, i.e. the 25th June 1960, Swamiji boarded the train from Haridwar for Lucknow, on the first lap of his journey, accompanied by six or seven members of the Ashrama - Sannyasins and Brahmacharins. Normally, he did not take more than one or two disciples with him. This time there were so many! And from Lucknow the band was augmented by some house-holder disciples also, including two aged women in the group.

At Lucknow, Swamiji and party stayed at the usual place, Shukla Ghat, on the Gomati. Where devotees were told that Swamiji would be there for three or four days only as he had to be in Kerala for Guru Poornima, which was on the 8th of July, they decided to celebrate it then itself when Gurudev was in their occasion. Now that Swamiji was on tour they would miss the opportunity if they waited for the actual day.

“अवध तहाँ जहाँ राम निवास”¹ - Says Goswami Tulsidas

In the same manner, when Guru Maharaj was in Shukla Ghat that was Vasishta Guha for devotees, and Gomati was Ganga. And, any day was Guru Puja day for them. Therefore, they informed their co-disciples in the neighbouring towns like Sitapur, Bara Banki, etc. and they all gather for the function. Guru Puja was conducted by them on a grand scale. They all considered themselves blessed for it was not convenient for everyone to

¹ That is Ayodhya where Sri Rama lives.

reach Vasishta Guha for the occasion. On the same evening Swamiji left for Madras by train, accompanied by monastic and house-holder disciples.

At Madras some devotees had made arrangements for their stay. On former occasions Swamiji used to stay in the Ramakrishna Math, but this time he had a number of people with him and therefore a few local devotees had decided to accommodate Swami and party elsewhere. When Swamiji was apprised of the arrangements on arrival at Madras Central Station his reaction was not favourable at first, but subsequently he approved of it. Mandavali in Mylapore area where Swamii camped, was a quiet residential locality. Swamiji was accomodated in 'Sarada Kutir', a small cottage type of house belonging to a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The monks and house-holders accompanying him were housed in two different houses on the opposite row. During his three days' stay there, many spiritual aspirants visited him. There was regular Satsang everyday, after which some young spiritual aspirants put intelligent and searching questions. This was a regular feature whenever Swamiji visited Madras. Swamiji cleared their doubts and satisfied them all.

One day he visited Sri Ramakrishna Math. The senior monks and others were happy to see him. After spending some time with them he returned. One day he went to the sea for bathing. He was fond of sea-bath, but during that visit he could go only once. After an early morning bath in the sea he spent some time on the beach, meditating. A new devotee who had accompanied him, also sat at a distance and meditated. After three days at Madras, Swamiji and party left for Ottapalam by train.

CHAPTER - VII

OMKARASHRAMA

The next morning they arrived at Ottapalam, in Kerala State. Swamiji and his monastic disciples stayed in Sri Ramakrishna-Niranjan Ashrama, while the others were accommodated in an adjoining house belonging to a retired District & Sessions Judge who was a Bhakta of a Sri Ramakrishna and a disciple of Swami Nirmalanandaji.¹ During their brief stay there, many people from nearby places came for Swamiji's darshan as well as spiritual advice. Guru Poornima was fast approaching and he had to reach Desamangalam for the occasion. Therefore, after two day's stay, Swamiji and party left Ottapalam by car and reached Omkarashrama at Desamangalam, within a couple of hours.

A few words about Omkarashrama may not be out of place here. The Ashrama was founded by Swami Sambananda, a disciple of Swamiji. It is situated on the left bank of the famous river of Malabar, the Bharatapuzha. The river flows northwards at Desamangalam. Swami Sambananda had been to Vasishta Guha during the year 1956 when he explained the situation of the place to Guru Maharaj and sought his guidance and blessings to found an ashrama there. His day-dream was to take Swamiji

¹ About whom see 'The Life of Swami Purushottamananda'. Chapter VIII & c.

to Kerala where he could stay in the new Ashrama for the rest of his sojourn in this world. But Swamiji was indifferent to such proposals. However, he gave rupees One hundred and one as his contribution and blessed the disciple's venture. The latter had plans to install marble idols of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna in the Ashrama. He informed Swamiji about his plans when the Ashrama was under construction, but Swamiji advised him to install only a symbol of Pranava. Accordingly an OM made of Panchaloha² was installed. And the installation ceremony was performed by Swamiji himself on Sri Rmakrishna's Tithi Puja day (birth-day) in February 1958.

A month before starting on the present tour, namely, in the month of May 1960, Swamiji bade a disciple, Swami Sadasivananda, to proceed to Omkarashrama to assist the founder who was getting old. To 'assist' was only a pretext. In fact Swamiji was sending him to 'succeed' the founder, as later events proved. Leaving Vasishtha Guha as per Gurudev's advice, the Swami reached Desamangalam on the 23rd of May. And, to his surprise, the founder, Swami Sambananda, had passed away three days earlier - on the 20th! The local devotees had conveyed the news to Swamiji and had requested him to depute a monk to manage the Ashrama and, lo! even before their message reached Vasishtha Guha, Swamiji's nominee had arrived to relieve them of their anxiety! This increased their faith in Swamiji.

² Panch-loha or Pancha-dhatu is a combination of five metals, namely, gold, silver, copper, brass and lead.

To revert to our story: Swamiji reached Omkarashrama on the 7th of July. The Ashrama had been decorated beautifully and it had a festive appearance. The next day, i.e. the Guru Poornima Day, a large number of local devotees arrived for the function. Swami Paresananda, a disciple of Swamiji, also arrived from Kanyakumari to perform Pada Puja to Gurudev and to conduct him to Kanyakumari. After Guru Puja, Havan and other functions Swamiji entered the sanctum sanctorum and ordered the doors to be closed. He spent some time there all alone. Afterwards he himself offered Puja and performed Arati to the Pranava. Everyone believes that during those few moments Swamiji was charging the atmosphere with spiritual currents for the well-being of the Ashrama. On that sacred day, Sri Koru Nair and his daughter received initiation from Swamiji. It was he who had made a free gift of land for the construction of the Ashrama. He had also made a gift of some agricultural land for the maintenance of the Ashrama. After the conclusion of the Puja and other items, a feast was arranged. After taking food Swamiji and party left for Guruvayur.

CHAPTER - VIII

TOWARDS KANYAKUMARI

Guruvayur has played an important role in Swamiji's life. Therefore he never missed the place whenever he visited Kerala. In the earlier book¹, apart from a whole chapter on Guruvayur, mention has also been made of Swamiji's love and awe for that place, rather the Lord of that place, in various other chapters. Hence no elaboration of this here. Suffice it to say that in spite of heavy rains, Swamiji spent three days there. Besides visiting the temple every day for darshan of the Lord, he gave spiritual instructions to many devotees.

Here Swamiji's party was divided into various groups. He sent away some of his monastic disciples to different places, later to join him at Kanyakumari. The house-holders were advised to spend some more days at Guruvayur. They were also to join him at some place to be specified later. But transport services were disorganized owing to heavy rains. Added to that, the postal employees were on a strike. This made it difficult for them to contact Swamiji. They were all from North India and were new to the place. They did not get any communication from Swamiji either, because of the strike. So to say, they were stranded. But they had faith in Swamiji. Therefore they did not lose heart.

² Viz., The Life of Swami Purushottamananda

After waiting for a few days, and not getting any message from Swamiji, they left Guruvayur and reached Kanyakumari where Swamiji had already arrived.

As for Swamiji, he proceeded from Guruvayur to Trichur thence to Kaladi, the birth-place of Bhagavan Sri Sankaracharya. There were only three or four people with him. From Kaladi he went to Haripad. A disciple there had invited him to visit his house where a Bhagavata-Saptaha had been arranged in connection with his mother's Shashtiabdapoorti (completion of sixty years) celebrations. Swamiji graced the house by paying a visit and blessed the old lady. Then, visiting some places here and there, he reached Trivandrum on the 14th of July.

Whenever he visited Trivandrum he used to stay with his boyhood friend Narayana Pillai, a renowned Ayurvedic physician, at his 'Dhanwantari Matham'. Now the friend had passed away, but the members of his family were also devoted to him and they requested him to stay on. In the meantime, an invitation came. It was from Capt. P. G Nair (now Lieut-Col.) whose father (Swami Paresananda) had taken Sannyasa from Swamiji only a couple of years before. Swamiji readily accepted the invitation and, after spending a day or two at 'Dhanwantari Matham' he went to P.G. Nair's quarters at Poojapura.

'Blue House', the official residence of Capt. Nair, had been dressed up nicely to receive the august guest. From the main gate on the road-side right upto the house there were arches, decorated with bunches of plantains, mango leaves, etc. And the

whole distance was spread with beach sand - a substitute for red carpet! - and water was sprinkled on it throughout. Everything was arranged in the traditional Kerala fashion. Swamiji was received at the gate by Captain and Mrs. Nair with due honours and conducted to the house. They performed Pada Puja also before Swamiji stepped into the house. He stayed there for five days. One day Capt. Nair received Mantra Deeksha from Swamiji. Swami Paresananda's elder sister, an aged lady, also received initiation. Many devotees came and took him to their houses in different parts of the town. Many of them were given initiation also.

Trivandrum is known for the temple of Sri Padmanabha. Here the Lord is reclining on anantha (Seshanaga). The town derives its name from the Deity and is called 'TIRUVANANTHAPURAM'¹ in local language, and 'Trivandrum' is a corrupt form of this in English. Swamiji visited this temple to have darshan of Sri Padmanabha. He had an invitation from Abhedashrama situated near the temple. On his way back from the temple Swamiji paid a visit to that Ashrama also. Swami Abhedanandaji the Chief of the Ashrama, is widely known for his propagation of Lord's name. He is a great Bhakta and a good Sankirtanist also. He had visited Vasishtha Guha a few years before and he knew Swamiji very well. He received him with love and respect.

² The split-up is : Tiru-Anantha-Puram. 'Tiru' is synonymous with 'Sri'.

After spending some time there, Swamiji returned to 'Blue House'. There were regular Bhajan, Kirtan and other religious programmes there. Apart from these, Swamiji held Satsang also for the benefit of the devotees.

From Trivandrum Swamiji proceeded to Kanyakumari, the southern-most tip of India. It is a beautiful place surrounded by sea on three sides: the Bay of Bengal on the east, the Indian Ocean on the south and the Arabian Sea on the west - a confluence of three seas! He reached there on the 21st of July. There were many members in his party. Most of those who separated at Guruvayur had, by then joined him. Swami Paresananda had come earlier, leaving Swamiji at Trivandrum, to make arrangements in his Ashrama at Kanyakumari. Here also the Ashrama, 'Shanti Nilayam', had been decorated beautifully with plantain bunches, etc.

Kanyakumari was the culminating point of Swamiji's journey. He had great love for that place, even as his own Guru, Swami Brahmanandaji, had. Talking of his Guru's love for Kanyakumari, Swamiji used to say: "He was not at all willing to leave Kanyakumari. He once told me, 'Bhakta, I do not want to go back to Calcutta at all. Ah! I wish I could get a small Kutir (hut) and live here the rest of my life.'¹"

So, whenever Swamiji visited South India, he did not miss Kanyakumari. This time he stayed there for twenty-four days-

¹ See - The Life of Swami Purushottamananda.

the longest stay in any one place during his journey. It was a festival at Shanti Nilayam. There was Satsang both morning and evening. Many were the visitors who came for spiritual guidance and initiation. Some Sannyasins of Sri Ramakrishna Ashramas, as also of other Ashramas, came to see him from different places. Many of them knew Swamiji from his earlier days in the Ashramas in Kerala and they had great love and regard for him. Many devotees also came from far and near and took him to their houses. He accepted Bhiksha in some houses, conducted Satsang at others and in some places he listened to Bhajans and Kirtan conducted by devotees. Everyone was happy. They all felt that their houses were purified by the visit of Swamiji.

Swamiji was very fond of sea-bath. His daily routine consisted of an early morning bath in the sea after which he, along with his disciples, visited the temple and had darshan of Goddess Kanyakumari. And, often he spent some time in meditation on the beach, near the local Ganapati temple, just outside the Devi's. Others also meditated sitting behind him and derived much benefit.

'Shanti Nilayam' was buzzing with activity. Visitors were coming day in and day out. Swami Paresananda was all attention to make Gurudeva's stay comfortable. He felt very happy that Guru Maharaj gave him such an opportunity to serve him. Ever since he first visited Vasishta Guhu in his Poorvashrama days and had darshan of Swamiji, he had great regard and admiration for him. When he visited again in 1955, he found that Swamiji's 'Atma Katha' had almost been completed. He prayed that he

be given the privilege of publishing it. Swamiji agreed and with his permission and blessings, he brought the manuscript and published it from Trivandrum, thus endearing himself to Swamiji.

Let us digress a little to say a few words more about him and his Sannyasa:

Major-General V.N. Parameshwaran Pillai, O.B.E., as he was known in pre-monastic life, had a distinguished career in the army. He retired from service as G.O.C., Travancore-Cochin State Forces. After retirement he was living in Kanyakumari, away from home, leading the life of a Vanaprastha, since 1950. When Swami Purushottamanandaji visited the place in 1958, he stayed with the General for ten days. One day during that period General Pillai apprised Swamiji of the course of Sadhana he was following, his mode of living since retirement in 1950, and also that he had already received Mantra Deeksha from Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj of Rishikesh. And now he was eager to be initiated into the Order of Sannyasa. A few days earlier, two others had also approached Swamiji for Sannyasa. Of them one was a Brahmacharin of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Pudukad, whom the Mahant of the Ashrama had recommended, and the other, Sri Damodara Menon, formerly a lawyer and now leading the life of a Vanaprastha. He was a Bhakta of Sri Ramana Maharshi and was running a religious institution called 'Vijnana Ramaneyam' at Palghat. Swamiji had visited that place in 1952 and conducted satsang. When General Pillai also prayed for Sannyasa, Swamiji advised him to call those two others also. He consulted the almanac (Panchangam) and fixed the day: the

Full Moon Day of Chaitra ('Meenam', according to Malayam calendar), corresponding to the 4th April 1958. That was the day of 'Panguni Uttaram' festival and Hanumat Jayanti in South India. On that auspicious day Swamiji gave Sannyasa to all of them. When Viraja Homa and all other formalities were over, he gave them ochre robes and new names as shown below:-

1. Br. Kesavan - Swami Narendrananda
2. Sri Parameswaran Pillai - Swami Paresananda
3. Sri Damodara Menon - Swami Sureshananda

Now, to return to our narrative, Swami Paresananda made arrangements for Gurudev's stay in his 'Shanti Ashrama' also for a few days during his present visit (1960). It was a small Kutir, adjacent to Shanti Nilayam. Swamiji liked that Kutir very much. Swami Paresananda not only served Guru Maharaj wholeheartedly but also took the maximum advantage of his stay by seeking advice on various topics connected with spiritual life. He knew the technique as taught by the Gita, viz., 'तद्विधिं प्रणिपाते न परिप्रश्नेन सेवथा'. The teachings imparted by Gurudev have been recorded by Swami Paresananda in his **Akhila Bharata-Kailasa Teerthatanam**, a work in Malayalam, published in 1969.

¹ In north India Hanumat Jayanti is observed on Naraka-Chaturdasi day.

CHAPTER - IX

THE RETURN JOURNEY

Before leaving Kanyakumari, Swamiji sent away some members of his party to other places. Some of the house-holders, having come all the way from North India, wished to make a pilgrimage to Rameswaram also. It is a life-long desire of every orthodox Hindu of North India to go on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram, at least once in his life-time, even as his South Indian counterpart longs to visit Varanasi. Among the four important places of pilgrimage (Chatur-Dhamas), Rameswaram is the southern one - the other three being Dwaraka in the west, Badrinath in the north and Puri in the east. They expressed their desire to Swamiji and with his permission and blessings they left for Rameswaram, whence they returned home direct. Thus his party became smaller. After spending more than three weeks in Kanyakumari, the most happy and memorable days for Swami Paresananda, Gurudev and the remaining members of his party started on their return journey on 15th August 1960 alongwith Sri and Srimati V.G.G. Nayar, his disciples, in their two cars.

On their way to Kundara, they made a brief halt at Trivandrum. Here Swamiji laid the foundation for a new house which Sri Nayar was going to construct. From there they proceeded to Kundara where Sri Nayar was then the General Manager of a large industrial concern. Swamiji stayed in his spacious house for four or five days. The hosts were all attention to Swamiji.

Bhajan, Satsang, etc., were held every day. All were happy. One day Swamiji conducted Vidyarambha of their young daughter. It was performed in a characteristic way. Swamiji asked the child to put her tongue out and wrote some mystic syllable or Mantram on it with a golden ring. Thus the child was initiated into real vidya: other traditional methods were secondary.

Leaving Kundara by car Swamiji reached Haripad where they camped at Sri Ramakrishna Ashram for a day. It might be remembered that it was at this Ashram that Gurudev received Mantra Deeksha from Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, way back in 1916. The Swamis in the Ashrama were all happy to see him again on his return journey.

CHAPTER - X

THE CRUISE ON THE PAMPA

लोकोत्तराणां चेतांसि
को हि विज्ञातुमर्हति ॥

*Who indeed can fathom the mind of those
who have transcended the world?*

- Bhavabhuti

Great souls move about in the world like ordinary men. Some of their actions may even appear to be strange at times. A common man hardly grasps it, whereas one endowed with Sraddha and devotion understands it either at the time or later. Our Swamiji's actions were no exceptions and they had a lesson for devotees and others. Here is an incident:

On reaching Haripad, Swamiji thought of a cruise on the river pampa, a spiritual excursion to visit the famous temple of Sri Parthasarathi (Sri Krishna in his role as charioteer of Arjuna) at Aranmula. The boats of Aranmula are not ordinary ones. They are huge boats having a length of 150 feet or even more, with the stern rising to the sky to a height of 50 feet or so. They are kept in huge sheds on land, protected from sun and rain and taken to the waters only when needed. It requires as many as

one hundred persons to take a boat to the waters, for rowing in the river and to take it back to the shed for parking. About a hundred oarsmen, divided into two, sit on either side. In the centre there will be nearly twenty persons to sing the special 'Boat Songs' with their drums and other accompaniments. Every year a Boat Race is held a couple of days after 'Onam', the most important festival of Kerala, during August-September. Some twenty or twenty five such boats, some even bigger, take part in the race and prizes are distributed in the end. Visitors in thousands, including foreigners and distinguished guests, throng to witness the race. These few words can give a rough idea about boating at Aranmula.

As was his practice, this decision of Swamiji was also taken on the spur of the moment. There was no previous planning. Indeed Paramahamsas have no planning at all. Yet how his wish was carried out despite various handicaps is better described in the words of Swami Sadasivananda:-

“On the day we reached Haripad, Guru Maharaj called me at 3 p.m. and said, ‘Aranmula boating. Tomorrow 8 a.m.’ The sudden command made me dumbfounded for I knew the procedure. If a boat is to be hired one has to deposit a certain amount, at least a week before, in the office of the Association which controls the affairs. Then only they will be able to arrange the party to take the boat to the waters. There are certain other regulations also. These hurdles flashed in my mind as soon as the sudden command came from Maharaj and perplexed me. I did not know what to say or do. I prostrated myself before

Guru Maharaj. He patted me on the back and said, ‘Everything will be all right. Go,’ and handed me ten rupees. His assurance gave me strength and I immediately proceeded to Nedumprayar, my Poorvashrama place. The sun had set when I reached the place. I approached some people and discussed the matter with them. They said the complications and hurdles in arranging at such a short notice, not even twelve hours were many, but they would try their best. Yes, they had heard about Maharaj, so they were eager to carry out his wish and be recipients of his blessings. Some people went from house to house the whole night to muster enough strength for the boating.

Next morning at 7.30 a.m. Guru Maharaj and party arrived from Haripad and reached my Poorvashrama house.

‘Hey! What is the position?’ He asked.

“Attempts are going on, Maharaj”, said I.

‘Oh, if it is difficult better drop the programme’, saying this he took his seat. Little children were doing Bhajan and Kirtan. Maharaj spent two hours in their midst. In the meantime people, men and women, young and old, of different castes and creeds, flocked to the place. It was a sea of humanity.

Then Maharaj enquired about the next programme. I replied that food was ready and after Bhiksha we could have boating. Guru Maharaj agreed. The moment he said ‘Yes’, the whole crowd rushed to the boat jetty. When we reached the jetty after Bhiksha, everything was ready. We all got into the boat and Maharaj occupied the chair specially provided for him.

At ten O'clock the boat moved. The boatmen sang **Kuchela - Vrittam** (the story of Sudama) in the 'boat-song metre' to the accompaniments of drums, cymbals, etc. On reaching the temple ghat we had darshan of the Lord. Then the boat returned. By 2 p.m. we were back at Nedumprayar jetty. Guru Maharaj was happy throughout and we all felt blessed.

It is beyond my capacity to explain how this was made possible at such a short notice. I, on my part fully believe that the boating programme was intended to teach me through experience that everything takes place as per His Wish and that human pride has no place anywhere; and that what is impossible for ordinary men becomes possible for the Sage by a mere wish. I am fully convinced about this.¹

¹ Translated and edited by the author from details furnished in Malayalam by Swami Sadasivananda.

CHAPTER - XI

VISIT TO THE HOUSE OF BIRTH

After spending about an hour at Nedumprayar, Swamiji and party motored to Pullad. Vaidyan Narayana Panikkar and all members of his family were devoted to Swamiji. They all felt blessed by his visit. By evening he reached Tiruvalla and drove straight to Sri Ramakrishna Asshama. The Swamis there were happy to see him and they received him cordially. Most of them were his Guru-bhais and they had lived together during their earlier days as Brahmacharins. Although they were all happy to receive Swamiji, a problem arose about accommodation. There was a lady in Swamiji's party and the accommodation available in the Ashrama and perhaps their rules, did not permit lady guests to stay. The male members, however, stayed there for the night. After spending some time in the Ashrama, Swamiji and party proceeded to the temple of Sri Vallabha for darshan. While a young boy, it was his daily routine to visit this temple and spend many hours there doing Japam, meditation, reading of Bhagavatam, etc. As such, he did not miss darshan of Sri Vallabha whenever he visited Tiruvalla. Then they went to Sankaraveli House situated near the temple. It will be remembered that the then 'senior lady' of this house had great love and affection for Swamiji during his younger days and she became a second mother to him. The present senior lady, the daughter of the previous lady, was delighted

to see Swamiji. (The daughter succeeding the mother as the head of the family is in accordance with the Law of Matriarchy prevailing among certain communities in Kerala.) All members of the family had great regard for him. The lady accompanying Swamiji was accommodated there. And for himself? Although they requested him to stay and the house was large enough with ample facilities, Swamiji did not agree. He had thought of another place - the house where he was born. Accordingly, he went to his Poorvashrama house, 'Kuzhiyil Parambil Veedu', for the night. His sister's daughter, Parukuntly Amma, was overcome with joy and was beside herself. On previous occasions, she used to have Swamiji's darshan whenever he visited Tiruvalla, but she had never even dreamt that he would be so pleased as to spend a night in the house. She considered herself highly blessed. Perhaps that was the first time and the last as it turned out to be later, that Swamiji stayed in his Poorvashrama house after embracing Sannyasa. A cot was provided and he slept in the open courtyard. Parukutty Amma felt that the house was sanctified.

CHAPTER - XII

GOOD-BYE TO THE SOUTH

The next day Swamiji left Tiruvalla. Visiting Kaladi, Guruvayur and other places, he reached Desamangalam by car. The gentleman who had donated the land for Omkarashrama and other devotees had requested Swamiji to make some arrangement for the running of the Ashrama. The local devotees gathered as soon as Swamiji arrived. A piece of agricultural land adjoining the Ashram property was purchased and donated for the Ashrama by Swami Paramananda, a disciple of Gurudev, who lived in a nearby place. As per Swamiji's instructions, a committee of five members was formed to manage the Ashrama. Of them, four were house-holders; Swami Sadasivananda was the Sannyasin member. He was to stay in the Ashrama and run the institution on proper lines. After a day's stay there Swamiji moved on.

He made a brief halt at Ottapalam and thence went to Palghat where Swamiji Sureshananda had arranged for a Satsanga. His 'Vijnana Ramaneeyam' was crowded with devotees. Swamiji spoke to them a few words on religious matters and then proceeded to Coimbatore, where a devotee had invited him.

While at Coimbatore, he paid a surprise visit to the house of Sri V.R. Krishna Pillai, the Assistant Collector of Customs. Mrs. Pillai is a daughter of Maj General Parameswaran Pillai (later Swami Paresananda), who had talked about them to Swamiji.

Although the couple were taken by surprise, they welcomed Swamiji and party in a fitting manner. After partaking of their hospitality, Swamiji left for Madras by train. Now he had only one or two disciples with him.

Swamiji had been on tour for more two months and he was eager to return to his favourite abode, Vasishta Guha. Therefore he did not stay in Madras for long. After a couple of days there, he bade good-bye to the South and boarded the train for Luchnow.

CHAPTER - XIII

RISHIKESH - VASISHTA GUHA

Swamiji halted at Lucknow only for three days. While there, he received a telegraphic message from Rishikesh saying that the road to the Cave was breached at many places owing to heavy rains and that there was no vehicular traffic. But, in spite of that, he left Lucknow on the third day of his arrival and reached Rishikesh on the morning of 6th September, 1960.

At Rishikesh, Swamiji was to stay for two days. It was not the hill section road alone that had been damaged, but even in Rishikesh a considerable length of the road had been washed away by the river chandrabhaga on the Muni-Ki-Reti side of the bridge. Therefore there was no vehicular traffic on the road leading to Vasishta Guha and Swamiji had to stay there for a couple of days. This was a 'blessing in disguise' for the people of Rishikesh. Men and women gathered for his darshan and for Satsang. When he went to the Ganga for bathing, a large number of people followed him, doing Kirtan. It was a virtual procession.

Swamiji was staying in a Dharmasala. There was a lot of inconvenience there and his stay was far from being comfortable. Yet he had to put up with them. On the 8th of September, the General Manager of the Motor Owners' Corporation arranged a bus for him. The road had not been repaired fully. Consequently, the bus had to be run very slowly with great care. With great

difficulty they reached Shivpuri. The road further up was worse and the bus could not proceed. From there Swamiji and others had to walk more than three miles. Towards evening Swamiji reached Vasishta Guha, after being away for two and a half months.

CHAPTER - XIV

TWO SANNYASA CEREMONIES

Swamiji's starting on a tour of South India in the month of June was termed as an unusual event of 1960. But that was not the only instance. Yet another unusual event of that year was the two Sannyasa ceremonies witnessed in Vasishta Guha.

A young spiritual aspirant had come in contact with Swamiji when he was in Kanyakumari during the year 1958. When Swamiji found that he was inclined towards monastic life, he had advised the youth to come to the Cave. A year later the aspirant, Sri Krishnan Potti, left home and after visiting various places of pilgrimage, reached Vasishta Guha towards the end of 1959. There was a Brahmacharin - disciple in the Ashrama, also awaiting to be ordained a Sannyasin. Looking to their earnestness Swamiji initiated both of them into the Order of Sannyasa, with due ceremonies. That was on the sacred day of Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti, corresponding to the day of 28th February 1960. They were:

1. Br Ramakrishna Das - Swami Sadasivananda
2. Br. Krishnan Potti - Swami Sankarananda

It was not Swamiji's practice to give Sannyasa frequently. But that year was an exception. Those who were given Sannyasa later in the second batch considered that Guru Maharaj blessed

them out of his mercy for they had not approached him for the purpose in the recent past. They were Brahmacharin - disciples of Swamiji and had been living in the Ashrama since two years. They hoped that they would get Sannyasa on the forthcoming Mahasivaratri day. But a day or two after Vijay Dashami, he called them one by one and advised them to get ready for Sannyasa within two days. They were surprised, but glad. And on the full moon day of Aswin (Sarad Poornima), corresponding to the 3rd October 1960, the Brahmacharins performed all preliminary rites connected with Sannyasa. The same night, i.e. in the early hours of 4th October, Swamiji initiated them into the order of Sannyasa, with Viraja Homa and other rites. The two disciples initiated on that day were:

1. Br. Gopal Das - Swami Gopesananda
2. Br. Umesh Chaitanya - Swami Puraharananda

Thus, almost all the Brahmacharin disciples staying in the Ashrama had been given Sannyasa. And this second batch of 1960 proved to be the last Sannyasa ceremony conducted by Swamiji. Had he not favoured them then, their hopes would have been shattered and they would have had to go elsewhere for Sannyasa, as the Mahasivaratri turned out to be Guru Mahraj's Maha Samdhi day! Another example of grace and compassion!

CHAPTER - XV

AT THE DEATH-BED OF A DISCIPLE

The Guru is an ‘Ocean of merey’. His grace knows no reason; it has no discrimination. Only, the disciple has to bow down to receive it. अहेतुकदयासिन्धुः बन्धुराममतो सताम - that is how Sri Sankaracharya describes an ideal Guru. We have already described one instance of Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj’s grace on a devotee and compassion for an absolute stranger.¹ We will now narrate an instance of the gracious Guru’s love for a dying disciple.

Swami Bhoomananda, a member of the Ashrama fell ill during the month of October 1960. He was a young man of erudition and dispassion. Born in the year 1933 in a scholarly Brahmin family of Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh, Sasibhushan Dutt Misra (that was his former name) had his early education in Jaunpur. Later, he joined the Allahabad University from where he passed the M.A. examination very creditably. Sanskrit was his subject. Even during his school days he showed signs of a bright future. He was almost a **Srutidhar**² even in those days, a trait derived

¹ See Chapter I

² i.e., one who is gifted with the power of retaining in one’s memory what one has heard only once.

perhaps from a paternal uncle. He was of an analytical mind and tried to fathom the mysteries of life through reasoning. When his class-mates were playing or studying, Sasibhushan would be sitting all alone under a tree near the cremation ground, far away from home, pondering over abstruse metaphysics. Not getting a satisfactory answer to his problems from ‘pundits’ he fled from home - once for Calcutta and another time for South in search of a solution. But the religious institutions did not attract him and he did not stay in any place. He turned back and continued his studies. On passing the M.A. examination, he was offered the post of a Lecturer in Sanskrit by the Allahabad University. He accepted the offer, but served for only one term. His dispassion drove him again - this time to the Himalayas.

When he reached Rishikesh, he heard of Vasishta Guha and trekked to that place. And there he found the peace he was hankering after! At the very sight of Swamiji he felt he had found the Guru who would ‘deliver the goods’. That was in the year 1956. During the winter of the same year Swamiji was pleased to initiate him into the Order of Sannyasa, along with another disciple. Sasibhushan was given the name, Swami Bhoomananda. The other disciple, Br. Kumaran, became Swami Gitananda.

Swami Bhoomananda had frequent attacks of malaria since 1958 and had been hospitalised more than once. This time also. i.e., in October 1960, it was thought that it was a recurrence of the malignant disease and he was admitted to the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama (hospital) at Kankhal. The disease was diagnosed as typhoid. The disease was treated and brought

under control. But, however, the after-effects of the drugs were not pleasant. He felt dizzy and fell down twice. On the 3rd of November, Swamiji deputed a disciple, the author of these lines - to Kankhal, bidding him to report on Swami Bhoomananda's condition and to stay there to attend on him. Bhoomananda's condition was serious. He was restless and did not get sleep. He was getting non-stop hiccups also. Physically he was very weak and his power of memory was fading too. At times he talked incoherently. On getting this news two co-disciples visited him in the hospital the next evening. Perhaps Swami Bhoomananda had a premonition of his impending death. He was saying that he would not survive and was pleading to have darshan of Guru Maharaj. One of the Guru-bhai returned immediately and halted at Rishikesh for the night. The following morning he reached Vasishta Guha and gave a first-hand report and also conveyed Bhoomananda's prayer for Gurudev's darshan. Everyone in the Ashrama became anxious. Swamiji thought for a moment and enquired if he had brought any conveyance. 'Yes, Maharaj. Knowing that the bus timings are most inconvenient, Govind Singhji¹ has brought his jeep and is waiting on the road,' replied the disciple. Swamiji started immediately and reached Kankhal Sevashrama by 10.30 a.m. accompanied by the same disciple and Sri Govind Singh. He went straight to where Swami Bhoomananda lay. After making some kind enquiries to him, Swamiji asked all those present to chant 'Om' loudly and repeatedly, himself

¹ The General Manager of the Motor Owner's Corporation, Rishikesh.

also chanting ‘Om’ all the while. Was he there by showering his final benediction on his beloved disciple? Or was he aiding the disciple to remember the sacred Pranava at that critical juncture? He knew. Then he blessed his dying disciple by gently stroking his head with his right hand. Ah! the tender affection! It touched the heart of everyone present. The present writer, who was standing on the head-side of Swami Bhoomananda’s cot, could not control his feelings: tears rolled down from his eyes and his throat was choked. Even now he could not bring that scene to his memory without a thrill passing over his body. Here the author would like to quote from his diary:

“He (Guru Maharaj) asked me to recite Vishnu - Sahasranama Stotram. A few minutes later he was going to visit the shrine (Sri Ramakrishna temple in the Sevashrama). He called me aside (to the verandah) and said: ‘Not more than two days. You remain here and return after the final disposal’, and gave me a new woollen shawl which was on his shoulders with the words, for ‘अन्तिं यात्रा’ and with gestures indicating that it was to be used as shroud.”

Swami Bhoomananda’s final desire was fulfilled. He had darshan of Guru Maharaj and he received his blessings also. The gracious Guru came all the way from Vasishtha Guha to Kankhal, a distance of more than fifty kilometres to bless his young disciple! That night Swami Bhoomananda had sound sleep - a great

¹ i.e. Last journey.

relief after three restless nights. By 9 a.m. the next day, i.e., the 6th November 1960, he was found to be in a state of coma and by 1 p.m. he passed away peacefully. His smiling lips and peaceful countenance indicated that Guru Maharaj's blessings had conferred on him eternal peace and happiness. Whosoever heard about Swamiji's visit to Kankhal was moved and everyone praised the Guru for his unbounded love towards his disciples. Yes, there is none greater than the Guru - 'गुरोः परतरं नास्ति'.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST TOUR

SWAMIJI's eighty-second birthday was close by. It fell on the 28th November 1960, but he was not in mood to allow a grand celebration. Swami Bhoomananda had passed away on the 6th and on the sixteenth day a few Sannyasins were fed, as is the custom. The Bhagavata reading should have commenced on that day if a Saptaha were to be conducted, so as to culminate on the 28th November. But there was no such programme that year. Reasons were many: Apart from the fact that a young disciple had passed away only a few days ago, Swamiji had been receiving distressing news from devotees in Lucknow. There the river Gomati was in spate from the first week of October and a large number of people were affected by it. Some of his devotees were also stranded or marooned for a few days. All these and other distressing news of the devastating flood moved Swamiji so much that he became averse to a grand celebration. He forbade the devotees from coming to the Cave for the occasion and, instead of spending money on celebrations, he remitted some amount for relief work in Lucknow - 'परतापात् द्रवते सतां मन' – (The heart of a saint melts when others are in distress). The birthday, however, was observed in Vasishta Guha on an austere note.

When he forbade the devotees of various places from visiting the Guha, he had promised a visit to those places at a later

date. To fulfill that promise Swamiji started on a tour within a week after his birthday. Leaving the cave on the 3rd December, he arrived at Lucknow the next day. There his usual camping place, Shukla Ghat, was not fit for stay owing to the damage caused by the flood. So he was accommodated in Shah-en-Shah Ghat. A large number of people came for darshan and some of them received initiation also. As on other occasions, there were Satsang, Kirtan and other programmes every day. Many devotees took him to their houses. A young disciple, a doctor, had arranged for the Vidyarambha of his daughter. Swamiji visited his place and asked him to bring his second child also. When the doctor said that the child was running fourth year and they had no plan for her Vidyarambha, Swamiji brushed the objection aside, saying, 'Oh, No. You bring her.' The child was still sleeping as it was a chilly December morning. She was awakened and brought before Swamiji. Here also he adopted his own method as he did earlier in Kundara and initiated both the children into learning by writing some mystic syllable or Mantram on their tongue with his own finger. Only after two months did the young couple realize the secret and significance of Guru Maharaj's action: He wanted to bless his disciples' children then and there for he knew that he would be leaving the body shortly!

After spending a week in Lunknow, Swamiji proceeded to Delhi. There also he had a busy programme of discourses, visits and so on. At the request of the organizer of Yogoda Satsang (Ladies Section), he addressed their members one day at Kashmere Gate.

From Delhi Swamiji moved to Allahabad where he stayed for a few days and thence returned to the Cave. When his train halted at Lucknow, a large number of devotees met him on the platform. He was all love. Nobody could ever imagine that Swamiji was taking final leave of them all. In all the places that he visited on that tour, Swamiji showered his blessings abundantly on devotees. Everywhere the devotees felt his extra-ordinary love and grace, and they all were happy. But nobody then knew that Gurudev was on his final tour. After an absence of just three weeks Swamiji returned to the Cave on 24th December.

CHAPTER XVII

MAHASAMADHI & AFTER

The days rolled on and the year was out. The New Year (1961) dawned. The first month passed on without any spectacular event. Visitors came as usual for darshan, advice, etc. In other words, things were going on smoothly in Vasishta Guha. During the month of February, however, a change came. On Tuesday, the seventh, Swamiji developed symptoms of illness. Towards the evening of that day, all of sudden, he had high temperature coupled with severe vomiting. This made him weak. Some first-aid was given by the Ashramites (disciples) and, by midnight, his condition improved.

The next day, the disciples wanted to bring a physician from Rishikesh, but Swamiji did not allow them to do so. During the day there was no relapse of the fever but his physical condition was weak and he looked exhausted. The weather had changed: it was cloudy and there was drizzling off and on since two days. The sun was not visible at all. This aggravated the chillness of the season and hampered the early recovery of Swamiji's health. In the evening his temperature rose again and he spent another restless night.

The Ashramites became more concerned as they did not find any improvement in Gurudev's health. The weather also continued to be damp and cloudy. Swamiji gave instructions to send a

telegram to a particular disciple in Delhi about his being unwell. The words “seriously ill” were not approved by Swamiji. The telegram was redrafted saying. “Maharaj unwell.” On receipt of the telegram the disciple started immediately and reached the Cave on the morning of the 10th February. Just before getting the telegram he had received a letter from Swamiji. It was written on the 7th February, a few hours prior to his falling ill. In that letter Swamiji had written. “It is raining and raining - quite unusual. We do not know what all are in store for us. Thy will be done -” Was this a foreboding of his impending Mahasamadhi? Another point, the following conversation that Swamiji had with this disciple of Delhi on the day of his arrival, namely the 10th, is also of importance. Swamiji enquired whether the latter had a Panchangam with him and when replied in the affirmative, asked him to bring it. Then the following conversation ensued:

Swamiji : “See when is **Ekadasi**.”

Disciple (after consulting the Panchang) : “Tomorrow is Ekadashi, Maharaj.”

Swamiji : “And, Mahasivaratri?”

Disciple : “It is on Monday, the 13th.”

Swamiji (after a little pause) : “You know I am 82. The body does not co-operate.”

Perhaps Swamiji was giving a hint that he wanted to give up the body. But all that the disciple could guess was that Swamiji was talking about the illness he was suffering from.

In the meantime, the Ashramites brought a physician from Rishikesh. He examined Swamiji and prescribed some medicines.

An important event took place on Saturday, the eleventh. That day was Ekadashi. Not minding his illness, Swamiji took bath in the early morning. Then he called all the inmates of the Ashrama to his room. He enquired whether everyone had his ablutions, etc. and asked those who had not, to wash their face, feet, etc. and come. When everyone arrived, he asked them to sit erect in some posture (Padmasana, etc.), without touching each other. Swamiji himself was seated on his couch. Then he asked them to recite certain Slokas and hymns. After some time he gave a few words of advice. It was sermon on the ever-pure Atman. He also stressed the importance of complete surrender to God and depending on Him for everything. He cited his own life as an example of Divine grace, namely, how the Ashrama was being run without the least effort or anxiety on his part, and so on. Another point of emphasis in his advice was to be sincere in everything, to pray to the Lord with a sincere heart and to live with a mutual love. And to some of his disciples living far away, he gave certain instructions through letters which were written by others at Swamiji's instance. He was particular that his illness should not be mentioned to anyone. So he asked them to read out every letter and when he found that a hint about his illness had been made in a letter or two, he asked them to destroy those letters and re-write strictly according to his instructions. Therefore, although the Ashramites desired to inform some Guru-bhais who were away at the time, and for whom they had even drafted telegrams earlier without the

knowledge of Swamiji, they refrained from sending the message. Apart from general advice, Swamiji gave individual instructions also to some of those present. Then he exhorted them not to lose courage when everything was over - meaning, when he would have left the physical frame but to be strong. He also blessed them, some of them with a pat on the shoulder when they knelt down before him. The servant boy who lived as member of the Ashrama, was also a recipient of his grace on that day. This is reminiscent of what his own Guru, Swami Brahmanandaji, did during his last days. Says his biographer:

“Then he called all the disciples and devotees who were present to his side. For each he had a blessing and an affectionate word.

‘Ah, my children’, he told them tenderly : ‘never forget God, and you will realize the highest good. Don’t grieve. I shall be with you always.’ ”¹

Swamiji also directed by gesture that his body should be consigned to Mother Ganga. All throughout he was not speaking fluently: he would utter a word or two and then express himself by signs. Even in normal days he was a person of few words. On that day he spoke more through gestures than words. All were listening attentively. Pin-drop silence prevailed. A minute or two passed and Swamiji was sitting erect and motionless, his

¹ see “The eternal Companion’ by Swami Prabhavananda, P. 108 - III edition, 1961 (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras).

eyes gazing afar. Everyone could guess what it meant: Swamiji was getting ready to leave the body. At that juncture, unable to control his emotion, a disciple cried aloud: “O Maharaj, what will we do without you?” and so on.

A few minutes passed. The interruption seemed to have disturbed Swamiji. Slowly a change came over his face. He reverted to his normal posture and asked everybody to leave the room. Apparently he wanted to leave the body at that very moment. But when someone cried aloud in spite of his advice on spiritual matters, he was perhaps disturbed and he gave up the idea for the time being. Although only one among them cried aloud, tears were flowing from the eyes of most of those present and gloom was writ large on their face. Asking them to leave, he relaxed on the bed. From that time onward he spoke very little and remained indifferent to everyone. Was he giving them a practical lesson on detachment because they had so much attachment for his body despite his instructions? Later during the day when someone went to his room, Swamiji said; “Hey, take out the Panchangam. See when Sivaratri is.” This he said again to another disciple, and also on the next day. Every time he was told that Mahasivaratri was on Monday, the 13th. Was he waiting for that day to leave the body? The events which followed confirmed this apprehension.

Swamiji’s physical condition remained weak. During the day, two doctors, a practicing Homoeopath and an Allopath, were brought from Rishikesh. They were of the opinion that Swamiji’s heart was weak. They gave some medicines and returned. Although

they did not express it, they felt that during the night his health may turn critical. During the night Swamiji had no proper sleep and he spent yet another restless night.

The following day, i.e., Sunday, the 12th February, Swamiji's condition did not show any improvement. He was feeling restless. The weather was quite cold. In spite of that, he was feeling very hot - perhaps owing to the drugs. It was decided to bring a heart specialist from Dehradun or somewhere and somebody proceeded to Rishikesh for the purpose. At Rishikesh he came to know that the Civil Surgeon of Narendranagar was a heart specialist and that he had come to Rishikesh on that day. The doctor himself was planning to go to Vasishta Guha for Swamiji's darshan. He did not know that Swamiji was indisposed. So when he was approached, he readily consented. The two other doctors were also brought along with the specialist. The two doctors had no hope of seeing their patient alive and as such they were surprised beyond measure. They examined Swamiji and the Civil Surgeon also opined that his heart was weak. He said that Swamiji should be given complete rest and that he should not even talk as that would strain the heart. But Swamiji was not the person to care. He energetically talked to them lovingly for quite some time and gave them advice on spiritual matters. He gave them **Prasad** and also a copy each of his "Spiritual Talks" before their departure. The specialist felt highly blessed that he could get Swamiji's darshan and hear a few words of advice from him, for which he was longing. They gave some medicines to be administered and, after saluting Swamiji, they all left for Rishikesh.

Swamiji's physical restlessness continued during that night also. He was tossing from side to side and throwing away the quilt and blanket covering him, due to unbearable heat in the body. The disciples covered him again and again. Somehow that night also passed.

On **Monday, the 13th February 1961**, the fateful day dawned. It was Mahasivaratri day - a day dedicated to Lord Siva. People observe the day by fasting and worshipping. The day is of special importance to sannyasins also, and they keep vigil the whole night.

Swamiji was up early in the morning and had his bath in warm water. The weather which had become damp and cloudy a week before, turned worse on that day. Occasional drizzling and dampness increased the cold. A chilly wind was blowing. It was now a week since the sun had not been seen. Nature appeared gloomy.

Although Swamiji had asked everybody to keep away, someone remained in the room or outside, just near the door. By turn the Ashramites kept vigil day and night to attend on Swamiji from the day he fell ill.

In the morning Swamiji asked a disciple to sit near the door and read the eight chapter of **Srimad Bhagavad Gita** (entitled 'The Discourse on Immortal Brahman') and the eleventh chapter of **Sri Durga Saptasati** (designated 'Devi Stuti' or the praise of the Goddess).

That day being Mahasivaratri, some people from the nearby villages visited Vasishtha Guha, after bathing in the Ganga. It was a general practice with them to have a dip in the Ganga and have darshan of Swamiji and the Cave on auspicious days like Mahasivaratri, Sri Rama Navami, Janmashtami, etc. That year also some people visited, despite the unusually chill weather. One among them was an aged Brahmin woman from the village, Lorsi. This woman had great faith in Swamiji. She was kind-hearted too. Whenever Swamiji gave Sannyasa to some disciples in Vasishtha Guha, it was her privilege to offer Bhiksha to the new monks on the first day. They would go to Lorsi and collect Bhiksha from her house. It was this very same lady who, way back in 1929, offered him the first Bhiksha when Swamiji went round the village to collect food-grains¹. That was when he came to settle down in Vasishtha Guha. It was again this lady's son, then a young lad, who gave him a handful of salt in the absence of elders in the house². Swamiji never forgot such incidents. He recollected many such acts of help rendered to him even during his boyhood days and felt grateful to those who had helped in unforeseen circumstances. Even a casual reading of his life will reveal his feelings for such benefactors. When the woman came and saluted him, Swamiji spoke to her tenderly and asked a Brahmacharin-disciple to bring a new jari (gold-lace)-bordered dhoti and give it to her. He also bade the disciple to give her two rupees. The lady would not accept the

¹ See - The Life of Swami Purushottamananda

² ibid - P.152

gifts. Then Swamiji signalled to her to take and she accepted them gratefully as 'Prasada'. Perhaps Swamiji was recollecting the old incidents and giving her his final gifts. After some time a Brahmin from the same village came for darshan and to him also Swamiji gave two rupees.

There was not much rest for him during the day. Everyone in the Ashrama was anxious. And slowly the day faded into night. Swamiji drank a little milk. After a while he had a dose of medicine also. At about 10 O'clock when a disciple went to give him a sleeping pill, Swamiji said, laughing, "Oh! who needs it? You take it." The disciple pleaded that doctors had said that rest was very essential for him and as such he should take the pill. All the while Swamiji was lying on left lateral position, facing the wall. A few seconds after the disciple's pleadings, he turned to his right and said. 'Hey, hurry up. Be quick. I am going to sleep forever.' Then he took the tablet and swallowed it. Who ever knew the significance of his utterance? Lately he had been speaking in such a vein. Less than a month before, on the 21st January, his Sannyasini disciple who had come from Rishikesh, was returning. While taking leave, she saluted Swamiji and said that she would come again Mahasivaratri day. Immediately he retorted, "Who knows where I will be on Mahasivaratri day? Who knows where I will be on that day?" He said like this many times, but neither she nor others who were present could imagine that Swamiji was hinting at his own departure from the physical plane. No wonder the Brahmacharin who gave the sleeping pill, also could not guess the seriousness of Swamiji's words. A few months earlier, in a letter to a householder disciple in Lucknow,

dated 11th October 1960, Swamiji had written, “What all are going to happen in 1961? Forget not the Lord.” Was this also a hint about his own Mahasamadhi? This disciple is a man of absolute faith in Swamiji. Swamiji would have foreseen that the disciple would be put to great agony when he left the body and hence this warning and advice not to forget the Lord. That is how the disciple interprets it. One could guess about these writings and utterances only later.

To come back to our story. After administering the tablet, the Brahmacharin went out. Another disciple was sitting outside the room to attend on Swamiji. He was reciting some slokas, etc. in a low tone. After quite some time a disciple entered the room to observe whether Swamiji was sleeping or not. He found him quiet. He also noticed that Swamiji’s eyes were looking blank. He raised a cry and all the others rushed to the room. They found that his heart had stopped beating. Other symptoms also proved that the body was lifeless but it was still warm. Swamiji had attained Mahasamadhi at 10.50 p.m.

That was a significant time for, it happens to be the second quarter (Prahara) of Mahasivaratri (night). Of the four Praharas, the second is considered to be the most important one as the midnight Sandhya (junction) occurs at the end of this quarter. Again, this particular time happens to be the auspicious seventh Muhoorta¹ (also termed “Lingodbhava Muhurta”), for, it is said

¹ 48 minutes constitute a Muhoorta. The seventh Muhoorta is between 10-25 and 11.13 P.M., approximately.

that it was during this period that Paramesvara (the formless Supreme Brahman) manifested Himself in the form of Jyotirlinga. So, in common parlance, that was most auspicious time for Swamiji to leave his body. But, of this, later.

II

The Leela (play) is over. The instrument of this Leela lay motionless on the bed. Everyone present realized the gravity of the situation. The Master unto whom they had surrendered themselves and to whom they looked for spiritual guidance would not be available any more. He was not only a Master to them but a Father, Mother and Master, all combined. He loved them as a mother would her children. Naturally, their sorrow knew no bounds and they felt orphaned.

Gradually they composed themselves and discussed together about the action to be taken immediately. Telegrams to many disciples and devotees in various parts of the country were drafted; a list of articles to be purchased in connection with Mahasamadhi was drawn. And, by 2 a.m., undaunted by the dark night, chill weather and the distance (22 kilometres), two Ashramites trekked to Rishikesh. They reached the town before dawn and the news of the Mahasamadhi of **‘Vasishta Guha-wale Maharaj ji’** spread like wild fire. After purchasing the articles needed, they returned by bus. Telegrams flashed to Allahabad, Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Trivandrum and many other places.

Tuesday, the 14th February, 1961 :

By 9 a.m. the sky was clear and the sun appeared brilliantly, a great relief after a week of damp weather. In Rishikesh the shop-keepers closed their business in honour of Swamiji and many of them proceeded to Vasishtha Guha to pay homage to the revered Sage. A large number of Sannyasins also arrived from Rishikesh. People from nearby villages poured in too. Those who have visited the place would appreciate the difficulties in reaching the cave: viz., a distance of 22 kilometres from Rishikesh, inadequate transport facilities during those days, the one-way traffic system prevailing then, the bad weather prevailing for a week and various other handicaps. And, many people had fasted the previous day and kept vigil the whole night. In spite of all these difficulties, by noon, a few hundred had gathered to pay their last homage.

Arrangements for the disposal of the physical frame that encased the sage were complete by 2 p.m. As Swamiji had already instructed on Ekadasi day that the body should be offered to Ganga, the disciples had not to think of the other method, namely, burying the body in a sitting posture - interring in Samadhi - as is the general practice from ancient times in disposing of the body of a Sannyasin after Mahasamadhi. In North India, however, the custom of immersing the body in the Ganga and certain other sacred rivers is also prevalent. Swamiji had great reverence for Mother Ganga and he had expressed a preference for this method. After giving a bath

and draping with new ochre robes, the body was brought from the room to the entrance of the cave and seated on the gadi. This was his familiar seat, sitting where he used to conduct Satsang, take meals, etc. This enabled one and all to pay last respects to their beloved and revered Maharaj. No one could believe that Swamiji had attained Mahasamadhi: the face had not faded and the limbs were pliant even though sixteen hours elapsed after Mahasamadhi. The sacred ashes (Vibhuti) on the broad forehead gave an appearance of freshness. Who would believe that a lifeless body was seated there? Burning incense sticks were emanating sweet aroma. The body was bedecked with flower garlands; flower petals were strewn all round. The whole atmosphere was charged and solemn.

By 3 p.m. the body was transferred to a decorated chair and carried to the Ganga, followed by the crowd. They were singing the Kirtan: **“Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare!”** All along the route flowers were showered on the body. On reaching the bank the body was removed from the chair and seated on a flat rock. There the final worship befitting a sage was performed. Abhisheka was done with milk, honey, rose-water, attar, Ganagajal and so on; flowers were offered, Arati was performed with burning camphor.

A few words about this procedure may not be out of place here. There are not ‘last rites’ for a Sannyasin as are done for ordinary men. The Sruti declares, नाशौचं नाग्निकार्यं च न पिण्डोदक क्रिया... namely, ‘No impurity’¹, no rites with fire, no offering of rice-balls, nor

any rite with water², for a Sannyasin. Therefore, in the case of a Sannyasin, there is only worship and no ‘last rites’.

After Puja the body was seated on a thick cotton sheet with a heavy marble slab to give weight. The corners of the sheet were brought to the head and wrapped round. Amidst shoutings of “Guru Maharaj ji ki Jai” and so on it was transferred to an improvised raft and rowed to the mid-stream. There the body was lowered and placed on the lap of mother Ganga. Thus the sage’s mortal coil also disappeared from the physical vision of onlookers.

A Sloka composed by a disciple, Swami Raghuv eerananda, on the Mahasamadhi of Guru Maharaj, is given below:

नगविधुसुषिपक्षैः सम्मिते विक्रमाब्दे
शशिदिनशिवरात्रेः सप्तमे सन्मुहूर्ते ।
उपगतजनवृन्दं सागत्वयन् सपदेशैः
परमपदमवाप्नोदुत्तमः पूरुषोऽयम् ॥

(Having given his last sermon to the assembled disciples, this Sage, the paragon among men, attained total liberation (Videhamukti) during the auspicious seventh Muhoorta of Mahasivaratri on Monday, in the Vikrama Samvat 2017.)

¹ Pollution for ten days, etc. observed by near relatives of a deceased person. No such observance is necessary when a Sannyasin leaves the body.

² Ceremonies performed for the welfare of the departed soul - Homa Pinda-dana, Jalanjali, annual Sraaddha, etc. These are ruled out for a Sannyasin.

III

Many devotees in different towns had strange experience on that Mahasivaratri night. Various people narrated their experiences when they gathered in Vasishta Guha to participate in the special Puja conducted on the sixteenth day of Swamiji's Mahasamadhi. All those details have not been recorded. However, we will cite one incident which will be of interest to devotees.

A disciple in Himachal Pradesh was meditating in his Puja room on Mahasivaratri night. He had unquestionable faith in Swamiji. He was facing a photograph of Swamiji, which was kept in a Mandap. A lamp was burning near the photo. That night he had very deep meditation, the like of which he had not known before. After meditation when he opened his eyes he noticed the curtain of the Mandap suddenly jerking, as if blown by a strong wind. One corner of it came in contact with the flame of the ghee-lamp and caught fire. He extinguished it at once, but became perplexed about the incident because this happened in a closed room, where he did not feel any sudden breeze that could have moved the curtain. He felt something ominous, the significance of which he understood only on the following day when he received the telegraphic message from Vasishta Guha. A notable feature in this incident is that it had taken place about the same time as Swamiji entered Mahasamadhi!

Apparently Swamiji had originally chosen Ekadasi for Mahanivarana. Some people contend that his choice was Mahasivaratri for, apart from the day being auspicious by itself,

there were other features too. It was a Monday, there was 'Pradosha' all dusk and Chaturdasi later. All these are considered sacred for Lord Siva. The combination of these is very rare and it had occurred that year (1961). These are views expressed by common folk. The truth is that the sage has no such consideration for discarding the body. This has been emphatically declared by Sri Sankaracharya in his famous treatise, Vivekachudamani, (sl.557), thus:

सदात्मनि ब'ह्मणि तिष्ठतो गुणेः
 पूर्णबुद्धयानन्दमयात्मना सदा ।
 न देशकालाद्युचित प्रतीक्षा
 त्वङ्मांसविट् पिण्डविसर्जनाय ॥

*“The sage who always lives in the Reality -
 Brahman - as Infinite Bliss, the One without
 a second, does not depend upon the customary
 considerations of place, time, etc. for giving
 up this mass of skin, flesh and filth.*

*(He may give up the body any time he
 pleasure, for it has served its purpose.)'*

IV

The next few days were full of activity in the Ashrama. The Ashramites, as well as the other disciples who started arriving

¹ Tr. & Notes by Swami Madhavananda (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati).

everyday, seemed lifeless. Yet they had to plan and arrange for the **Shodasi** (the sixteenth day function). A bulletin announcing the passing away of the Great Sage was released to the Press. The news appeared in many newspapers and periodicals. The Trivandrum station of All-India Raido, on receipt of the news, included it in their evening news broadcast and the Malayalam-speaking world became grief-stricken. Almost all the Malayalam dailies of Kerala published the news, and articles with photographs appeared in many periodicals in that language.

Printed cards intimating the passing away of the Master were despatched to disciples and devotees all over the country. The **Shodasi** was on the 28th February. A Havan was performed on that day for world peace. Another important item was the worshipping of sixteen Sannyasins. They were presented with various articles like cloth, a copy of Bhagavad-Gita, a garland of Rudraksha, etc. This was followed by a grand feast in which a large number of Sadhus and more than a thousand householders took part. The Master's disciples and devotees had arrived from various parts of the country; people from Rishikesh and from the hills had also gathered. It was a grand function befitting the Master's greatness. By Swamiji's grace everything went off well and thus the last function connected with the Mahasamadhi also came to a close.

CHAPTER XVIII

VASHISHTA GUHA ASHRAMA TODAY

The Master has left his physical frame. His disciples and devotees decided that the sacred memory of the Master should be perpetuated in the place where he spent more than three decades. Vasishtha Guha was his abode of penance for many years. Swamiji used to say that the Cave has solved many problems for him. The moment he sat in meditation inside the Cave, he used to say, all troubles vanished like darkness before light. Slowly an Ashrama had sprung up and the disciples desired that the Ashrama should continue to be run as before so that house-holders could come and spend a few days whenever possible and practice Sadhana. Moreover, they could all gather together on festival occasions like his birthday and live in the thoughts of their Guru Maharaj, talk about their reminiscences of him and hear about him from co-disciples - ‘तद्चित्तनम् तद्कथ्यमन्योन्यं तद्प्रबोधनं’. Proposals and counter-proposals as to the shape of the arrangements were placed and discussed. As is generally found everywhere, misgivings, misunderstandings and differences raised their heads in the minds of some disciples. At long last, a Private Religious Trust was formed and the deed registered in the month of December 1962 to manage the affairs of the Ashrama.

The primary aim of the Trust is to perpetuate the sacred memory of the Master. And to fulfil this a temple is being constructed

in the Ashrama where a marble statue of Swamiji will be installed. Devotees will be able to sit and meditate there and feel the presence of the Master. May Sri Guru Maharaj's grace be showered upon all! May everyone attain peace!

APPENDIX

(A)

BIRTHDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE delivered by Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj on his eighty-first birthday celebrated on 8th December, 1959:

ॐ

मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ।

श्रद्धया परयोपेतास्ते मे युक्ततमा मताः ॥

The object of all these, this Kirtan, this Bhajan, Puja is to take the mind to the Lord. The mind is always going out. It is very difficult to control it. So these are the means to take the mind inside. As lovers think of their beloved while eating, drinking or playing, and as the misers think of their wealth, those who want to advance spiritually, must think of the Lord in the same way. They must think of the Lord and Lord alone. There should be no room for any other thought. Place a signboard: “No entry. The door is closed.”

For all these, what is required is strength. ‘नायमात्मा बलहीनेन लभ्यः’ - This Atman is not for the weaklings, this is for the strong men. How to accumulate strength? There is a pot which has got five holes and you keep water in it and go to sleep. When you wake up you will find not even a drop of water in it. Whose mistake

is it? It is your own. You should have closed these five holes and then if you had filled the pot with water it would have stayed there. Our body is the pot and the five holes are the five senses - (पंचेन्द्रियः). Through these we have to collect strength and through these very **Indriyas** the strength also goes away. When we hear Bhajan, stories about the Lord and good music, we get strength through the ears; and when we see the Ganga and holy persons we get strength through the eyes. When we talk about good things, read the Bhagavatam, Ramayanam, etc., we get strength through the tongue. So these are the means if we use them properly; otherwise all the strength goes away. So collect and collect strength. A weakling has no place here or anywhere. Strength is life. We have got this human body. Many many bodies we have already taken - they say eighty-four lakhs - and then we have got this human birth. This must be utilised well. This is the boat to cross the ocean of Maya. We have got the boat and if we do not utilize it to cross the ocean, then we are committing the greatest suicide - atmahatya. So utilize every second in the best way possible if you want to become masters. Nobody wants to become a slave; everybody wants to become a master - “I”, “I”, “I”, - and this is the way. But you are taking wrong ways. Now take the right way. Know for certain that happiness is not outside. All the happiness you are getting is from inside but you think you are getting it from outside. It is all **inside** and **inside** alone. The treasure-house of happiness is **inside**; so go **inside** and be happy. And you get Shanti - perfect calmness. You are all happy now. Why? Because the mind is not going here and there and the mind is perfectly quiet. So this is the way to get happiness.

Truly speaking, I had no mind to celebrate the birthday. Whose birthday? I was not at all willing to give trouble to you all in the this cold weather, but somehow or other it has come off like this. You know the great Swami Vivekanandaji. He has written in a book¹ : “O, mother, make me a Man.” Likewise let us all become real Men and not beasts. ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

Food, sleep, fear and sex - these are common to beasts also. If you are indulging in these actions only, you are worse than beasts, Why? The beasts have no common-sense and discrimination but we have got them. So utilize this commonsense and discrimination and go above and above and be settled, be fully established in the Atman, the all-pervading Atman. May Lord bless us all!

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

¹ **Modern India**, vide Complete Works Vol. IV, P.480 (Tenth edition)

(B)**POEMS****(i)**

(The following poem was unearthed by me in an old note book of Guru Maharaj, lying in a corner of the cave along with some waste material. This was the only 'complete' work in it. The book was partly destroyed by worms and as such some words were not clear. However, I copied it and approached Maharaj for clarification when he returned from South India in September 1960. He was surprised at the discovery for he thought it must have been destroyed long ago. Maharaj asked me to read it and he also recited the whole poem along with me. He remembered it although it was written about thirty years before. He was pleased to supply the words that were not clear and also the last two lines of the last stanza. He said that he was inspired to compose this poem in line with Swami Vivekananda's "The Song of the Sanyasin" when he was in Brahmapuri (1929 or '30).

Maharaj had not given a caption to the poem. Upon my request, one of his guru-bhais, Brahmasri P. Seshadri Iyer, a pious man and well-known linguist of Kerala, suggested the present title.)

ADMONITIONS OF THE SANNYASIN

Hear Ye great ones and think no more
You are bodies frail of flesh and bones;
Nor mind you are which fleets and decays
But above mind and body both
Know you are for ever and sure
And say with voice so clear and high
I'm the Self eternal ever pure

Hari Om Tat Sat

When troubles come and disasters bother
Deny flatly what these are!
Can these have sway over me the pure
Bliss, Intelligence, all-knowing, free
Reach that height and teach the world
Hungry and poor as they are
I'm the Self eternal ever pure

Hari Om Tat Sat

The world may praise and blame at times,
But be ye fixed in the central Truth.
The sun is always bright and luminous
In him no day or night
No clouds can veil or mar him least
The brilliant sun; and what you are!
Sun of sun and Moon of moon
And know this Truth with grace of Lord
I'm the Self eternal ever pure

Hari Om Tat Sat

The body may or may not live
 It may vanish soon or late
 The whole world is in the jaws of death
 And What! your body silly thing:
 Be not cowards, be heroes
 Face the death with all thy might
 Kick him down and jump over him
 Knowing thine own nature true
 I'm the Self eternal ever pure

Hati Om Tat Sat

Many a birth and death you had;
 In many a body you had been
 Again you are blindly thinking
 I am Mr. So - and - so
 Off this idea, be ever fixed
 I'm the Self eternal ever pure

Hari Om Tat Sat.

(ii)

(There is an interesting story behind the poem that follows. During his visit to Kerala in 1952, Swami Purushottamanandaji went to Pullad to see his boyhood friend, Vaidyan Narayana Panikar. The Vaidya, his wife and all members of the family were his disciples and they had great devotion for him. When he visited the place, he saw little girls doing "Tiruvatirakali"

(Ardra dance). This is a folk dance of Kerala in which the participants form a circle, going round and round singing songs and keeping time by clapping the hands. When the dance was over, Swamiji called the lady of the house and said, “Here is another song. Note it down” and composed it impromptu. He called it ‘JNANAKKUMMI’. This song has become very popular in Kerala and is sung everywhere during Bhajan-Kirtam.

This song has been included in Swamiji’s ‘Atma Katha’. When the manuscript of “The Story of Divine Compassion” was presented for his approval, Swamiji asked me why this song was not there. The difficulty of translating the song was explained and it was suggested that it could be included in some other work at a later date. And he agreed. During Swamiji’s final tour in December 1960, I was inspired to translate the work. I placed the translation when he returned, but had not the good fortune of eliciting his opinion on it as I left the Guha on pilgrimage and returned only after his Mahasamadhi. A couple of years later I showed this also to the famous linguist of Kerala, Sri P. Seshadri Iyer, who made valuable suggestions and improved the translation. Now it is being included in this book.)

S.N.

THE SONG OF WISDOM

Ye folks! to attain the supreme goal of life
By dwelling on the Blessed beneficent blue-hued Lord,
And His divine Leelas that free you from sorrows,
Why do you hesitate?

Wasting not the precious moments,
Meditate on the full form
of Radha's Lord, Charmer of Lakshmi,
 born of the ocean of milk
And say adieu to vanity, delusion and the rest of the ills.

Service unto the great ones, rendered with Sraddha
A sovereign remedy to cure all ills
Bringing in its train purity of mind
Delivers unto thee untainted Bhakti and Mukti

The delusion 'I am the body'
Which turns everything topsy-turvy;
Knowing not the Truth of the Self, alas!
Fools are caught in unceasing birth and death

To throw off the burden of Samsara
It's easy if you but possess
Child-like nature and non-attachment
know it soon, my dear ones

Be no more a frog in the well',
Reach the height of the Infinite.
Peace of mind for ever and aye
Can be attained with utmost ease.

Become a Krishna yourself
By thinking on His form and Leelas
Desires vanish with all their train
And you'll behold the Lord in all.

“Thou, Narayan, Hari, the One dispeller of sorrows,
O, Madhusudhana, giver of Moksha”
Reverently recite His name ever with devotion
Eternal bliss will come to you.

Sincere devotion, the only path
To reach the lotus feet of Lord.
Resting all hopes in Him, the Lord of Lords
Attain your natural blessed state.

To secure Yogakshema¹ to those
Who worship Him with guileless heart.
Kama’s foe, the charioteer of Partha,
Is ever nearest of all.

Knowing this human birth to be
The result of virtues of many lives,
Regain the knowledge Immortal
By seeking the Sadguru’s lotus feet.

Yearning to realize Atmaswaroop,
Intensified day by day
“Brahman is Real, false all else”
Will reveal in the heart most brilliantly.

1. Gain and safety.

You'll gain a state of unwavering
Even in the midst of quakes violet;
Meditate with real understanding
“Tat-Tvam-Asi”² and other great Vedic Texts.

Alas! Alas! many a day,
I wandered in delusion of mind
The grace of the Sadguru shed
Pure Bliss³ and Peace on Purusha.

Translated by Swami Nirvedananda

2. Thou art That.

3. The word in the original is ‘NIRMAL-ANANDA’. The last two lines of the original are so ingeniously composed as to serve also as a tribute to Swami Nirmalanandaji, who moulded the composer’s spiritual career.

SUBLIME

SUBMISSIONS

SUBLIME

SUBMISSIONS

The Guru

- Swami Nirvedananda

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

A very familiar sloka is recited by millions of Hindus every day. The meaning is plain:

“The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is Siva, the God of gods. The Guru verily is the Supreme Brahman, Salutations to that adorable Guru!” The Guru is identical not only with the Holy Trinity of the Hindu religion responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe but also with the Transcendental Brahman, the One without a second. Such is the position of the Guru. Etymologically, the word is explained as “Dispeller of darkness (Avidya)”. ‘**Gu**’ meaning darkness and ‘**Ru**’ remover. This is all in the religious context. Even in a lighter sense, in the ordinary usage, the word means ‘heavy’. Such being the greatness even of the word, it looks audacious on my part to launch on the subject with my limited knowledge. I take a hint from Sri Pushpadanta, namely, that my mind and speech may be purified by dwelling on the greatness of Guru. It is only this hope that has prompted me to write on the subject and this is my only apology for this venture.

The necessity of a Guru for a spiritual aspirant can never be over estimated. Even in secular matters, whether it be a child

beginning to learn the three R's, or an adolescent wishing to learn motor driving, or any other trade for that matter, he has to put himself under a teacher who is himself competent in the subject. How much more it is in the case of a Sadhaka who has to tread the spiritual path which is likened to the 'sharp edge of a razor'? This fact can be discerned from most of the Upanishads which deal with the subject of Brahma Vidya. The students approaching a Seer with their doubts about Atman-Brahman Reality, and the Rishi asking them to undergo some more penance according to the degree of purity of mind already achieved by them and, later, imparting the Supreme Knowledge to them, is a very common feature in the Vedantic texts. We also come across direct Sruti and Smriti passages stressing the necessity of a Guru.

i) Says the **Kathopanishad**: उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत – “Arise, awake (from the slumber of ignorance) and realize, having approached the excellent (teachers)”

ii) The Mundakopanishad (1.2.12) also stresses the point thus: तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् - “To know That (Atman), he (the aspirant) should approach a Guru” Sri Sankaracharya, while commenting on this passage, clarifies that one should not launch on the knowledge of Brahman independently, even though he is learned in the scriptures.

iii. The Bhagavad Gita (IV- 31) also exhorts : तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया “Know that (Supreme knowledge) by thyself (before the Guru), by questions, and by serving him”.

We are thus convinced on the authority of the shastras and our own reasoning that a Guru is necessary- nay, indispensable, if we have to attain success in the spiritual path. But a problem arises: How to recognise and choose a real Guru? What are his qualifications? Let us look to Sri Sankaracharya for an answer: He describes an ideal Guru as one who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, unsmitten by desire and a knower of Brahman par excellence, who has withdrawn himself into Brahman; who is calm, like fire that has consumed its fuel, who is a boundless reservoir of mercy that knows no reason, and a friend of all good people who prostrate themselves before him '(Vivekachudamani, verse 33). Then, again, there is no yardstick with which to measure the spirituality of the Guru and make sure of his genuineness before surrendering to him. Only, we must have implicit faith. "Even the finding of a Sadguru depends upon one's Karma", says the Sage of Vasishta Guha, Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji.

He proceeds: "Many people wonder whether faith in the Guru alone suffices. They are afraid of being exploited or of being misguided. Although there is the possibility of one being exploited or of being misguided by an ordinary guru who does not possess the requisite qualifications, still we remember that we live in a world governed by Law and we get generally what we deserve. If a Sadhaka is perfectly sincere and has intense desire for finding God, there is hardly any possibility of his falling into the hands of an unscrupulous person. Things do not happen by chance but according to an over-ruling Law known as Karma. Besides, the more our mind becomes pure, the

greater is the power of Viveka, and with a discriminating mind it is not possible for us to choose an undesirable person as our Guru. It is only unscrupulous people who generally come across unscrupulous gurus.”

The disciple surrenders himself to the Guru without any reserve and pins his faith on him for his salvation. Such a disciple who has ananyabhakti does not waver or entertain doubts about the preceptor’s teachings; nor does he run about from guru to guru to achieve his aim. One who digs a well has to concentrate on one selected spot and dig persistently until water is struck. If he changes the spot frequently and digs at different places, he will never find water; all his efforts will result only in waste of energy, time and money. In the same manner, one has to stick to one Guru and practice Sadhanas as prescribed by him. “The Knowledge that the Guru possesses can be had only by Guru-bhakti,” says Lord Siva to Parvati. The importance of Guru-bhakti is stressed by Sruti also. The Svetasvataropanishad says that the spiritual truths shine forth only in him who has supreme devotion to God and an equal degree of devotion to Guru - यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ । The teacher who, having himself crossed this dreadful ocean of Samsara, helps others also to cross the same without any motive whatsoever is, indeed, a great soul. The greatness of such a Guru has no comparison anywhere. While narrating the greatness of the Guru, the Lord tells Parvati: “If Siva gets angry you can find a saviour in your Guru; but if the Guru is enraged, there is none to save you.” We come across an anecdote in the **Ramacharitamanasa** of Goswami Tulsidas, illustrating this statement of Lord Siva.

It runs thus :

“A disciple was sitting in a Siva temple, doing Japa as initiated by his Guru. He, because of his birth and culture had grown more and more egoistic than Sattvik. The Guru never uttered a word of reproach even when his teachings were ignored or he himself was insulted. Now, when the disciple was in the temple, his Guru also happened to come there. The disciple’s egoistic feelings were upper most and he did not even care to get up from his seat and prostrate himself before his Guru. The latter, as was his nature, did not mind the lapse on the part of his disciple but the Lord could not tolerate the discourtesy shown to the Guru. A voice was heard, cursing the impertinent disciple, ‘O sinner, you have been sitting motionless like a python when your Guru has come. For this sort of insolence, may you become a snake and live in the hole of a big tree.’ The disciple realised his mistake and began trembling with fear. The Lord had cursed him, but the Guru had a soft corner for his disciple. So, he praised the Lord and prayed to Him to save his disciple from the wrath and the Lord had to modify the curse, making it lighter.” This praise, called ‘Rudrashtakam,’ is very popular among the people of North India.

In modern times too, saints have glorified the greatness of the Guru. Sri Swami Maheswarananda Saraswati, the late Sankaracharya of the Oordhvamnaya Peetham, Varanasi , who was an authority in various Sastras, used to say like this: “If one has removed the previous day’s flowers, garlands, apparel, etc. from the deity and is about to begin the worship, and if his Guru happens to come there then, he should leave everything at that

stage. Then, after salutations, he should offer a seat to his Guru and perform the remaining part of the Puja including Dhoopa, Deepa, Naivedya, etc. to him. After that he can continue the worship of the deity. The Lord will only be pleased by this.” Coming as it does from such authority, it has the stamp of the Sastras affirming the superiority of Guru over God.

There is a couplet in Hindi sung by a Bhakta kavi, with which people in the North are very familiar. Rendered freely, it would read:

**“Guru and God have both appeared,
To whom to bow down (first)?
Guru is greater (between the two),
For, he has shown me God.”**

Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji has also dealt on what may be called divided loyalty to the Guru and Ishta-devata. After giving a few hints he says: “Besides, this difficulty of directing the devotion to both, the Ishta-devata and the Guru, is based upon a misconception with regard to their nature and the relation between them. There is really no difference between the two. The Sadguru is really an embodiment of the Ishta-devata and should be regarded as such. Then there will be no question of divided loyalties. We worship God in stone images. Why cannot we worship him in a living image which the Guru is?”

All these anecdotes, authoritative texts and statements of Mahapurushas of our day tell us the greatness of the Guru when the disciple is a Sadhaka, one practicing spiritual disciplines in order to attain the **summum bonum** of life, namely, Moksha.

When one attains to that state, we learn, all differences disappear: no duality whatsoever remains-not even the difference of Guru and Shishya. After reaching that exalted state does the disciple completely forget the Guru who helped him to attain that Supreme felicity and push him to the background? No, Guru is great even after reaching that state. Sri Sankaracharya tells us graphically in a few verses how the disciple, bubbling with Joy after experiencing the highest Samadhi, gives expression to his gratitude to the preceptor who made it possible for him to attain that state of Beatitude. One of the verses reads, *“Blessed am I; I have attained the consummation of life, and am free from the clutches of transmigration; I am the Essence of Eternal Bliss, I am infinite-all through thy mercy!”*

Another savant, Sri Tandavaraya Swami, portrays the disciple’s attitude and the Guru’s exhortation in two beautiful songs (verses) in his **Kaivalya-Navaneetam**, a masterpiece on Advaita Vendanta in the Tamil language. We give a rough translation in brief: The disciple sings: “Salutations to thee, Oh Father! Thou, residing in me as Antaryamin, hast been guiding me through my innumerable births and hast come out as Guru in this birth of mine to grant me Mukti by imparting the Knowledge Supreme. For this act of kindness, Oh Lord! Oh Gurudeva! I know not how to repay thee. Salutations at the Holy Feet again and again. And, what does the teacher demand as Guru-dakshina? The magnanimous preceptor, as befits his status, answers in very endearing terms: “My child, if you remain established in Brahman (Swarupajnana), not giving the least chance for doubts, ignorance, etc., to rise again, that will be the best reward.”

This expression of indebtedness by the disciple is found in Srutis too, but in a seed-form, like an aphorism. The Prakarana treatises of a later period, like the ones quoted above, have elaborated and presented it in a picturesque manner. One Sruti text reads: “Having worshipped him, they (the disciples) said, ‘Thou art our father that hast taken us across the other shore of Avidya.’”

From all that has been said above, it will be seen that the status of a Guru has no comparison whatsoever; he is always great and there is nothing greater than him. That is the reason why it is difficult to find a real Guru. Sri Sankara too lists, among other things, the ‘protecting care of perfected sage’ as a rare thing, and available only due to the grace of God. But one need not lose heart. As we have seen in the foregoing paragraphs, if one is perfectly sincere to find God, to attain brahmajnana, he is sure to find the Sadguru. If a question is again raised as to how one decides upon a particular person as his Guru, we can only say that the intuition plays the part of a guide in this matter. Or, as someone has said in a different context, ‘the heart knows the reason that reason does not know’ aptly fits in here also.

Before concluding the article, let me offer grateful Pranams to my revered Guru whose grace alone helped me to write on such a lofty topic as this. Whatever good point is found in this, is all due to him; irrelevant points and inadvertence being entirely mine.

May the grace of the Supreme Guru be ever upon all!

Om Shanthi ! Shanthi ! Shanthihi !

My Sacred Reminiscences

- Swami Sankarananda

People are always happy to tell how they were drawn to the lotus feet of their Sadguru and their reminiscences about him. It is a source of rare spiritual joy and inspiration. The mind is withdrawn with ease from this mundane world and it soars to the spiritual realms. It gives a boost to their sadhana. As such I feel some ineffable joy in recalling my reminiscences of Sri Guru Maharaj. Not only this, I also find the unseen Grace of God that brings a sadhaka to the lotus feet of his Sadguru.

Even in my teens I had the good fortune of reading the life and teachings of our great spiritual masters, sages and saints and some religious literature, Upanishads, etc. from my father's library. In 1957, I got a copy of the autobiography of our Guru Maharajji the sage of Vasishta Guha, **Iswarakarunaym** in Malayalam (from a friend who was member of the Divine Life Society and who occasionally used to visit Rishikesh, headquarters of Sivananda Ashram). Instinctively, I was attracted to him and inspired by his life of Tapasya, renunciation, Nishta, etc.

In 1958, I visited Kanyakumari on a pilgrimage along with some of my friends. Sri Parameswaran Pillai, (G.O.C, of Kerala Force) was living there in those days after his retirement, devoting his time to spiritual sadhana. In the course of conversation, he mentioned about his trips to the holy places of the Himalayas,

his visit to Vasishta Guha, meeting Maharaj and the publication of the autobiography of Maharaj, etc. He also told us that Sri Maharaj was expected to visit Kerala and Kanyakumari shortly. One day I saw, in a daily, the happy news of Maharajji's programme at Trivandrum.

One afternoon I reached the house of Dhanwanthari Parameswaran Pillai, Trivandrum, where Maharajji was accommodated. That day he was invited for *Bhiksha* by a devotee, Sri Chandrasekharan Pillai, I.G. of Police, to his house. On his return, Maharajji saw a few of us waiting for his darshan. Even though it was time for his rest, he did not care for that and was happy to be with us. I offered flowers at his feet. There was no formality or fixed time for his darshan. Anybody, known or unknown, young or old, high or low could freely approach him at any time. His room was always open and, so too was his heart to devotees. He was happy and smiling. His mere presence was a source of inspiration and supreme peace. His personality was much more than what one might imagine by reading the autobiography. He rarely used to make any formal enquiries viz. about name, occupation, place, etc. So directly he began to ask, as it was usual with him, "What do you want?" It was an eye-opener. It used to awaken the spirit of self-analysis and enquiry. This enquiry, 'What do you want?' is also a Mantra to be remembered often in life when the mind gets distracted by all sorts of mundane desires. This helps to develop Viveka and Vairagya and to maintain the balance of mind. Human life becomes blessed if only we know what is it that is really wanted

or desired. ‘Desire something by which all desires vanish’. Such was Maharajji’s method of teaching.

Maharajji asked me to meet him again at Ramakrishna Ashram, Nettayam, a few miles away from Trivandrum, after a day or two. Accordingly, I reached there one morning with some of my friends. Shri Maharajji was seen sitting on the western verandah, commanding a distant and beautiful scenery. A senior Swami of the R.K. Mission was eager to know about the life at Vasishta Guha-how many members, how it is run and the means of income, etc. Maharajji said, “Eight to ten permanent inmates apart from the floating number of pilgrims, ten to fifteen daily.”

Question: “Is there any permanent fund to run the Ashrama?”

Ans. “No.”

Question: “How do you manage?”

Slowly came the answer in the most natural way with a smile. He began to recite the famous sloka of the Gita:

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।

तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ (Ch 9, Verse 22)

and said, “This is my repeated experience”. Before he could finish the Sloka his voice got choked out of emotion. Horripilation was seen all over his body. Perfect silence supervened for a few minutes. We remembered the words of Narada regarding a real Bhakta:

तीर्थोर्कुर्वन्ति तीर्थानि सुकर्मोर्कुर्वन्ति कर्माणि सच्छास्त्रीकुर्वन्ति
शास्त्राणि

We saw in Maharajji's life some of the important teachings of our Shastras, pertaining to spiritual life, viz., unreserved surrender, sincerity, simplicity, nishta, renunciation, brahmacharya, Solitude and so on.

The silence was broken by the Swami' intrusion:

Question: Is not the teaching of the Gita better realised while engaged in the service of the world than in solitude?

Answer: "First one should realise God by intense sadhana. Solitude is best for this purpose. This is my view. Don't be anxious about service of the world. '*Lokasangrah*' will take place without any effort according to one's past karma and samskaras." Maharajji continued, "you are living in an ashrama and engaged in social activities. How many times do you remember God, for how much time it lasts, with how much feeling or intensity do you remember Him? Does it come from the heart? Find out. But when you go to a solitary place for sadhana, where you don't have any sense of security and find your bare necessities of life fulfilled by the unseen power of the Lord, then see the feeling of your heart, how deeply you think of God, of His mercy, etc. You will develop complete dependence of God. He will take care of you."

Then he narrated one of his own experiences at Vasishta Guha-how he was supplied with some match boxes when, after

his failure to secure fire, he had decided not to go out for fire again. Maharajji didn't encourage further discussion and asked us to go to the shrine and meditate. And he himself took the Bhagavatam.

My contact with Maharajji brought a great change in my life. The feeling of dissatisfaction, some sort of restlessness and sense of lacking vanished, and I began to feel a sort of peace and clarity of thought.

The mere presence or remembrance of Maharajji is enough to arrest the outgoing tendency of the mind and make it turn towards its source-Atman. Once somebody repeatedly prayed for his blessings. In a serious mood he said, "It is my duty to protect sincere sadhakas going astray from the right path and bless them".

Maharajji's life was most simple and natural. He led an austere life of renunciation, contemplation, solitude, brahmacharya, etc., and he was called the 'Sage of Vasishta Guha' by the people. He emphasized sincerity and straight forwardness in all matters. In his teachings, actions were neither encouraged nor denounced, the implication being "undertake only the minimum work required for a simple living". People were received by him irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, age, sex, learning, nationality and so on. All shared his love and affection. All types of sadhakas were led, encouraged and enlightened in their respective spiritual path- jnana, karma, yoga or bhakti. Even though he was simple and was accessible at any time, people

always felt that they were in the presence of a great personality and they paid due respect to him. None could think of tempting him with worldly things or commanding or overpowering him. By dint of spiritual practice, he had attained the rare and noble state of desirelessness. **In his presence people used to forget all about their possessions, status, learning, their ignorance, their superiority and inferiority complexes and inconveniences, and felt as if they had come to their “real home-Atma”.**

Om Shanthi Shanthi Shanthi

At the feet of My Guru

- Swami Nirvednanada

It was in the autumn of 1953 that I met His Holiness Sri Swami Purushottamanandji Maharaj, who was to be my Guru a few years later, for the first time in my life. It was at mid day during the last week of October that I reached Goolar Dogi by bus from Rishikesh and, enquiring with a lone villager who chanced to come across, I found my way to Sri Vasishta Guha. When I went down from the road and reached the ashrama precincts, I was overwhelmed with joy and emotion because I felt I knew the place very well. The valley, the river Ganga flowing not far from the Cave, tall trees and bushes, all made me happy, for they all looked very familiar to me. And when I walked towards the main cave through the bushes and garden, the sight of the Cave thrilled me beyond description. For, as a young boy, when I used to listen to the story of Sages Vasishta and Viswamitra from my father, I had imagined Vasishta's Ashram in the same manner as I now witnessed before me. The small elevated platform next to the door of the cave, the small thatched roof in front (the present tin-sheet roof was put up much later), were all exactly as I used to imagine. The whole atmosphere seemed very familiar. But that was not the end. One more surprise awaited me. I found a Brahamachari there and he showed me a thatched hut a few yards away where his holiness was sitting. (There were no buildings in the vicinity; only two huts were

there. Adjacent to the main cave there was a small room in which Swamiji lived. It is still there).

When I approached, I found Swamiji seated in an easy chair outside the hut. A small table was in front of him with some books and papers on it. Holding the letter of introduction from Sri Swami Chinmayanandaji Maharaj (Founder, Chinmaya Mission) in my hand, I approached him. What a surprise! I did not feel that I was standing before a stranger. I felt I was his own - and felt as if he were my grand-father or some close relative. I felt so familiar with him. After salutations, I introduced myself and handed him the letter. He showed me a cane stool and I sat on it. He opened the letter and started laughing and laughing - his inimitable and natural child-like laughter! After making some kind enquiries about Swami Chinmayanandaji who was then conducting an Upanishad Jnana Yajna at New Delhi, started again laughing when he read my name. He was so happy to read it. My name was Vedagiri and he asked, “Who gave you this name? A very good name..,” and so on. He enquired whether I had my food and replied in the negative without any reservation. I myself was surprised as to how I behaved so naturally instead of saying, “Please don’t bother, I will have it at Rishikesh”. I felt in the heart of heart that itself was an indication that I was like a child before his guardian.

One day Swamiji received a letter from one of his Sannyasin-disciples. The disciple had written that he was staying in some Ashram in Punjab. Brahmachari Sadanand gave the news that another Sannyasin-disciple of Swamiji was about to be made

the Mahant (Head) of an Ashram at Rishikesh. Swamiji laughed on hearing this and looking at me, said: “One should live and work independently. By depending on others, one does not realise the difficulties. Sannyasins should not stick to some established Ashrams. They should move out and experience life for themselves. Then alone they will know things as they are.”

Though I was then in a workaday life, I took this as guideline for future and noted the advice in my diary.

The following day, November 15, 1953, I approached Swamiji at about half-past nine and saluted him. He was sitting in the sun. I was to leave on that day. I humbly placed an insignificant amount near him and asked his permission to leave after the mid-day meal. He picked up the money and put it back in my shirt-pocket, saying with tender love and affection, “Oh, Why? It is not necessary. I will keep it here. You need it.” After a few minutes silence, he said:

“Be sincere in all actions. Develop intense love towards God.”

(Pause)... “God can be seen.” Smilingly: “Yes, I see Him just in front.” (pointing to the front with raised hand. I looked at the direction, but ...)

(Pause) ... “Be in the world but not ‘of the world.’ Forget the ‘I’-ness and ‘My’-ness, and have firm faith in Him and leave everything to Him. Do not bother about anything. When time comes, things, Karmas, will leave of their own accord and relieve.”

(Pause) ... “The desire to know and live in Him should not be half-way. It should be like a flood. It should come with such a force, and full, and wipe off old Samskaras.

These words were uttered not eloquently, but slowly and deliberately.

Swamiji was a confirmed Vedantin. But there was a happy combination of Bhakti also in him. He always advised: “Think, think; Discriminate, meditate.” and so on. Another point on which he laid emphasis was “Love”. His own love for others was like that of a mother towards her children. When anybody suffered it was his suffering. Not only human beings, even plants had his sympathy. Once a few mango-grafts were planted in the Ashram. On the second day when he was coming down his room, he noticed a plant near the stair case and reached towards it. Removing his upper garments, he held it above the plant to protect it from the sun and called us. When we approached., he asked us to provide shade for the new plants by fixing poles and placing leaves above them. His facial expression showed his feeling for the plant; his face had faded in sympathy with the plant!

Once Maharaj decided to construct a compound wall as a protection from flood waters. Masons and labourers were engaged. Some of the Ashramites also joined hands. The work went on for a few days. Maharaj had, planned the wall to be of a certain height but before reaching that height, one day he ordered the work to be stopped. All our pleadings could not change his decision. And what he said was an eye opener to us: “Look, not that I wanted a compound wall to protect the

buildings and all that. I wanted to help the poor villagers, so I started the work. Money should not be given gratis. It will make them idle; you see.” And while making payments he would ask for the account of each worker and then give two rupees extra to one man, three to another, and so on. (Two or three rupees had great value in 1958-59.) To some he would give clothes also. This was one of the ways in which he expressed his ‘feeling for others’.

Let me cite one more instance of Swamiji’s compassion, this time for an absolute stranger: It was the summer of 1959. One day in the hot sun a well-built person of dark complexion came to Vasishta Guha for Swamiji’s darshan. He looked like a poor peasant or labourer, and he had an awkward look on his face. He was suffering from piles and was wandering desperately in the hills. Swamiji advised him to go to the hospital run by Sivanandashram in Rishikesh where he would be attended to. The man left then but was back again after a day. The surgeon, after examining him, sent him away as the piles was not ready for surgical operation. He said that he was desperate because of acute pain, etc. and did not want to go anywhere. He wanted to stay in the Ashram (Vasishta Guha) and render some seva (service). He believed that service to Mahatmas alone would cure him of his ailment. Swamiji advised him to return home, but he would not listen to any advice, and was adamant. He knelt down before Swamiji and implored him to be allowed to stay and do some seva. Swamiji, laughing, asked one of his disciples, the present writer, to fetch a stick lying nearby, as if

to beat him. The man immediately offered his own heavy lathi and bent down to receive the blow. Maharaj simply laughed and laughed. It looked as if he enjoyed the play. He ordered the disciple to bring one orange from his room. When it was brought, he began peeling it himself. When the man extended his palms to receive the prasada, Maharaj, by gestures, asked him to open his mouth. He knelt down immediately and opened his mouth. Then Maharaj put a piece of the fruit into his mouth. When he had eaten it, another piece was put. Thus, he put three or four more pieces of the fruit into his mouth. While doing so, Maharaj's face was beaming with love and compassion. Then the man saluted Maharaj by lying flat on the ground before him and went away as advised. This time there was no pleading from him for being allowed to stay in the Ashram. On reaching the road he started clapping his hands and dancing with joy, uttering, "I am blessed; I am cured," and so on. What was it that the absolute stranger received from Maharaj? Nothing but compassion and unalloyed love! Yes, his love and compassion knew no bounds; they were all embracing.

Maharaj could easily detect what was going on in the minds of others. It was difficult to hide anything from him. On January 1, 1959 he was starting for Delhi. Some of us were packing his bedding and other things. Some wrong notions crossed my mind about the preparation when Maharaj looked at me and said: "This is also worship. Do you understand? This is also worship." I was put to shame and became pale. and meekly replied. "Yes, Maharaj." No one else knew the significance of these words.

Another instance: Once Maharaj asked me to send a money order to a lady who was in strained circumstances. Perhaps somebody had written about her condition. She happened to be a member of Maharaj's *poorvashrama* family, so I felt something bad about it. I was still filling up the M.O. form when Maharaj said, as if by way of explanation, "Look, I consider her like other devotees. You know I send money to some devotees when they are in distress. This is also like that, but a small amount." How unobtrusively he erased the wrong notions from my mind! What impression these words made on my mind can better be imagined than described.

R. Dubey, a devotee from Bihar, came one afternoon. Though he used to write to Swamiji occasionally, he had not intimated about his arrival. After placing his offering before Maharaj, he prostrated himself before him and sat down. None of us *Gurubhais* knew him personally. Maharaj did not make enquiries of him but asked some of us to give him the *Ramacharita manasa* and asked him by gestures to read some passage at random. He opened the book and recited a few *chaupais* with his heart and soul in them. Only after that Maharaj enquired about his welfare, etc. Later, he told us that when he came to Vasishta Guha for the first time, about fourteen years before, the same thing happened: Then also Maharaj just asked him to open the book and read even before enquiring about him. He left the same day but had been impressed so much that he considered Maharaj as his Guru and started writing letters now and then. And now when he came after fourteen years without notice, Maharaj did the same thing and what was more, the portion

he read was the same which he read during his earlier visit. It moved him very much. A staunch devotee of Sri Rama, he used to read Ramayana with devotion and Bhava. He stayed two or three days and took *mantradeeksha* from Maharaj before leaving.

Maharaj could understand the nature of a person from his physical features. At times he studied it through other methods also. One can't say for certain in what way he studied every disciple. About six months had elapsed since my joining the Ashram. One night I was sitting in Maharaj's room, by his cot. He asked me to raise my hand and when I did so he passed his palm over my forearm three or four times. I guessed that he was examining my character thereby. After a few minute's interval, I asked him with trepidation, what he was examining but he did not say anything. Three or four days later, during the Gita class, while commenting on the term *arjavam* occurring in the sixteenth chapter, he laid emphasis on sincerity and explained "Thought, word and deed should all be in consonance with one another. They should be in a straight line and not in a crooked one which is nothing but deceit. That is *arjavam* (straightforwardness)." At this point he looked at me and said: "The other day I touched you and you were asking what it meant".

Just as Maharaj was beyond money and calculations, he was beyond Time also. Sometimes, when he asked for something, he would demand it immediately as a child would do. Once, while returning from Ganga after evening bath, he asked for some khichri (a preparation of rice and dal cooked together, adding salt and turmeric powder) to be prepared, saying that he was

feeling hungry. However hastily one works, it takes some time to cook the stuff. But within a few minutes Maharaj was on his seat and asked: “Is it ready? Bring it.” If he was told that it would take another ten minutes, he would say after a while that his hunger was gone, and he did not want khichri. (All that he would eat would be just three or four spoonfuls of it.)

Likewise, sometimes he would ask for the mid-day meal much earlier than usual, saying that he was hungry. On such occasions we had to be very tactful. We would hurriedly move about here and there as if searching for something, sweep the floor and sprinkle some water over the place, place his asana after dusting it a few seconds and pretend to do something or the other, just to pass time and keep his hunger alive. He would say, “Hey, bring it quickly”. We would tell him that so and so was just bringing the food and so on. All the while we would be in tension and only when he finished his meal would we be relieved of anxiety.

We knew very well that he was not an ordinary person. Nobody could fool him. Our intention in playing such parts was to see that he did not withdraw his mind from what he wanted, for *Paramahansas* are just like children. Such instances convinced us that the realised ones are beyond the bounds of Time.

A Foreigner meets Maharaj

- Swami Jnanananda Giri

Swami Jnanananda Giri (1929 - 2015) was born in Zurich, Switzerland as Hansjuerg Habluetzel. Habluetzel means “have little” and this became indeed the motto of his life when he went to India at the age of twenty-two and joined the ancient order of sannyasis (renunciates) who devote their lives to yoga, meditation and self-realization.

During a three years’ stay in England as a young man he became interested in Indian philosophy and spirituality. After an initial correspondence course in kriya yoga, offered by an international school of yoga, he set off for India where he was confident to find a qualified master. In his autobiography “Transcendent Journey” he describes life in his guru’s ashram near Calcutta. In 1956 he was initiated into sannyasa and received the Name Jnanananda.

Swami Jnanananda never left India again. After his guru passed away, he led the life of a wandering mendicant. Relying on God alone he travelled far and wide through India, particularly to the ancient places of pilgrimage and to many less known holy sites. His life was rich in encounters with saints, yogis and healers of manifold denominations.

Abiding by his own guru’s advice he never started a formal ashram or an institution. He finally settled in the outskirts of the Himalayan hill station Mussoorie and lived in a tiny hut in

the forest. Just big enough to accommodate half a dozen guests every evening for satsang (talk about spiritual matters) and kirtan (devotional singing) which Swamiji would conduct, playing his harmonium with great skill.

Given below is an interesting account of this Swamiji on his first meeting with Maharaj. Whenever he came to Himalayas, he used to spend a few days at Vasishta Guha. He not only liked the place but valued the company of Guru Maharaj. In this article he recalls his first visit to Vasishta Guha with great admiration of Guru Maharaj.

In his autobiography ‘Transcendent journey’ Swamiji has devoted several pages to fondly remember about his frequent visits to Swami Purushottamananda at Vasishta Guha as well as his close association with two Vasishta Guha saints, Swami Nirvedananda and Swami Bhoomananda.

“It was during the rainy season in the year 1955 that I set out from Rishikesh walking along the motor road by the Ganga in the direction of Vasishta Guha. My intention was to have the darshana of the great Swami Purushottamanandji Maharaj who lived there and of whom I had heard while staying at Rishikesh.

Late in the afternoon I came near to my destination. I descended from the motor road on a narrow footpath that led through the dense lush forest towards the river. Soon I reached the ashram precincts.

All day long I had been thinking of the divine presence that permeates these sacred forests and mountains. A deep sense of timeless ecstasy filled the very heart of my being, which on

approaching that forest hermitage, turned in to a mysterious expectation.

I found Swamiji Maharaj sitting on an elevated mud platform in the open, just in front of his small Kutir next to the entrance of the cave. A few Brahmacharis and householder devotees were also by Swamiji's side.

The elderly saint, with flowing long white hair and beard, did shine like a Rishi of ancient times.

A heavenly smile lit up his bright face! As I moved closer, with my folded hands in salutation, the saint's smile turned into cheerful laughter. Laughing heartily like a child, he made me sit down with a gentle gesture of his hand. Not asking anything he looked for something amongst letters, papers and books that did lie by his side. He picked up one picture-postcard, perhaps received by that day's mail, and still laughing, he waved that card before me and then handed it over to me, now asking: 'Do you know this country and place?' I looked at the postcard and replied that I know it, it is Zurich in Switzerland! To my surprise that card depicted just that particular part of the town where actually I was born! I was indeed wondering how Swamiji knew my nationality and how he happened to show me this picture postcard. He then made a few enquiries about me, my Guru, etc.

I felt wondrously uplifted in the saint's august presence. I was allowed to stay at the hermitage. For a number of years thereafter I kept on visiting Vasishta Guha to be with dear Swami Purushottamanandji Maharaj whenever I came to that region of the Himalayas."

How I met my Gurudev

- Ishwari Dayal Srivatsava

It was the summer season of 1935 when I was about 29 years of age. I started for a happy trip to Mussoorie. My dear mother accompanied me for a Yatra to Shri Badri Nath. We reached Haridwar. There I decided to escort mother up to Devprayag and then to return and go to Mussoorie. We came to Rishikesh and started for Devprayag in a lorry. On the way, the driver told me that, a Gufa of ancient times was worth seeing and should I like to see it, he would drop me on the road near the Gufa and keep the lorry standing at the next crossing. I agreed. The driver, accordingly, after covering a distance of about 24 miles, dropped me on the road. One yatri companion also accompanied me. I did not tell my dear mother the reason for getting down for the fear that she might not agree. I looked down towards the Ganges from the road. I and my other yatri companion managed to scale down the slope of the hills. I found the place full of natural scenery. The two streams near the cave, which meet the Ganges make the place very picturesque. It was a solitary place. I wandered here and there and finally reached in front of the cave. The cave has a natural opening in which a door is fixed. Inside it was considerably cold, so much so that you need some clothing to sit inside even in the summer season.

At the threshold of Guha, a young lad of about 19 years was sitting in a meditative mood. He was dressed in lungi and vest.

It appeared he had not shaved for several days. I took him for an ordinary villager and did not take notice of him particularly. As I attempted to step inside the Gufa with my yatri companion, the lad stood up and stopped us saying that there was a Sadhu inside the cave. I replied “I shall only see the Gufa and come back. I have no business with the Sadhu. I will not disturb him.” Without further waiting for his reply I stepped inside the cave with my yatri companion.

Here I may introduce the young lad to you. He is Sri Abhimanyuji, son of Seth Jai Narain of Sitapur. I only came to know of his whereabouts next year. It may also be noted here that all that time of my life I had very little inclination for religious matters, and had never attended a Satsangh or waited on a Sadhu for darshan, etc.

As I stepped inside, I found the place very dark. I had hardly taken 3 or 4 steps in the darkness when a voice commanded in English. “Who is there? Sit down.” I and my companion obeyed at once. The next moment the voice asked “What do you want? Tell me at once and go away. I have not much time”. The voice was sweet and lovely. It acted the magic and took control over me. I replied “I came only to see the Gufa. I do not want anything. I am enroute to Devprayag, where I shall leave my mother for pilgrimage to Sri Badri Nath and myself proceed to Mussoorie.” The voice then asked me “What religious books have you read? Does your religion not impose a duty upon you to serve your mother throughout her pilgrimage?” He condemned my going to Mussoorie and leaving my mother to be attended to

by others. I kept silent for a second, but the voice demanded my decision. I could not think clearly but extended a promise to go to Sri Badrinath with mother. The invisible Sadhu then laughed heartily at my answer. Soon after, the voice asked me to send my companion outside the cave. I asked him to go outside the Gufa leaving me alone, but he whispered in my ears “Babu, do not be foolish. You and I have large sums of money and it is not wise to be separated from each other. Kindly leave the Gufa at once.” I scolded him and sent him outside. No sooner he was gone, the voice, to my surprise asked me to utter some holy mantras that were being offered for Japa in the yatra. I flatly refused and told the voice “I am not going to put up any restraint upon myself. I have no interest in the subject.” The voice then in a more familiar manner replied “I am not going to put you under any obligation. You are a free man. When you like to recite the holy mantras, do it. It will do you good and no harm.”

I considered the matter a trifling affair, I repeated them in union with the voice two or three times. I did not think at that time that unconsciously, I was contracting the sacred relationship of Gurudev and disciple.

After this, I stood up to leave but the invisible Sadhu began to shower upon me numerous blessings which made me very happy. While departing he told me not to tell anybody what had passed between us in the cave. I inquired if a lie could be told to dear mother if she asked me where I had been so long. The invisible Sadhu replied, “Never tell a lie”. He further

asked me to take his address from the lad sitting outside and if there was any need, I might write to him. I found the young lad and my yatri companion outside. I took down the address. From it I came to know the name of the Sadhu was Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of whom I did not get darshan although talked with him in the darkness. I did not tell anything to the other yatri companion until I reached the lorry again.

My mother was anxiously waiting for me and she asked me where I had been so long. I told her briefly all that passed inside the Gufa. I requested her to take me with her to Sri Badri Nath. She asked me if I offered anything to His Holiness on the occasion, I replied, “No offering was needed as it was he who forced me to recite the mantras. I made no choice. Moreover he is not to be seen in the darkness of the Guha. She told me that she would herself take the permission of the Sadhu for my proceeding on pilgrimage with her. So, I brought her to the cave again along with the other yatri companion, by an easier path, which I discovered while climbing up the hills to go to the lorry. As soon as I again entered the Guha, the voice said to my mother “Blessed are you. Keep your son in your service in the yatra”. He again bestowed blessings as if magic enchanted all those who had gone into the cave. When we had been seated in the lorry my mother with other womenfolk began to sing prayers addressed to Gurudev.

We reached Devprayag and travelled on foot from Devprayag to Sri Badrinath. I devoted most of my time in looking after the needs and comforts of my yatri companions. As for the recitation

of the holy mantras, my mother gave me a mala and made me to sit for Japa morning and evening. I recited the Mantra hardly for 5 minutes without any enjoyment or inclination, but the natural scenery, solitude, and the satsangh on the way, had some effect on my mind and made me think of the Lord very often.

Thus, we continued on our journey. When we reached nearly half the distance, I got some stomach trouble. I could not digest food and had to ease myself several times the day. For 2 or 3 days I did not tell anybody about the trouble as I did not like rest but kept on travelling. By and by I became weak and one day I had to stop at one big chatti. I told my mother of my ailment. She sent for a vaid from a nearby village. The vaid came and told my mother that I had an attack of diarrhea. He gave me some medicines, but they did no good to me. The next day of my stay at the chatti I became unconscious. When in the evening I regained my consciousness, I found my dear mother weeping. The other companions were also in tears. They thought I was going to die there. I was also in great distress. Suddenly the idea of the invisible Sadhu flashed in my mind.

I asked my dear mother to give me a post card for writing to the invisible Sadhu. I do not remember what I wrote but they must be insolent and impertinent words since I thought at the time that it was on account of his wrong advice that I had gone on pilgrimage and attributed all my suffering to him. I remember only that at the end I said “I am to die here after some time and if you can do anything, send your help.” I gave him my address at Sri Badri Nath and asked him to send his reply which I would

get if I was left alive. I handed over the card to dear mother for posting. After a little while an old lady from our group came to me and said “Let me rub some oil on your belly; it seems you have got some jerks in climbing up the hills and this has caused the trouble.” I kept quiet and she applied some oil and began to rub the belly gently. I fell asleep and woke after 3 or 4 hours. I got up to ease myself. To my astonishment I found I had a perfectly healthy motion and felt a keen appetite. I persuaded my mother to give me some khichri at once and after eating a little of it I again fell asleep.

When in the morning I got up, I forgot my serious illness of the previous night. I also did not find any signs of weakness. My mother still looked sad. When I tried to reassure her saying that I was all right she burst into tears and clasped me lovingly in her arms. The hearts of other yatri companions, both men and women were also moved when I began to cheer them up.

The next day we started. My mother hired a horse for me for a week as she would not allow me to go on foot, but I did not use the horse and got someone or another of the yatri people to ride on it. The cheerfulness of the whole group revived. Finally, we reached Sri Badri Nath after walking for about three weeks.

On the day of my departure from Sri Badri Nath for home I received the reply of Sri Swamiji. I did not remember the exact words, but it meant “You are a coward. Blessed are those who die in the service of their mother. Had you died in her service you would have lived for ever; now that you are alive the opportunity is lost. Go home directly, do havan and feed the poor.”

I did not think of the invisible Sadhu for several months, but in the winter of 1936, my curiosity to have his darshan was aroused. I extended an invitation to him to visit Lucknow. It so happened, Swamiji had gone on tour to South India at that time, so the letter followed him. After about a month I received a reply from Madras. The letter said “Ready to come to you; send Rs. 200/- by telegraphic money order for travelling expenses.” This letter confused me very much, firstly because I had not this sum with me and secondly because I thought that a second class journey was much above his standard and apprehensions arose in my mind that I might be deceived even if I raise and send the amount. On the other hand, I did not like to refuse him as my miraculous recovery from sickness of last year had produced a good impression about him. I consulted my mother and also other personal friends. Everybody shifted the responsibility to my shoulders and wanted me to act as I liked. I could not decide one way or the other and after a week I wrote to him very frankly about all the considerations, both for and against, that were present in my mind. I promised to send him back to Rishikesh, if he could manage to come by raising contributions at that place. I received a reply very soon “Coming on such and such time and date; meet at the City Station, Lucknow”. I wrote back to him “As I have not seen you so far kindly keep sitting at the platform till any other Sadhu, if present, is out of station so that I may take the right person to my home”.

The fortunate day dawned, and I was at the platform for the first darshan of my Gurudev. I was eagerly looking towards the compartments when a Sadhu in second class beckoned me with

a smile. I at once ran towards him and lay prostrate at his feet. For the first time he patted me with love and affection. I was so much overwhelmed with joy that I forgot to ask his name in order to be sure of his identity.

He stayed with me for two or three days. I had a feeling of shyness in appearing before him as the matter of his travelling expenses was still troubling me. I was astonished to find that he himself opened the subject and asked me “Why do you look so shy. You should understand all the formalities that are connected with the invitation of any person.” I apologized in my own humble way. He smiled and gave me some money and said, “I do not need this money, take it for the children.” I hesitated in receiving the money. He said you are to obey me. You are meant to receive from me. My Gurudev also used to give me money and I am following his footsteps. The third day he went back to Rishikesh. When he was ready for the station. I asked him “What class do you intend to travel? I would like to purchase the ticket”. He sent for Seth Jai Narain of Sitapur who had come to see him off and directed him to purchase the ticket. He told me not to worry as Sethji was a rich man and he must spend for the ticket.

While parting, I prostrated myself at his feet. He pulled me up lovingly and it seemed he whispered into my ear.

“O ye of little faith! wake up! wake up to your Holy Majesty! and a single glance from your royal indifference, a side wink from divine recklessness is enough to convert the driest hells into charming heaven.”

Swami Purushottamanand Ji - A deep Vadantin

- Late K.M. Munshi

[Sri. K.M.Munshi (1887-1971) was an eminent freedom fighter. He had adorned several important positions which include home minister of Bombay state, member of constituent assembly, Union minister of food and agriculture and governor of Uttar Pradesh. He was the founder of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan]

A few weeks previously while we were guests of the Rajmata of Tehri-Garhwal at Anand Koshi, I met a sadhu who lived on the bank of the Ganga in a cave called Vasishta Guha.

When one morning we visited this natural retreat, we found hanging on the outer wall a portrait of Ramakrishna Paramhansa; the interior of the cave was dark and deep. A shrine of Shiva was installed there. An old sadhu, frail, fragile, tiny, accompanied by his disciples, limped forward to meet us and began to talk fluent English. His name was Purushottamananda Puri.

We met again in the afternoon and had a long talk. He told me his story. He originally came from Travancore and was initiated by one of the senior disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. After wandering for many years, he heard of a cave in the wilderness in 1928. So, with staff in hand and a blanket on his back, he limped his weary way to Vasishta Guha, determined to meditate there in solitude.

Another sadhu, however, was in occupation of this cave and refused to share his cave with the newcomer. It is easy to leave

the world; but very difficult to get rid of one thing, the sense of possession.

But Purushottamanandji was persistent; he refused to give up the idea, to live in the cave; he kept vigil outside it for a few days and slept in the open. He had no food; he had no fire at which to warm himself. He remained in wilderness trusting in God. The ways of the Almighty are inscrutable, he said. “A villager gave six matches to light a fire with. A woman gave me milk and so I managed to live”.

After a time Purushottamanandji went on a pilgrimage to Amarnath and returned only after six years. He first cleared the cave of the silt which had been brought down by the river during the floods, and then settled down to meditate. People from surrounding villages flocked to see him, offered him food and afterwards became his disciples. He took a paternal interest in their welfare; helped them, advised and induced them to build an Intermediate College in the locality. He is now a man of considerable influence in the neighborhood. Everyone honours and respects him.

He is, I discovered, a deep Vedantin and his ways are simple, innocent, almost childlike; he smiles and smiles all the time. Loneliness, starvation and a hundred other aches mean nothing to him; he lives a real life, possessed of God which gives him perpetual Joy and Peace. He has won this state after years of sadhana.

Before we parted, he admonished me. He asked, had I not had enough of life? It was high time I realised what I really was. ‘I wish I could’. I replied.

The Sannyasi Sishyas of Swami Purushottamanada

Like a large banyan tree, Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj gave spiritual solace to large number of people. Many of them were fortunate to get Mantra Diksha from Swamiji at Vasihsta Guha as well as other places he visited within India. Some of them were subsequently given Sannyasa Diksha by him. Most of these Sannyasi Sishyas settled at various parts of the country and propagated the teachings of Guru Maharaj. Some of them were lifelong parivrajakas (wandering monks). Complete information on these Sishyas (especially those who took sannyasa during early years of Guru Maharaj at Vasishta Guha) are not available now. The total number of sannyasi sishyas of Poojya Swamiji was more than 30. This is an attempt to capture the names and details of most of those Sishyas. This list is based on the information available in Vasishta Guha souvenir 2011 (as provided by Swami Chaitanyananda), notes made during conversations with Swami Shantananda were also used for getting some of the missing details. While detailed sketches are available in respect some of these Mahatmas, in case of many of them only minimal information is available. Some of the facts as well as dates may not be very accurate.

Swami Purushottamamanda lived in Vasishta Guha for around 32 years. He used to sit in front of the Guha where a small tarpaulin was put as a shelter for the visitors from sun and rain. Whoever came to him used to sit and sleep in the open. Cooking

was inside a small Guha on the side of main Guha using jungle wood. All used to go to Ganga for bath and ablutions. One or two small rooms were built 3 or 4 years before the Mahasmadhi of Guru Maharaj. The sadhaks who came and stayed with Guru Maharaj had to undergo all kinds of hardships. This is mentioned to indicate the viveka and vairagya of the sannyasi sishyas of Gurumaharaj. It may be noted that many of them stayed at Vasishta Guha for many years, foregoing minimal bodily comforts.

Almost all the sishyas had certain common traits : (a) All of them had high level of viveka and intense vairagya from very young age; (b) Many of them were wandering monks (parivrajakas); (c) Almost all of them were reluctant to be among worldly people and publicity shy; (d) None of them created any large organisation or built a large Ashram or amassed wealth. True to the teachings of Guru Maharaj, they were dependant on the Lord, even for their day-to-day meals. Sadar Pranams to all these great souls.

1) Swami Dheerananda

Swami Dheerananda was an employee in a foreign Bank. He became a sannyasi before 1948. He established a small Ashram at Brahmapuri (8 KM from Rishikesh on the Rishikesh-Badarinath Road).

2) Swami Veerananda

Swami Veerananda was a Keralite by birth. He was one of the early sishyas and his sannyasa deeksha was before 1948. Through

severe penance he acquired some sidhis and exhibited them to the then Maharaja of Tehri Gharwal. Purushottamanadji Maharaj was extremely annoyed with this exhibition and prohibited him from going after sidhis. He stayed for many years at an Ashram called Mangalashram at Uttar Kashi. In early seventies he left his Ashram and wandered in several places in North India. No information is available after this phase.

3) Swami Baalananda

He belonged to a village near Kayamkulam in Kerala. In 1938, at the age of 25, he arrived at Vasishta Guha. He stayed with Guru Maharaj for around 10 years and received his sannyasa diksha during that period. Thereafter he lived in Bhoorimatha Ashram, Ludhiana for some years. In 1949 he wrote a book titled **Purushottama Gadha or Prema Sudha**. Thereafter, he moved to Kerala and established a small Ashram near Kayamkulam. When Swami Purushottamanda visited Kerala in 1951, Swami Baalananda accompanied him.

4) Swami Sevananda

He was living as a Naga Sadhu and visited Guha along with Swami Veerananda. Subsequently he took Sannyasa. Swami Sevananda had severe asthma problem and he left the Guha and lived for many years at a place called Khurali (between Ropar and Chandigarh) in Punjab and he breathed his last there.

5) Swami Sathyananda

Before coming to the Guha he was doing Tapasya at Nashik and then he moved to Rishikesh. He was given sannyasa by Guru

Maharaj on the Holi day of 1950. He was well learned and a scholar. He used to practice severe austerities. After a few years he moved to Brindavan in UP and lived there for many years. He entered Mahasamadhi in the year 2017 and at that time he was around 102 years old.

6) Swami Kalikananda

He was a Bengali and an inmate of Narayan Ashram in Rishikesh. He came to Guha in 1942. Guru Maharaj gave him mantra disksha in 1943-44 and sannyasa diksha in 1950. After the Mahasamadhi of Guru Maharaj, Swami Kalikanada went away for around 20 years. In the last phase of his life he came back to Guha and breathed his last on 9th May 1997.

7) Swami Nischalananda

He was born on 25th July 1925, as the fifth child to parents of Indian origin settled in South Africa. His name was Dhanagopal and the names of his parents were Kuppuswamy Naidu and Meenakshi. From his early age he was spiritually inclined and had great pride in his Hindu heritage, due to the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. Dhanagopal was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and Hanumanji. He came across Swami Virajananda in those days and was greatly influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

In 1948 he came to India, visited Belur math and took mantra diksha. He wanted to take sannyasa and go back to South Africa. The guidelines of Ramakrishna Mission were stringent, and he was not sure of his return to South Africa, after sannyasa.

Hence he went around India on a pilgrimage. On 23rd April 1948, he reached Vasishta Guha. On 8th May 1948 he was given brahmacharya diksha by Prushottamanadji Maharaj, who gave the name Brahmachari Jayaram. After one year of pilgrimage all over India he came back to Guha and received sannyasa diskha from Guru Maharaj on 17th August 1949. He was given the name Nischalananda. In 1953 he went back to South Africa. He was the first Hindu monk of South African origin and he played very significant role in the propagation and practice of Sanantana Dharma in that country. Over the years he established around 80 Ramakrishna Kendras as well as several charitable institutions in that country. He passed away on 11th February 1965.

8) Swami Ramananda

He was born in a Lahore (now in Pakistan) based Sikh family with the name Sardar Banta Singh. At the time of partition, the family migrated to Bazpur, Uttarkhand. Initially he came to Guru Maharaj, seeking blessing for acquiring prosperity, but eventually he realised that there were many more valuable things to gain from Guru Maharaj. He was given sannyasa diksha by Guru Maharaj in 1950 with the name, Swami Ramananda. He passed away around 1971.

9) Swami Chaitanyananda

Swamiji was born as Peethambaran at a village in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala in 1930-31. From a young age he was spiritually inclined and came across the influence of Swami Baalananda, who was an early sannyasi sishya of Guru Maharaj. Based on the advice of Swami Baalananda, he visited Guru Maharaj in

1954-55 along with Bhaktha Veeresan (Swami Prakashananda). In 1958 he was given Brahmacharya diksha with the name Atmachaitanya. Subsequently in 1959 Guru Maharaj gave him sannyasa diksha. Swamiji stayed with Guru Maharaj and did exemplary Guru Seva. He was present with Guru Maharaj at the time of his Maha Samadhi. Thereafter he left on a pilgrimage to Muktinarayan and other kshetras in Nepal. The devotees of Guru Maharaj requested him to come back and take on management of Vasishta Guha Ashram. Considering this as the greatest Guruseva he took over this onerous responsibility.

Ever since, he is ably managing the affairs to the Vasishta Guha Ashram and Purushottamanad Trust. He is a stickler to tradition and manages each and every activity in the name of Guru Maharaj. He is compassion - incarnate and takes care of the spiritual and temporal welfare of each and every devotee.

Swamiji has undertaken several pilgrimages with sparse resources (money as well as materials) and many of them were arduous and risky. These include visit to Kailash- Manasarovar, just when the Chinese were taking over control of Tibet as well as year long Narmada Parikraman.

Swamiji is now around ninety and has several physical ailments. He continues to live a frugal life at Vasishta Guha and guide a large number of spiritual aspirants.

10) Swami Paramananda

He was a Keralite who came to Guha in 1956 or so and took Sannyasa from Guru Maharaj.

11) Swami Sambananda

He came to Gurumaharaj in 1956 from Kerala and took Sannyasa. He had desire to establish an Ashram at Desamangalam near Ottappalam, Palakkad where Bhrata Puza (River Poorna) is flowing to North. Guru Maharaj gave permission and blessed him with the initial contribution of Rs. 101. When the temple got completed Swami Sambananda had a desire to install the idol of Radha Krishna. But Guru Maharaj advised him to install a Pancha Dhatu idol of the symbol 'ॐ'. When the idol was made ready, the villagers of Deasamangalam requested Maharaj to visit and he came there and performed Prana Pratishtha in February 1958. This temple and Ashram is called as Omkar Ashram (Address: Kattuvattur, Desamangalam, Kerala 679532).

12) Swami Bhoomananda

He was born as Sashibhushan Mishra (later known as Swami Bhoomananda) in a brahmin family at Jaunpur, Eastern UP in 1933. Being a postgraduate in Sanskrit, he was working as a lecturer in Allahabad University, teaching Indian philosophy. He was a person with high level of dispassion and was well versed in Indian philosophy and used to remain in meditation for hours together.

Swami Janananda Giri who was strongly associated with him mentions that Swami Bhoomananda was person of the calibre of Swami Vivekananda.

In 1956, Sasibhushan went to Himalayas in search of a Sadguru. After visiting many mahatmas at Haridwar and Rishikesh, he was

not happy. The despondent youngster decided to spend a night in a forest (few km away from Vasishta Guha) infested with wild animals in the banks of Ganga, leaving his life to fate. Around midnight Guru Maharaj asked some of the Ashram inmates to go and search at a particular spot on the banks of Ganga and bring the young man sitting there.

Sasibhushan became a brahmachari at Vasishta Guha and he used to sit on the banks of Ganga in meditation for days together without any food or drink. Guru Maharaj had recognised that this youngster was highly developed spiritually and one with a rare level of dispassion. After reaching Vasishta Guha and in due course he was given sannyasa diksha. It is said that Swami Bhoomananda went to Ganga few days after getting sannyasa diksha and threw several currency notes (the money he had) in the river. The shocked inmates came and complained to Guru Maharaj that he should have given the money to the Ashram as the Ashram was struggling to meet day to day expenses. Guru Maharaj laughed and mentioned to them that, “He is a true sannyasi and for him there is no value for money.”

From 1958 to 1960 Swami Bhoomananda was seriously ill due to malaria and other diseases. During October 1960, he was admitted for treatment of typhoid at Ramakrishna Seva Ashram Hospital, Kankhal, Haridwar. In his last days he became partially immobile. Lying in the hospital bed he was happily reciting Upanishad and Gita verses on the immortality of the Soul. All were deeply moved and inspired by the equanimity of the dying Swamiji. Guru Maharaj visited him at the hospital. After seeing

him Guru Maharaj asked the assembled followers to recite Vishnu Sahasranamam. Maharaj took his new woollen shawl and handed over to Swami Nirvedananda who was attending to Swami Bhoomananda and said, “Cover his body with this when it is over. The end will come in two days.” Swami Bhoomananda passed away on 5th November 1960 at around the age of 27. His mortal remains were immersed in mother Ganga’s lap at Neel Dhara, Haridwar.

13) Swami Gitananda

His name in poorvashram was Kumaran. He was given sannyasa in 1958. After a few years he left Guha and thereafter his whereabouts are not known.

14) Swami Vallabhananda

He received sannysa diksha in 1955 or 1956. No other information is available.

15) Swami Paresananda

He was a retired major general in the army and his name was Parameswaran Pillai. His last stint was as a G.O.C of Travancore state. After retirement he was living as a vanaprasthi at Kanyakumari. He came to Guha in 1955 during a Himalayan pilgrimage. He had taken mantra diskha from Shivanandaji Maharaj of Rishikesh. At that time Purushottamandaji Maharaj had written his autobiography ‘Iswara Karunyam’ in Malayalam. Sri Pillai took the initiative of getting it printed and published from Trivandrum in July 1956. On 4th April 1958, Guru Maharaj

gave him sannyasa diksha at Kanyakumari. He established an Ashram called 'Santhi Nilayam' at Kanyakumari where Guru Maharaj stayed for 24 days in the year 1960.

16) Swami Narendrananda

He was a Brahmachari by name Kesavan in Ramakrishna Ashram, Puthucaud, Thrissur, Kerala. Guru Maharaj gave him sannyasa diksha on 4th April 1958, at Kanyakumari.

17) Swami Sureshananda

He was an advocate by name Damodara Menon. He was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and established an Ashram by name 'Vijnana Ramaneyam' at Palakkad. Even today this Ashram provides spiritual succour to many. He was given sannyasa diksha by Guru Maharaj at Kanyakumari on 4th April 1958.

18) Swami Subhadrananda

She was the only female sannyasi sishya of Guru Maharaj. She was with Mahatma Gandhi for a decade or so in her earlier years. Initially Guru Maharaj gave her a brahmacharya diksha and named her Krishna Priya. Subsequently on 29th November 1958 sannyasa diksha was given to her.

Based on her request in 1959, Guru Maharaj started to write daily short notes in Malayalam. This continued for around 125 days. These were first published in Malayalam and subsequently the translated version (By Swami Nirvedananda) was published as '**Guide to spiritual aspirants**'.

19) Swami Nirvedananda

He was born in a Tamil Brahmin family based at Chittoor, Palakkad, Kerala on 23rd December 1923. His name was Vedagiri. Though he was brilliant, he had to stop his studies midway due to financial difficulties. Initially he worked in the medical wing of Indian army and subsequently he got employed in Burma Shell Company at Bombay (now known as Mumbai). There he started visiting Ramakrishna Mission and was greatly influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Vedagiri went to Himalayas and visited Mahatmas like Swami Tapovanam Maharaj of Uttarkashi and Swami Shivananda Saraswathi Maharaj of Rishikesh. With an introduction letter from Swami Chinmayananda (founder, Chinmaya Mission) he reached Vasishta Guha in 1953 and stayed with Guru Maharaj for around three weeks. He reluctantly returned to Bombay and used to frequently write to Guru Maharaj. In 1956 he did sankalpa in front of the idol of Sri Ramakrishna that his Gurudev is Swami Purushottamananda. He took mantra diksha from Guru Maharaj at Vasishta Guha 26th February 1957. After going back to Bombay, he wrote to Guru Maharaj seeking permission to leave his employment and come to Guru Maharaj permanently. Guru Maharaj wrote a reply on the following lines, “A ripe mango never asks permission from the mango tree to fall down. It falls down when it is really ripe.” Immediately on receipt of this reply, Vedagiri resigned his employment, came to Guru Maharaj and took sannyasa diksha on 19th April 1957. He used to do Guru Seva to Guru Maharaj by handling his correspondence as well as writings.

At the time Mahasamadhi of Guru Maharaj Swami Nirvedananda was away on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. Swami Nirvedananda helped in establishment of Purushottamanad Trust and thereafter left Vasishta Guha and went as a wandering monk. Around 1966 he settled down in a modest hut (Kutiya) in a village called Kurtha on the banks of Ganga near Ghazipur in Eastern UP. This hut was very near to the Ashram and samadhi sthal of the great saint 'Pavahari Baba', who passed away in 1898. Swami Vivekananda in early February 1890, visited Pavahari Baba here.

Swami Nirvedananda was a sannyasi with great tapasya and vairagya. He was a man of few words. He had fine knowledge of Sanskrit, Hindi, English, Malayalam and Tamil. He learned several vedantic texts in his early spiritual life.

For around two decades he lived in this kutiya suffering all types of physical hardships and without any worldly possessions. He used to beg for alms in the village and have a single meal in a day at noon time (Madhukari Bhiksha). He was affected with bone cancer in 1990 or so and the devotees of Manav Seva Sangh, Ghazipur took him to Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital, Bombay for treatment. In the last phase he stayed at the Manav Seva Sangh, Ghazipur and for around 17 days he was in a samadhi state, continuously chanting 'OM'. He entered Maha Samadhi at 5.45 p.m. on 28th February 1991.

Swamiji has written the following books - (a) The Life of Swami Purushottamananda (b) The sage of Vasishta Guha - The last phase (c) At the feet of my Guru (d) My Guru.

20) Swami Shambhavananda

He was born in a brahmin family near Hubli, Karnataka. He took mantra diksha from Swami Shankaranada (President of Ramakrishna Mission from 1951) at Belur Math. He was known as Brahmachari Madhusoodan. On 7th March 1959 (Maha Shivaratri day) he was given sannyasa diksha by Guru Maharaj. For some period, he worked as the Headmaster in the school established by Guru Maharaj at Goolar Dogi village. Thereafter for few years he lived at Uttar Kashi and other North Indian spiritual centres. Subsequently he moved to Rajkot, Gujarat. There at Mavadi Road he lived at a temple called 'Vishveshwar Mahadev Temple'. He passed away around 2008.

21) Swami Raghuveerananda (Popularly known as Sw. Anand Puri)

He was born on May 1925 at Kottakkara, Kerala. His name was Raghav Das. He was a Sanskrit scholar. He was given sannyasa diksha by Guru Maharaj on 7th March 1959 (Maha Shivaratri). Swamiji travelled and stayed at several places like Uttar Kashi, Pushkar, Amar Khandak etc for many years. During the last five or six years of his life he stayed at a cottage at Sadhana Sadan Ashram, Haridwar where he used to take classes in Upanishads. He passed away on 22nd May 2016.

22) Swami Rameswarananda

He was a Keralite and a popular poet and writer. His entire life was spent on learning and teaching Sanskrit and Vedanta. He came to Rishikesh at the age of 64, to study some advanced

vedantic texts at Kailash Ashram and started visiting Guru Maharaj at Vasishta Guha in 1958. He was given Brahmacharaya diskha with name Rama Chaitanya by Guru Maharaj. He was given sannyasa diksha on 7th March 1959.

23) Swami Sadashivananda

He came to Vaishta Guha around 1956. On 7th March 1959, Guru Maharaj gave him brahmacharya diksha with name Ramakrishna Das. He was given sannyasa diksha on 28th February 1960. In early May 1960 Guru Maharaj ordered him to go to Omkar Ashramam, Ottapalam and stay there assisting Swami Sambanada. Swami Sadashivananda reached Omkar Ashramam on 23rd May. Then he came to know that Swami Sambananda had breathed his last on 20th May (three days earlier) and on the same day the devotees had written a letter to Guru Maharaj informing this and requesting to send a sannyasi to head the Ashram. He realised that asking him to go to Omkar Ashram in early May was a divine leela of Guru Maharaj.

24) Swami Gopeshananda

He was a Bengali and an excellent Bhajan singer. He was given brahmacharya diksha on 11th March 1959 (Ramakrishna Jayanthi). On 4th October 1960 Guru Maharaj gave him sannyasa. He lived in Punjab for many years and not many details are available of him.

25) Swami Sankarananda

He was born on 9th March 1932 in a Madhwa Brahmin family from Nedumangad, Trivandrum district, Kerala. His poorvashram

name was Krishnan Potti. Since childhood he was spiritually inclined and spiritual books were his companion. He also learned Sanskrit. He met Swami Purshottamananda during his Kanaykumari visit in 1958 at around the age of 27. On seeing him Gurumaharaj mentioned, “He has come fully prepared.” In the year 1959 he came to Vasishta Guha and stayed there. On 28th February 1960, Ramakrishna Jayanthi day, Guru maharaj gave him sannyasa diksha. After some months Swami Sankarananda went on a padayatra for around 6 months, to the upper reaches of Himalayas (Gangotri, Yamunotri, Gomukh, etc.) with the permission of Guru Maharaj. After the Mahasamadhi of Guru Maharaj, Swami Sankarananda went to Uttarkashi and stayed in various places and caves doing intense tapasya. Then he lived at an Ashram called Udhalak Ashram and eventually moved to Mangalashram in 1972.

Swami Shanakaranada was the sannyasa guru of Swami Shantananda and the initiation was given on 2nd February 1992 (Maha Shivaratri day) at Managalashram, Uttarkashi. Swami Shantananda used to mention that Swami Shankarananda was a deep rooted vedantin and he had studied Upanishads deeply and if a doubt was asked in spiritual matters, he used to explain the same very clearly.

Swami Sankaranda was detected with brain cancer in the year 1993. One of his Brahmachari Sishya requested and took him to stay at Lucknow and undergo treatment. On 18th December 1994 at around 5.10 a.m. he loudly uttered ‘OM’ thrice and entered in to Maha Samadhi.

26) Swami Puruharananda

He was from Uttarkhand. Around 1958 he reached Vasishta Guha. On 11th March 1959 he was given brahmacharya diksha with the name Umesh Chaitanya. On 4th October 1960 he received sannyasa diksha from Guru Maharaj. He lived in Vasishta Guha for around 28 years, managing the affairs of the Ashram along with Swami Chaitanyanda. He passed away at Manav Seva Sangh, Ghazipur on 1st February 2008.

27) Swami Ramananda (Ramananda -2)

He was from Kerala. Guru Maharaj gave him sannyasa in 1958 during his Kerala tour.

28) Swami Manishananda

He came to Guha around 1955. He was given brahmacharya diksha with the name Manoranjan. Subsequently Guru Maharaj gave him sannyasa diksha. Around 1960 he left Guha and lived near Shimla, Himachal Pradesh.

29) Swami Shantananda

He was born as Janakiramanan in an orthodox Tamil Brahmin family on 6th May 1928 at a village in Thanjavoor district of Tamil Nadu. His father was a Sanskrit scholar. At the tender age of 7, Janaki Ramanan was sent along with the entourage of Kanchi Mahaswami Sri. Chandrasekhara Saraswathi on his padayatra. In place of traditional schooling he was taught Sanskrit and these factors sowed the seeds of spirituality in him at a tender age.

After graduation he joined in defence audit service at Meerut and had the fortune of reading the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and this great book had a profound impact on the 22-year-old Janakiramanan. He started visiting Swami Sivananda at Rishikesh during weekends. During one of those trips he visited Vasishta Guha. Guru Maharaj asked him to come and expound Srimad Bhagavatham as saptaha during Guru Maharaj's next birthday. He was given mantra diksha on the birthday of Guru Maharaj. But even though Janakiramanan requested for sannyasa diksha, Guru Maharaj asked him to get married and mentioned that eventually he will get sannyasa too.

Janakiramanan led a householder's life and for a few years worked overseas. After Guru Maharaj's Maha samadhi in 1961, he stopped visiting Guha for many years. His Guru Bhai Swami Nirvedananda brought him back to the Vasishta Guha.

In the second half of 1991, Janakiramanan moved to Mangalashram, Uttarkashi and on 2nd February 1992 (Maha Shivaratri day) he was given sannyasa diksha by Swami Sankarananda.

After sannyasa, Swami Shantananda wandered as a monk (Parivrajaka) for several years. Swamiji never had a permanent base and he used to stay in Vasishta Guha and Sri Ramanarsamam, Tiruvannamalai for a few months every year and stay at several other Ashrams spread across the country during the remaining months.

Swamiji had large number of sishyas all over India and abroad. He wrote large number of books (covering Puranas, Upanishads and several other spiritual subjects) for the benefit of sadhaks. He had several health issues in the last years of his life. Swamiji entered Maha Samadhi on 14th October 2014. His samadhi sthal is situated at a village six kilometers away from Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai.

30) Swami Prakashananda

He was born on 27th August 1922 at Pallippadu village in Alappuza district of Kerala. His name in poorvashram was Velayudhan Pillai. He was known as Bhaktha Veeresan in Vasishta Guha. He was in Indian Army service for few years. As Guru Maharaj entered Mahasamadhi in 1961, he took sannyasa diksha from Swami Vishwatananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Thiruvalla. It may be remembered that Sri Guru Maharaj was born and brought up at Thiruvalla and the Ramakrishna Ashram, Thiruvalla was established due to his initiative in his poorvashram days.

Swami Prakashananda established an Ashram with a shrine of Guru Maharaj at the place where Guru Maharaj's ancestral house was situated. A small part of the ancestral house is also preserved. For around 40 years he used to keep this as his base and engaged in Guru Seva. Swami Prakashananda breathed his last on 3rd October 2014.

31) Brahmachari Krishna Chaitanya

He was a Keralite. Guru Maharaj gave him Brahmacharya Diksha on 11th March 1959 (Ramakrishna Jayanthi). He lived at Uttar Kashi and passed away a few years back.

32) Sri Ananda Krishna (Purushottama Das)

He was with Guru Maharaj from 1956-57 to 1961. He was given mantra disksha by Guru Maharaj. He was known as Purushottam Das.

Sri Sadguru Arati

श्री सद् गुरु आरती

श्री रामकृष्णं जगतां शरण्यम्
 ब्रम्हानन्दं ब्रह्मसमाधिनिष्ठम् ।
 तच्छिष्यवर्यं पुरुषोत्तमं च
 गुरुनिमान् नित्यमहं नमामि ॥

Daily we bow down to our spiritual preceptors, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa the refuge of the world, Swami Brahmananda engrossed in attribute less (absolute) Brahman, and his pre-eminent disciple Swami Purushottama.

ॐ जय करुणालय गुरुवर
 जय सद् गुणसिन्धो
 जय जय सद् गुणसिन्धो ।
 पालय सत्वरमस्मान्
 पालय सत्वरमस्मान्
 कृपया भवबन्धात् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥१॥

Oh! Eminent preceptor, the abode of compassion! Be victorious. By your kindness quickly save us from worldly bondages.

@Oh! Effulgent Guru, the Supreme Spirit, triumph to thee (at the three levels of Consciousness).

मधुरमनोहर वचनं - मन्दस्मितवदनं -
 मृदु - मन्दस्मितवदनं ।
 परिहृत - संसृतिकदनं
 परिहृत - संसृतिकदनं
 प्रणुमो मुनिमेनम् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ २ ॥

We bow down the Sage who has a sweet, captivating speech, a face with soft gentle smile and who has abandoned the fight with transmigration. (Repeat @ above).

हिमगिरिराजनितम्बे - सुरतटिनीतीरे -
 वरसुरतटिनीतीरे ।
 प्रथितवसिष्ठगुहायां
 प्रथितवसिष्ठगुहायां
 कृततपसं ध्याये ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ ३ ॥

We meditate on Swami Purushottama who practiced ascetism in the famous Vasishtha Cave situated on the sacred banks of celestial river Ganga flowing down the slopes of the snow-capped emperor of mountains. (Repeat @ above).

दुस्तरदुरितपयोधौ पततां तरणार्थ -
 परिपततां तरणार्थ ।
 समुदितमिव प्रथुपोतं
 समुदितमिव प्रथुपोतं
 शरणं यामस्तम् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ ४ ॥

We seek shelter under Swami Purushottama who has incarnated like a wide boat to ferry us - deeply drowned in the ocean of invisible sins. (Repeat @ above).

विविधागमकृतविवृतिं -
 हृदयगुहावसतिं निजहृदयगुहावसतिं ।
 ध्याये गुरुमात्मरतिं
 ध्याये गुरुमात्मरतिं
 विषयाशाविरतिम् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ ५ ॥

We meditate upon the spiritual preceptor who has expounded various scriptures, who dwells in the cave of heart, who revels in his Self and who has renounced the desires of the senses. (Repeat @ above).

उन्नतशैलशिखरपरिवारितघनविपिने – परिवारितघनविपिने ।
 विहितगुहागृहवासं
 विहितगुहागृहवासं
 भजतोज्ज्वलभासम् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ ६ ॥

We serve the effulgent Guru who dwells in the caves of the dense forest surrounded by mountain with lofty peaks. (Repeat @ above).

सद् गुरुवर पुरुषोत्तम सच्चिन्मय मूर्ते ।
 सुखसच्चिन्मय मूर्ते ।
 पारं भववारिनिधेः
 पारं भववारिनिधेः
 प्रापय कृपयास्मान् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ ७ ॥

Oh! Venerable eminent Swami Purushottama Guru, the embodiment of Existence and Consciousness, by your compassion take us across the shore of the ocean of worldliness. (Repeat @ above).

ॐ जय करुणालय गुरुवर
 जय सद् गुणसिन्धो –
 जय जय सद् गुणसिन्धो ।
 पालय सत्वरमस्मान्
 पालय सत्वरमस्मान्
 कृपया भवबन्धात् ॥
 ॐ जय जय जय गुरुदेव ॥ ८ ॥

Oh! Excellent preceptor, the abode of compassion, may you triumph. Oh! Ocean of virtues, may you triumph. With mercy quickly protect us from the worldly bondage. (Repeat @ above).

The Arati song of Sri.Guru Maharaj is said to be composed by one of his Sannyasi Sishyas Swami. Raghuveerananda (Popularly known as Anandapuri Maharaj) during 60s. This song is sung in a melodious tune collectively by all devotees, at the time of daily Arati(worship by waving sacred lamp) at Vasishtha Guha, every day.

We express our gratitude to Bhaktakavi Sri. T.B.Lakshmana Rao for the English translation.



What are We Seeking? Happiness

The happiness we are seeking is inside us. Within us is the fountain-head of bliss, even a drop of which is quite sufficient to make us fully intoxicated forever and destroy completely our misery and pain. But fools as we are, we believe that happiness is somewhere outside and can be obtained through wife and children, wealth and property, name and fame, and consequently we spend most of our life in acquiring these external things. We are like the deer which goes on running after a mirage to quench its thirst and falls dead ultimately without finding the water. We spend our life in searching for happiness and find that life is mostly full of sorrow and suffering. Even the temporary enjoyments are found to lead to suffering ultimately.

Sri Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj

