

MY LIFE

Autobiography of Swami Krishnananda

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PREFACE

Swamiji felt that he should write something about his early days of such struggle and suffering. It would read like a meandering story in different phases, which would be sometimes humorous, tragic, and successful. It is here for what it is, and all should be considered as well.

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MY LIFE

When I was about 6 years old I was sitting in the verandah of the house. I was born in a very orthodox Madhva Brahmin family. We traditionally believe in Narayana as the ultimate Reality and the goal of life. This is the Madhva principle. Suddenly I called my father who was inside and told him, "According to our family tradition, Narayana is supreme." Then I asked him, "Is Narayana all-pervading?" He said, "Yes." "In that case He is also everything." My father said, "Yes, it must be so." Then I asked him, "Where are we sitting now? Are we sitting on Narayana Himself, as Narayana is everything and is everywhere?" The father told me that I'm a small boy and I don't understand anything and should not ask such questions. There our conversation ended.

But this question to which I could not get an answer haunted me, and even today at my late age this question has not left me and is persisting for an answer. I am a Madhva Brahmin and this orthodoxy is still persisting in everything.

Though I have read practically every type of philosophy, both Eastern and Western, and no one can stand before me in philosophical arguments or religious doctrine at the present time, and therefore I am fully satisfied as regards all the philosophies and all the religions of the world, though these philosophies appear to be different from each other and religions also differ from each other, I have with my own rational capacity tried to bring them together, and to me now there is only one philosophy and one religion. I do not any more see many philosophies and many religions; they just don't exist for me. I agree with Chesterton who said: "There can be only one cosmic philosophy and one cosmic religion, and those who are believing in many philosophies and many religions are asking for many skies, many suns and many moons."

I grew up in maintaining my Madhva tradition, which makes me feel that I am a holy man born to my father who was an example of holiness and piety.

I saw my father reading some book every day before the midday meal and also another book after the meal. I asked him what he was reading. He retorted that it was not meant for me, and when I insisted, he said that it was Srimad Bhagavatam that he was reading, and Sundara Kandam of Valmiki Ramayana. He also added that the Srimad Bhagavatam is a holy book and I should not touch it as I do not know what it means. Sundara Kandam is read for the destruction of enemies and opponents, if any.

He would get up in the morning and survey the fields and the coconut trees to see how they were. Then he would come back and take bath about 9:00 or so in the morning and then start his Puja, which would last for about 4 hours. He would worship every God conceivable, the Panchadevatas as they are called. As we were all boys born to him, we had no right to ask the mother to give us food until the Puja was over. When the Puja was over he would come out, then the mother would stretch banana leaves for our food, and then we would start eating. After we washed our hands he would sit with me and teach me pronunciation of the Rigveda Samhita, and I knew by heart the whole of the Pavamana Suktam, a long thing in the ninth Mandala of the Rigveda. He also taught me Mahasaura Suktam. All these I learned from him with the Rishi, Chhandas and Devata. All these I knew by heart. When he was doing the Puja inside the room, I was sitting outside in the verandah and trying to learn by rote these Veda Mantras. If I made a

mistake in the Svara (intonation) of the reading, he would only make a sound, “Hum Hum” in the middle of his Puja, which indicated that I had not pronounced properly. My Vedic knowledge is due to my father. I learned some rituals like Mahamrityumjaya Yajna and some specific Mantras from my mother’s father who was an expert in these things.

At noontime when we were about to eat food, we would chant the Fifteenth Chapter of the Bhagavadgita. One of my colleagues, some other boy, told me that the Fifteenth Chapter occurs in the Bhagavadgita, of which I knew nothing actually. When the father was out of station, I opened his Bhagavatam copy and tried to understand what it meant. When he returned from his outing I told him that I had seen the book and I understood it. He said, “Oh, you touched it, why did you touch it? It is a holy book; you cannot understand it.” I said I did understand because I had knowledge of Sanskrit. He told me to read a passage and explain to him what it meant, which I did to his satisfaction. He taught me many other Mantra Suktas of the Vedas, connected practically with all the Devas for welfare, as well as for the destruction of evils including enemies. Now comes the answer to my question, “Where do I sit when God is everywhere?” I ransacked and studied all the philosophies and all the religions. I came to know that there is only one philosophy and one religion. Those who think that there are many philosophies and many religions do not know what they are seeking.

I have learned the art of *Total Thinking*. For me there is only One Thought and every thought is included in it. Everyone’s thought is a part of that thought. I tried to think as God would think. What would God think about his creation? Would he have loves and hatreds for some part of his creation? Loving God would mean loving the whole creation. This thought is called meditation. Now the time has come for me to enter into the *Virat Purusha* who is seeing me with His all eyes, through all His heads, - *Sahasrasirsha Purusha*.

I was a poor man, financially very poor. I suffered with extreme poverty not because I had no food to eat, - I had very good food in the house and that was not my problem. I left my house in search of the higher values of life. And that journey of mine to the Sivananda Ashram involved my contact with many places and many persons, in each of which I learned something noble. A Brahman called Sridhar Bhatt came to Benares by chance with only Rs. 200/- in his hand. A marriage ceremony was performed by a Pandit scrupulously and in an orthodox manner and within one hour the whole ceremony was over. At that time the Tiruvanantapuram Kshetra that was catering food to selected people every day had an excellent cook of the Kerala type. He was called for cooking the food to which he agreed, and the invited people for the ceremony were fed sumptuously, all in less than Rs. 200/-. When he said he was now preparing to go to Haridwar, I told him, “You may take me also.” Some well-wishers came to me and told me that I should not mix up with Sadhus and Sannyasins. And he spent out of his pocket Rs. 8/- to purchase the ticket for me from Benares to Haridwar. He gave me half a Rupee to go from Haridwar to Rishikesh in order to reach Sivananda Ashram. This is my story. I saw Swami Sivananda in the evening at about 3:30. Some few others were also there with me but Swamiji did not utter a word; he finished his work of seeing the daily post and went away. It was on the third day he called me and settled me in the Ashram.

Swami Sivananda did not talk to me for 3 days. I felt disgusted as there was no food to

eat and I did not know that anybody was eating food in the Ashram at all; I thought they would be eating some leaves. The only person who came to me on the second day perhaps was one Swami Gopalananda who, as he said, was serving Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj even in his Swargashram days. This Gopalananda brought to me on the second day a dry *chapati* with a little sugar on it. I am feeling grateful to him even now for the first item of food I got in this Ashram. He said, "There is vegetable also, rice also, but now it is 3:00 in the afternoon, so I cannot get anything at this time." While I am deeply grateful to Swami Gopalananda whom I can never forget because of his kind-heartedness, I was deeply concerned over my fate even on the third day when I had no indication that I could stay in this Ashram. It was in the evening of the third day when, in a disgusted mood, I was walking on the narrow strip of land on the bank of the Ganga that Swamiji saw me and beckoned me to him. That was the day of my blessedness. He called me and asked me who I was and what I wanted. I gave a childish answer with which he was not satisfied, but directed me to Bhajan Hall to do Akhanda Kirtan of the Mantra *Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare*. He said, "Don't go anywhere; I will see that Kings and Presidents will touch your feet," all of which I could not understand; they were just Greek and Latin. I thanked the Swamiji and, before I left, he told me to go and take food. I did not know where the food came from. He pointed out to the verandah that is now a part of the Post Office structure. I went and sat there with others who were all eating *chapatis* and some vegetable. Though I never ate such food, for a man like me who starved for long days, that food was like nectar. I joined the Akhanda Nama Sankirtana Yajna under a person called Tirumala Acharya who took me into the fold when he learned that Swamiji himself had sent me to him. I did the Mantra Japa in the Bhajan Hall for several days, when again Swami Sivananda called me and asked me whether I knew typing. When I said, "Yes, I know typing", he asked me for how long had I practised typing. I said that for eight months I had practised, which satisfied Swamiji very much, because a person who has done typewriting in an institute for eight months must be a very able one to assist in the daily work of Swamiji himself. He gave me some letters to which I had to give a reply, and also some manuscripts of his own handwriting that I had to type out in three copies. Swamiji's system was that when typing a manuscript it should always be in three copies, so that if it happens to be lost, at least one copy will be there out of the three; a wise method of preserving copies. Day by day Swamiji became more and more interested in me. Whenever I used to give replies directly by myself, Swamiji used to tell me, "Show it first to Sridhar Raoji and then only bring it to me." This Sridhar Raoji, incidentally, is almost the first person whom I met on the Ganga bank when I went for taking bath while he too was bathing. He was recognised in the Ashram as a great scholar in English, and so it was that all literary works were referred to him before they were finally given to Swamiji himself. This Sridhar Rao is actually Swami Chidananda who became later the President of The Divine Life Society.

For some peculiar reason we both became very great friends, constantly consulting each other in every matter. He was kind to me even when I did several foolish acts, such as wanting to leave the Ashram on a long northern path. Swami Dayananda, who joined the Ashram later, joined me in this foolish act of renouncing everything and starving on the road. But in a few days he could not continue to follow me, saying, "I cannot come with you anymore" and turned back. My fingers lost sensation and crumpled as if I was

about to die. I then returned to a kind of nowhere as I had no courage to meet the Swamiji again in the Ashram. I had one cloth, a kind of *lungi*. A friend of the Ashram who knew me told me then, "Swami Krishnananda, this is the thing I do not like you doing. Why are you running about like a beggar? No, don't go." I had no courage to return to Swamiji and tell my foolish errand in search of God. I went rather to Swargashram where the boatmen recognised me and were wondering how I came there. Fortunately there was a *bhandara* that day in Swargashram kitchen and I was one of the Swamis who stretched their cloth and took some *puri*, but I had no liquid. One of the Swamis who was watching me had a vessel of his own and he gave me the vessel so that I may have some *dhal* to eat the *puri*. I was a well-known man in the Medical Dispensary of the Ashram and the boatmen etc. who used to come to me for ointment and such and such things were surprised to find me begging for food with one cloth. I could not see their face. I somehow walked off by some other way.

Already some Swami was in search of me and he found me at the rear end of the road, and the man told me "Swamiji wants you," and took me to Swamiji. Another friendly Swamiji had already mentioned to Swamiji, "He's a good boy; it is good if Swamiji does not talk to him in any harsh manner." When I was sheepishly standing behind Swamiji when he was doing his work in his office, he just said, "Who asked you to work? Go, take rest." Then I went up to a place that is now called the Music Hall, and at that time there was nobody staying there. Swami Chidananda (Sridhar Rao) in his kindness brought a lit-up lantern and gave it to me, saying at the same time, "How foolish, how foolish. Don't go anywhere. You can be quite happy here." This good Samaritan of people did me much good in trying to obstruct tendencies in the Ashram that were inconducive to me, and always on my side in everything. We became such friends later that we both used to go for walks along the main road leading to Lakshman Jhula. At that time we never knew each other personally, though by some instinct we were drawn to each other.

A second time I left the Ashram without informing anyone, in search of Lord Krishna, my Beloved God. I went far on the holy Badrinath road, about 20-25 kilometres distance. I had no clothing but a scanty covering of perhaps a deerskin that Swami Chidananda gave me. I slept on the bank of the Ganga, and one can imagine the cold in the night of February, which I passed in utter agony and great sorrow, for day the broke and Krishna did not come. I crawled into a nearby Sitaram Baba Kutir, where the Baba was making *chapatis* and *matta* (buttermilk). He asked me from where I came just now in the morning. I said I came from Ganga bank. He was shocked and could not believe that I could live in the cold in the night by the Ganga. "Where are you going?" he asked. I said, "I want to go to Badrinath." He said, "This is not the time to go to Badrinath which is bitterly cold in February. Go back to your place and do some good work." He gave me one well-baked *chapati* and some *matta*, patting me on my back and wanting to see my palm, where he said is written the future of my life. He added, "You are going to shine like Swami Vivekananda. Abandon this bad idea. Go back," he said. I came back to the Ashram walking, tottering, with cold, in fear of Swami Sivananda, in fear of life itself. And Swami Sivananda as usual was very cordial, because he understood me well.

My father and others nearby wanted me to become an earner of money, which was the only thing that people valued, though my personal desire was to study Vedas, a large part of which my father taught me. Actually, I committed to memory, learned by heart, the whole of the Pavamana Sukta of the Rig Veda. Incidentally, I learned by heart the

whole of Brihajjataka of the famous astronomer Varaha Mihara. At the age of about 16 or 17 I learned the whole of the Bhagavadgita by heart, and also the holy Vishnu Sahasranama that caught my attention and my affection. I loved my mother, who was an illiterate lady, so much that I told her it would be good to recite every day Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram. It is a surprise to me again that she, by sheer oral hearing, mastered the Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram. Wherever I went I used to propagate the Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram, and even those who had scant respect for religious life were caught by the fire of my insistence that it is good to recite the Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram. People around me, wherever I went, were turned by my insistence on the study and recitation of this Stotra by everyone.

My father later changed his mind and refused to teach me Vedas, saying that I must find some job and earn some money for the house. This attitude of my father suddenly brought my spirits down, and everybody wanted me to earn money, which I could not, as I had no job. Meanwhile my uncle contacted a local Sub-Registrar, an amiable young man, to give me some place in his Office. The Sub-Registrar said "Yes, very good, let him come; I will give him some work," and he tested the handwriting, with which he was deeply satisfied. The next day I was supposed to have gone to the Sub-Registrar for work, but it so happened that the next day itself I received an appointment order from the District Educational Officer of Bellary saying that I should join work immediately in the Hospet Government Training School. Considering the distance of the place from our own house, my father changed his mind and said, "It is better not to have this job." But those who did not value any human being unless he earns some money, including my uncle, wanted me to go to Hospet, about which I knew nothing. By the goodwill of my uncle I got a temporary job as a writer in the local District Munsif Court for a while, but it was difficult to continue there.

There was a man in the District Munsif Court in Puttur who happened to be a resident of Hospet itself, a fact which he never revealed for his own reasons, but directed me through a rugged, zigzag, difficult way by bus route and train, to Hospet. All the while I was conscious that I had to catch a train to a place called Harihar. Though the driver of the bus was conscious that he should reach the railway station in time, yet when the bus reached the station, the train had already started moving. I dropped my trunk into the train and then clamoured for a seat, by which time the train began to move fast. One thing I noticed was that in the area of the movement of trains in Mysore State, there was no Travelling Trains Inspector. Actually, no one came to see my ticket. The train reached Harihar. I immediately got down, and I saw a hotel man. It was evening by that time and I enquired from the hotel people whether I could stay for the night somewhere, if I could get a room. The hotel master told me that in the whole of Harihar I could not find a room to stay. However, he allowed me to lie down on a bench in his own office, which he vacated in the night. In the morning the bus taking people to Hospet arrived. At that time I saw a gentleman in white clothes who asked me where I was going. I told him that I wanted to go to Hospet. The gentleman told me that he too was from Hospet and he was going there. So we both boarded the bus. The bus ride was a long move in the hot sun, and we reached Hospet late in the evening. The good gentleman who was accompanying me was kind enough to note that I had not taken food, because throughout the day we were in the bus. So when the bus reached Hospet town, this gentleman took me to his house and served me some food. I hurriedly ate it and told

him to guide the way to the Government Training School. He took me there on his own scooter, and he took me back to his own house so that I could pick up my luggage. I took up the same and walked to the Government Training School's office. The office was closed because it was too late in the evening. Here again I met another good Samaritan, an old man who knew only two languages, English and Telugu. His name was Periah Vasti. He invited me and told me that I should meet the Headmaster of the school who could be seen now in the Library building. I went up there and I saw the Headmaster reading newspaper. But his arrogance and nonchalant nature was obvious when he did not even look at me and only said, "Talk to them," without even having the courtesy to tell me what he meant by "Talk to them." I turned back to the office and the old Telugu gentleman invited me to sleep there and join the office the next morning. This old gentleman was a great help to me. He was a graduate teacher wrongly posted in the Government Training School in Hospet, though he himself belonged to Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh. Due to this anomaly of posting he was expecting a transfer from that place to a Government Training School where Telugu was the medium, and not Kannada, of which he knew nothing. The next morning I went to the office. Here, I must say, that I never attended any office in my life; I just knew nothing about it. There was a colleague called Subramaniam who was doing this work and was acquainted with all the details of the work, which were all very insipid, dry and meaningless to me except that I would receive Rs. 30/- every month. What would I do with Rs. 30/-? The Headmaster's arrogance used to crop up now and then. "Hey, are you not eating salary?" he would tell me. So was the case with the other teachers in the school with whom he was dealing. I was not happy, to tell the least. I could not eat the food of the hotel in Hospet - the people there were a curious type who did not eat breakfast and ate only twice a day, and in my case it was in the hotel only. I felt disgusted for having joined this duty.

One young man who was a teacher himself in the Training School attached to the Centre was a very good person, and he offered the old Telugu teacher and myself the service of taking us to the site of the ancient Vijayanagara empire that was supposed to be initiated by Swami Vidyananda in the 14th century under the care of two brothers known as Hukka and Bukka. The efficiency of Swami Vidyananda in administration can be seen by the extent of the empire that the two boys developed, which grew up into an astounding attraction even to those pilgrims who had come from the West, such as Fahian who described the glory of the Vijayanagara empire as more beautiful than the Roman empire. They wrote in their pilgrim diary, "People do not lock the doors in that empire, shopkeepers sell their jewels on the roadside without fear from thieves and the like." Wonder! A British Collector of the District of Bellary wrote a book called *A Forgotten Empire*. Those days British Collectors used to write Gazetteers of the district in which they were ruling, of which they were Collectors. Robert Sewell was evidently a District Collector in Bellary who wrote the book *A Forgotten Empire*. I have never seen that book; it was not available to me anywhere though I was in Bellary itself for some time. I imagine it must have been as interesting as the great six volume work of Edward Gibbon known as *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. These kings of the Vijayanagara empire came in conflict with the Muslim kings nearby, egoism clashed with egoism, and the five Muslim empires who were always at war with each other joined together to root out the Vijayanagara empire in a concerted move. The great glory into which the empire grew and the great destruction that followed many years afterwards are both part of the history of the world. This young man took us round the old rampage of the Vijayanagara

city; actually there was nothing to see. There was sometimes only a plinth of some house. We tried to walk a long distance to try to find if anything worthwhile was coming forth, but nothing came; all rampage and desecration faced us throughout our trip. Tired and exhausted, by twelve o'clock in the afternoon, we returned to the Hampi's famous Virupaksha Temple, an old structure that we may attribute its existence to Swami Vidyananda only. We were hungry and thirsty and the sun was shining at midday. We saw some people eating food in some corner, looking as if it was a choultry. Here we three people went in, sat with others and ate rice and pudding to our hearts' content. I hear from people that nowadays this choultry is closed.

The building structure of the Training School was acquired on rent by the Government from a local insurance agent. It was a large building indeed, very spacious. This gentleman who was the owner came one day to the office of the Headmaster of the Training School and told him that he should persuade me to sign a bond of life insurance. The Headmaster told me, "Yes, you can go for it." though I was reluctant since my salary was a pittance and most of it went in payment of hotel bills. I never wore a shoe or a *chappal* because I had no money to spare. Everywhere I went, I went barefoot.

Having known that I knew the whole of the Bhagavadgita by heart, one day this curious Headmaster of the Training School asked me whether I could give a lecture on the Bhagavadgita, where he would be present with other teachers of the school. I readily agreed, and one evening they closed all their offices and came to hear me. Since at that time I had not developed the art of public speaking, it was difficult for me to narrate at length the content of the Bhagavadgita, but however something went well and the lecture closed.

Another interesting thing this Telugu-knowing graduate teacher did for me was introducing me to the local dignitaries, such as the people in the Commissionary and some business guys, always introducing me as a good man. This he did effectively. At the same time he did not forget to egg the Headmaster daily to see that he is transferred from this Kannada area to his own Rajahmundry Telugu area.

People are generally uncharitable in their comments. In the first two hotels in which I was eating, the food was bad, so I shifted to a third hotel in which the food was more tolerable. Some people started saying that the third hotel in which I was eating was simple. The owner had a daughter who was young and beautiful, about whom I knew nothing, and everybody started saying that that may be the reason why I shifted from the earlier two hotels to the third. This was false accusation, because I didn't go for the sake of the lady as I didn't even know about her until I heard the gossip that people were fabricating about me. The hotel food became a nightmare; I could not eat it. I fell sick with asthma for the first time, and the old Telugu man again intervened and told a local doctor to treat me without payment because I had nothing to pay. The doctor did something for the first time, and when I fell sick for the second time he refused to do anything unless payment was given. I do not know what happened later. I survived death practically. Everything was an ugly, meaningless, torture for me in which condition I wrote to my uncle at home that "I'm quitting this place, I do not want it, I'm travelling to Tirupati or some such place". On receiving this letter the uncle took no time in taking a train to Hospet and arrived in the Training School at about evening time. He

told me, "There is no use staying here, let us go now". I had already obtained a medical certificate from a doctor that I should be given leave. We departed in a horse cab, boarded the train that went to Bangalore, went through a very long distance of movement, and then at Bangalore changed the train to one meant for Mysore, where we reached very late, and went to a hotel where, for the first time, though it was so late in the evening, I ate the best food even though it was a remnant, when all were fed and had left. My uncle pointed out to me, "Have you eaten such a *sambar* at any time?" I said, "No, I have not eaten such a thing." Then we came to Mysore and then after a breakfast took a bus to Puttur via Mercara and I landed in my house. I was grieved to the deepest of my heart and never wanted again to do this job under pressures of any kind. I took leave of my house again and boarded a bus to Mercara, then to Mysore. A train was standing there and a guard was also there whom I accosted and asked whether this train can go to Pune. "Yes, yes," he said, "You go," and I entered the train. Actually this train was not going to Pune. I had to change the train at Arsikere Junction where I had to transport myself to another train coming from Bangalore that was going to Pune. My money was scanty. I purchased a ticket at Pune station for Jubbulpur without knowing what is my destination. As my ticket was exhausted, I could not go further. I remained on the platform with my small trunk and some eatables like *achar* (pickle) that was lovingly prepared by my mother, not knowing that I would not go back to the house. A railway officer queried me, "Hey, why are you sitting here when all people have gone?" I told him honestly, "I am a student of learning. I have starved for days together, my tongue is parched." He heard what I told and gave me a little tea in a saucer – this is the first time that I tasted tea. Then he let me go and I went out of the station. Then a train arrived that was supposed to be intending for Allahabad. I told the Controller of the Train sitting in the office that he should allow me to entrain without ticket as I am a poor man and I cannot purchase a ticket. He hinted to the guard to take me inside the train, and the train moved on to Allahabad. I got down from the train but the Train Inspector would not allow me to get down; he wanted me to show the railway ticket. I told him, "I have no ticket, I have come with the compassionate gesture of the Railway Controller in Jubbulpur," but the gentleman would not allow me to go. When I persisted that I am a student and I cannot pay him anything, he let me off in a mood of disgust. It was about four o'clock in the morning; it was all pitch dark. I did not know where I was resting. I felt something was moving towards me and later I realised it was a dog who wanted some warmth. I pitied the dog and allowed it to come near me as a cushion, as it were, and when it was dawn I took my bundle of belongings and walked up to the Ganga, asking people where Ganga is. I went starving, half dead, and nobody would give me anything to eat. On the way I saw a guava fruit-seller with a heap of these fruits, and when I asked him to give me one, he refused. I did not know what my fate was. I went to the Ganga. There was a wooden cot. I, shiveringly covering myself with one cloth, tried to sleep. Then in the morning time a Pundit came and threatened me because it happened to be his property. "Who is there? Get up, go out!" he shouted. I got up from the cot and slept on the sand near the Ganga. That it was cold is indeed very little to say. I again went up to the railway station and told the Controller to please let me into the train to go to Benares. He obliged, knowing well that I was a hopeless case, and I sat in the train. The train arrived in Benares; at what time it was, I cannot remember now. Many years back my grandfather, uncle, mother and others had stayed in this very place, in a house of a Pundit called Chikka Bhau Acharya. I asked the nearby shopkeeper which

was the house of Chikka Bhau Acharya, but it so happened that this agent was of another Acharya called Dodda Bahu Acharya, to whom he led me immediately. He knocked at the door and a lady opened, thinking that a customer had come. I told them, "I am a starved man; I am not a customer of Pundits". However they allowed me to stay there for a few days. At that time a person from Udupi called Narayana Tantri from a few miles distance came to the very same place where I was living, and offered me a charity of coming with him. I did agree and went away from the Bhau Acharya's house to Narayana Tantri. But there was another problem. Where would I eat food? There were 2-3 choultries; I was told to go there with a pot until the chief of the choultry would select the people who he considered as all right, and whoever had the pot or vessel in his hand was sure to receive his food the next day. There were two or three such choultries. I used to get up early in the morning and visit these charity houses with my vessel, praying to God that my vessel would be accepted and I would eat some food there. But this vessel would not be accepted all the seven days in a week, so many days I used to be just sitting in Narayana Tantri's house helplessly like a beggar, noting which this good man used to invite me to his own house for food. Poverty was my name. I cannot describe me better than that. At that time a very rich Marwari Seth known as Narayandas Bajoria in Sarnath made an announcement that whoever recited the Bhagavadgita whole, without mistake, would receive a gift of ten Rupees from him. This Narayana Tantri told me, "Let us go. We shall get ten Rupees." We walked for eight miles to Sarnath from Benares to the residence of this Seth where I recited the whole Gita nonstop and I was given ten Rupees. Even in giving a gift the Seth was not wanting to be more charitable. Then I walked back with my colleague from Sarnath to Benares city. Every day I used to take bath in the Ganga. It was almost the month of December and yet the water was not as cold as it is in Rishikesh. I had only one pair of clothing, which I could not wash for fear of there being no other set of clothes. I used to keep the clothes somewhere near a stone and take bath and come, put on the same clothes once again. Misery was my name. I came back to Narayana Tantri's house with a beggar's bowl. At that time one Sridhar Bhatt, having completed his *tapasya* in a place called Sirmur in the Himalayas, came to the place where I was staying with another *tapaswi* whom I recognized as a Kerala expert, a good man in his demeanour and the manner of speaking. Here it is before this Kerala Tantric Yogi I recited my mantra of Lakshmi.

On hearing this recitation from me the Kerala specialist asked me, "Can you kindly write it down for me?" I wrote it down for him. Narayana Tantri, in whose house I was staying and before whom I recited this Lakshmi Mantra, was very much astounded at my Sanskrit expression. This Narayana Tantri was an astrologer, but he did not know English. Often he, as a poor man, earned his living by writing the horoscopes of well-to-do people who knew English better than any other language. This Tantri used to tell me, "Kindly write in English what I am telling you in Kannada." This recital was very much liked by the candidate concerned, and he used to have one or two such occasions that earned him money.

Now the time came that the Sridhar Bhatt of Srimur developed a desire for marriage. He consulted Sri Narayana Tantriji as to how it would be done. Everything had to be done in Rs. 200/-. Whom will he marry? There was a widow with a daughter living on the ground floor of Sri Dattatreya Mutt, where every one of us was living. A proposal was made to the widow to give her daughter to this Sridhar Bhatt. She, being an extremely

poor person, readily agreed to everything. Narayana Tantri was himself the presiding priest of the ceremony to be performed. One or two local Pundits came to create disturbance in the middle, saying that the recitation was not correct. But Sridhar Bhatt, who was more eager to end the marriage early and not engage himself in wrangling, closed the issue giving them some *dakshina*, and here again the matter ended.

A few people were invited and a Kerala cook was readily available at whose charity house I used to eat occasionally, as I mentioned earlier. The next phase of Sridhar Bhatt was to pack off from the place and catch a train to Haridwar. He asked me whether I would like to accompany him to Haridwar. I said yes; I readily agreed to be free from the beggar's atmosphere in which I was living, and the train moved to Haridwar. When we got down at Haridwar, Sridhar Bhatt gave me an eight anna coin, that is half a rupee, to enable me to go by train to Rishikesh. There were two train stops in Haridwar. One was at the main station and another was a city stop that I missed, since I was a little late. When the Ticket Collector was standing there I gave him the eight annas, but he refused to give the ticket, saying that it's too late. But however I was determined to enter the train without the ticket. With the eight anna coin I got out of the Rishikesh train checkup by telling the man concerned that I missed the purchasing of the ticket and here was the equivalent eight annas with me. He took the same and asked me to go. My aim was to reach Sivananda Ashram. Two other people were also with me heading for the Sivananda Ashram. They were just pilgrims, and we walked in the heat of the sun. At 3:00 in the evening we met Swami Sivananda in his office. He used to see letters, take some with him for personal attention, and throw other letters on the floor for the Secretary to pick up and handle himself. We all sat there for an hour or so. The Swamiji got up. I hurriedly went near him and said, "I want to learn Yoga," but he cared not to hear what I said. He went away to his Kutir. There I was left with no other alternative than to sleep in the ramshackled Rama Ashram tin shed on the floor that was not cemented. The rest we have already talked about previously.

To go ahead with the story, it was surprising to me that I actually met Swami Sivananda on the third day when he summoned me to his own Kutir and uttered some persuading words of great encouragement. My intellectual capacities rose up and I wrote rapidly essays in good English, with vocabulary that stunned Swami Sivananda himself. One of my colleagues, then known as Balan Menon, who later became Swami Chinmayananda, showed my first essay on the Gita written in my own handwriting (or as told by me and written by him) to Swamiji. "Is this Swami Krishnananda who wrote the article?" "Yes, Swamiji." "Or you wrote it? Did this Swami write this essay, or is it a recording by you?" I myself could not understand how I wrote books in such rapidity, a thing which I never did earlier. To my memory, my first writing was a commentary on Swami Sivananda's *Moksha Gita*, a testimony to my ability to write.

One day when I was living in the Music Hall, Swami Sivananda peeped in through the window and asked, "What are you doing? You know that T.M.P Mahadevan of Madras University has written a book called *The Philosophy of Advaita*, for which he has earned laurels. What are you doing, you are also sitting here. Why don't you also write like that?" I told Swamiji I would try my best. From that day I decided to write a book that has gone under the title *The Realisation of the Absolute*. The fame that this book has attained is well known to people, and it would well be a thesis for a doctorate. I wrote the book with my own hand rapidly in about 14 or 15 days, and the whole manuscript

was typed by Swami Omkarananda, who was then living in this Ashram and later went abroad. The manuscript was read again by the then Vice-President of the Ashram, called Swami Mownananda, who told Swami Sivananda, "Here is a well-written book." That was enough to please Swami Sivananda that I was able to write well and attract the appreciation of a literary genius like Swami Mownananda. The book was printed in Rishikesh itself and is now available (though not for sale) in the beautifully printed form.

However, my first literary work was *The Philosophy of Life* that I dictated offhand with the help of a typist who readily came to help me. He typed it first as notes and the second time as a fair-copied literary piece. People who read this book will know how I advanced into the literary field from what I was, a beggarly individual searching for a meal, and so came many other books, more than two or three dozen of them, some of them conversations with people and some actually dictated compositions.

I am now dictating these lines when I am seventy-nine years of age, as my memoir and a rumination of my trudging through the track of ups and downs that I pursued, the aim being the seed sown by my grandfather on whose lap I used to sit and ask questions of great people such as Krishna, Vasishtha, etc. This seed erupted gradually into a vast vision of a determined life of meditation and a substantial literary contribution to the work of Swami Sivananda, - administrative, literary and spiritual. My memoir here is quite different from *Roses in December* of Justice M.C. Chagla, Chief Justice of Bombay High Court, who was later to become Minister for External Affairs in the Government of India. He wrote his memoir under the title *Roses in December*. He wrote well of course, but all political. There was a little uproar in his career as Minister of External Affairs, caused by the escaping of an important Russian lady through an American jet plane. Chagla describes this incident picturesquely. As I am dictating all these ideas in a hurry, it does not have the charm of Edward Gibbon's masterpiece. My masterpieces are indeed *The Philosophy of Life*, *The Philosophy of Religion*, *The Ascent of the Spirit*, *Essays in Life and Eternity*, *The Problems of Spiritual Life*, *Your Questions Answered* and the like, a few others of the same category. All glory to Swami Sivananda who made this acorn of a struggler to the peepul tree and the banyan. Swami Sivananda left us physically in the year 1963, and left us today what we are in the eyes of God.

Swami Chidanandaji, who was General Secretary, went abroad on invitation from some well-wishers. There was no General Secretary in the Ashram. As the post of the General Secretary was considered unavoidably important, the residents in the Ashram went to Swami Sivananda Maharaj and told him that myself, who was the Secretary, may be made the new General Secretary. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj wrote a note that from a particular day I should be the General Secretary. Though there are stipulations on appointing a General Secretary, the Founder-President had the power to overstep all these constraints and directly appoint suitable incumbents for a post. So I became the General Secretary. When Swami Chidanandaji returned from America, he found himself in a most inconvenient and embarrassing situation, that his position had already been occupied by another. But he stayed wisely in the Ashram for a while and, taking the permission of the Founder-President Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, went away to unknown places as a retreat, for a purpose which was in his mind alone. This action had a dubious meaning, which was happy and unhappy at the same time. Happy because someone was the General Secretary, unhappy because it was done in a rather hurry,

affecting the personal responsibility of another in the same position. I too felt that I was in an embarrassing position, and there were some people who wished to pour salt on the wound created by this peculiar condition of a person occupying the same position that another was already occupying, though under the order of the Founder-President. Swami Chidananda returned to the Ashram about three weeks before the passing away of the Founder. His returning became some solace to people in the Ashram and placed me in an uncomfortable position, so that the official relationship between Swami Chidananda and myself was indescribable. Swami Chidananda knew this very well, and distanced himself from all managerial affairs until he was forced to enter into the mainstream when the Founder-President left this world. After the election of the new President, consequent upon the vacancy created by the demise of the Founder-President, I became the General Secretary *de jure* as well as *de facto*.

The whole weight of management of The Divine Life Society came upon me as the General Secretary of this internationally famed Institution. There were troubles that arose from all directions at the same time, many of which were unknown to me and of which I was entirely unaware. One well-intentioned but totally unwise individual pressed upon the Trustees the necessity of having a movie film prepared on Swami Sivananda, and manoeuvred to take acceptance from all the Trustees, though this was done without the full knowledge of the person chosen who was preparing the film. As could be imagined, this led to a case in the court since the filmmaker refused to hand over the film with the negative unless the Ashram paid him another some 2.5 lakhs of rupees for some work that he assumed he had done. The Ashram rebutted all these arguments of the filmmaker and found itself in the pit of a long legal battle that lasted for about ten years. The case went from court to court and then it reached the High Court, and finally to the Chief Judicial Magistrate. In this battlefield of ten years' legal scene, a very able resident of the Ashram known as Sri Jaya Kumar played an essential role as a practical representative in all matters legal concerned with this film affair. Finally it was impossible to decide what would happen. Then, suddenly the Chief Judicial Magistrate passed a judgment closing the case, which went well in favour of The Divine Life Society, especially as the filmmaker himself had had enough of it and gave a written statement that he would like the case to be closed without any harm either to The Divine Life Society or anyone concerned. The ability of this Jaya Kumar in handling these legal issues is indeed worth appreciating.

When a piece of land got acquired on lease from the Forest Dept. thirty years ago was to expire, I mentioned to Sri Jaya Kumar that the application had to be made for the renewal of the lease for at least another thirty years. Sri Jaya Kumar went and contacted every source of official importance and finally succeeded in getting the order of acceptance on the part of the Government, though with many conditions imposed on it.

Swami Chidananda again went abroad on cultural grounds and stayed away long. In the meantime we received a copy of the ordinance passed by the Governor of the State of Uttar Pradesh that all the Ashrams should come within the administration of the State Government. At that time I had no one to consult; I had to scratch my head myself and either let the Government take away everything or to oppose it directly from my part. I took upon myself the latter decision, addressing a letter to the Governor that his proposal to make Trustees of institutions Government employees is a futile attempt, and the Government would not achieve any benefit out of such an attempt. In my letter to

the Governor I detailed all the consequences that would follow from trying to convert Trustees into Government employees, since no Trustee, more so who were Sannyasins, would agree to such a sudden pouncing of the Government on them. My letter touched the heart of the Governor and he exempted The Divine Life Society, along with two or three others, from the operation of the ordinance.

There were many other legal issues and official matters in which Jaya Kumar was a great help, and his name cannot be forgotten in any attempt to write a history of The Divine Life Society. Thirdly, I had the responsibility of seeing to it that residents in the Ashram, who were the prime pillars of activity, maintained a friendly and a cooperative relationship among themselves, for which purpose I used to see each one of them frequently and take such necessary steps as to enthuse them, please them and convince them that all was well in the Ashram. It was also necessary to maintain good relations with the public, especially of the locality, to which I had to pay special attention, together with our relations with the Government. Apart from this there was the need to send replies to the daily incoming of letters from people within India and abroad on matters galore, all of which took practically all my time in work only, telling upon my health to a great extent. In dealing with any person, it was necessary to know the sanity of the person, together with the verifiability of what the person was representing.

My conversations with people, my writings and my articles in the monthly magazine of The Divine Life Society made me sufficiently famous, which was enhanced by the website of my books and discourses, the success in which my close assistant Narayani (Swami Narayanananda) was responsible. The website made me rather world-famous beyond my expectations. I remember how the first words that Swami Sivananda uttered when I met him many years back fructified into its flowering in the glory that the website brought.

After the passing of the Founder-President Swami Sivananda Maharaj, I had to face one more difficulty in playing my role while electing the new President. I vigorously proposed the name of Swami Chidananda as the President, with which every one of the Trustees present agreed, except one or two on their personal grounds. The election of Swami Chidananda as President of The Divine Life Society was confirmed. All went well.

One of the duties, I felt, was to have citizenship obtained for my assistant Narayani (Swami Narayanananda), who was a Canadian national, for which I had to work hard, and in which I obtained staunch support from some of the mighty bigwigs of the Government. The citizenship was granted and the same was ratified by the District Magistrate of Tehri-Garhwal. This I thought was necessary to avoid the painful exercise of approaching the District Superintendent of Police every year for renewal of the visa.

All through my adventure of managing The Divine Life Society, I had kept in my mind not to omit any aspect unnoticed, but bring into the fold of my consideration every aspect, - financial, social, ethical, and spiritual, all at the same time. In my meditations I adopt the same method, leaving no thought aside as unworthy, because the rejected thought also is a thought and so it will refuse to be so easily rejected, since every thought is connected with its opposite; the synthesis of all these thoughts would amount to a cosmic thought, a total thought. Every possible thought of the universe will resound with equal status, and there will be an all-glorious universal meditation. This should

keep one perpetually in the positive mood of complete attunement with God Almighty.

Both Swami Chidananda and myself are Madhva Brahmins, and both believe that Moksha is the ideal, though with some difference in the way of its operation in daily life. Though we are one in our idea of attaining Moksha and preserving social unity in our attitudes, yet we can see differences if we really want to see them. Often we can see things if we want to see them, and we may not like to see them if they are not really there. The Bhagavadgita is an instance on this point. "The real cannot become the unreal, and the unreal cannot be the real." Here what are we to understand from the words "real" and "unreal"? This is mostly a subject of perceptual psychology, like seeing a rainbow while it is really not there, and seeing the mirage water while it is really not there. Here a question arises: are things that we see with our faculties of perceptions realities, or they may not be realities? When a person is going for a walk on the main highway and he sees two women coming in front of him, and cannot differentiate between them in the beginning, but notices that one of them is his sister and another is his wife, what is the difference between a sister and a wife? Here lies the whole problem of human relationships in which one can be involved and has been involved. The famous Panchadasi of Swami Vidyananda explains how one and the same woman can be the mother of some, a wife of another, a sister-in-law of a third one, and so on, all which are really there as facts of difference, yet they are not there. How does a woman who is the mother of someone become the wife of another? These differences, though they are poignantly visible and can create hell to one and heaven to another by a wrong annotation attached to perception, even as there is no such thing as my land and another's land, because what is today my land may become another's land tomorrow by a negotiation of sale deed. The song of the earth, which is recorded for us in the Vishnu Purana as well as the Srimad Bhagavatam, both deny that there was anyone who ruled the earth. This is independently existing even now, though many egoists trod over her thinking they are the rulers, and the possessors of the land. "Fie on the kingdom of both Rama and Ravana", says the Vishnu Purana, because walking over the earth does not convert it into an object of possession in any way. More detail in this regard I have endeavoured to give in the last pages of my book *Your Questions Answered*. So, while Swami Chidananda and myself are one in primary issues, we were also two in their interpretations.

Religion and spirituality are the two defining factors in the determination of the higher values of life. These two functions of the inner call of a human being correspond to life in the world and life in God. The relationship between the world and God is also the relationship between religion and spirituality. It is said that God manifested Himself as the world. Then, equally, we may say that spirituality manifests itself as religion. Here we come face-to-face with the necessity to describe the characteristics of God. It is generally believed that God is all-pervading, all-knowing and all-powerful. But these three features usually associated with God are connected with space and objects in time, while space, time and objects are subsequent to God's Original Being prior to creation. This would mean that no quality or attribute can be associated with God, even with the farthest stretch of one's imagination. Nevertheless, it should be accepted that every conceivable quality or character should have its potential existence in God Himself. Or, else, from where did these qualities arise? Here we have a hint at the nature of religion and the nature of spirituality.

In India there is a discipline prescribed for the gradual evolution of the human individual by stages of (1) education, (2) adjustment of oneself with the demands of natural and social living and, (3) an austere detachment from the usual entanglements in life and (4) final rootedness of oneself in God. This last mentioned stage is known as Sannyasa and the first two stages are the religious disciplines preparing a person for the third and the fourth stages.

Religion has its various restrictions imposed on a person, keeping all human activity confined to specific areas of living with its several do's and don'ts, - 'do this' and 'do not do that'. There cannot be any religion without these two mandates imposed on man. People in the first two stages of life mentioned above are placed under an obligation to follow these dos and don'ts of religion in social behaviour, in personal conduct and dealings with people in any manner whatsoever. Every religion has these ordinances defining the duties, which are religious, whether in the form of ritual, worship, or pilgrimage and even in diet daily ablution, and an exclusive literal devotion to the word of the scripture of the religion. These restrictions are lifted in the third stage where the life of a person is mainly an internal operation of thought, feeling and understanding and not connected with human society in any way.

Hindu codes of conduct called Smritis have often stuck vehemently to their promulgation of the superiority of the Brahmin (Brahmana) giving lesser importance to the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra, a classification characteristic specially to the Hindu religion. As such, the Smritis and scriptures of that kind do not consider people who are not Brahmins as sacred and pure. Foreigners were called Yavanas and Mlecchas, which words mean infidels. Thus, travel to the land of these infidels was considered as contaminating the purity of the Brahmin, and one who took to such foreign travels, across the seas, was debarred from the community of Brahmins.

But, the Sannyasin is an Atyashramin, that is, transcending the caste system, because the Sannyasin transcends social law, and he was even considered to have undergone civil death. He is not anymore one of the four castes. He is rooted in God and he is a man of God and he has no restrictions even as God Himself has no restrictions.

The point is then that those who have a hesitation to feel that they are rooted in God have to follow these rules, but if the Sannyasin is sure that he is fixed in God-consciousness, no rules apply to him. He is free in every way. While the caste system was originally evolved for the necessary classification of human duty in order to preserve the organic stability of society, its original meaning and its philosophical foundation was forgotten through the passage of time, and bigotry and fanaticism took its place through the preponderance of egoism, greed and hatred, contrary to the practice of true religion as a social expression of inner spiritual aspiration for a gradual ascent, by stages, to God Almighty.

Vidura, famous in the Mahabharata, was born of a Shudra woman. But he had the power to summon the son of Brahma, from Brahmaloaka, by mere thought. Which orthodox Brahmin can achieve this astounding feat?

It is, therefore, necessary for everyone to have consideration for the facts of world-unity and goodwill, *Sarvabhuta-hita*, as the great Lord mentions in the Bhagavadgita. Justice is more than law. No one's body is by itself a Brahmin, because it is constituted of the

five gross elements, - earth, water, fire, air and ether. Else, it would be a sin on the part of a son to consign to flames the lifeless body of a Brahmin father.

It is, therefore, not proper to victimise a colleague by an action plan of any religious community wedded to fundamentalist doctrines.

Through the process of evolution, the world has now become a global village. Sun, moon, stars and the galaxies operate in a cosmic co-operative spirit. The air that we breathe, moving everywhere freely, has no nationality, no ethnic distinction. We live by the free gift of Nature. Any assertion of isolated individuality is not in consonance with the way the Universe is operating. Events have cosmic connotations. Creation is one, even as God is One.

A Spanish professor wrote a doctorate thesis on my writings under the title *The Philosophy of Swami Krishnananda*. He tried to emphasize that I am a follower of Advaita though I personally told him I am not such. I do not reject any school of thought, because I consider that each doctrine, each philosophy, each phase of religion is a developmental difference in the evolutionary process of every one and everything to the Absolute. Be all and end all. I agree with Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vallabha, the Pratyabhijna system. I agree with Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, as well as Kant and Hegel and their offshoots, F.H. Bradley and Bosenquet, and Josiah Royce. I see no contradiction. Every spectrum of the crystal is beautiful, every petal of the rose is charming, and every ray of the rising sun is a call to life and rejuvenation.

All this that I am speaking about myself will look that I am a somewhat curious person, interesting, humorous, joyous, child-like and serious when it comes to the fact of the Love of God as the goal of life, whatever its meaning be to different people. I cannot say anything more.

The content of my book, *The Epic of Consciousness*, is actually the epic of my own life portrayed figuratively in an epic fashion. The book, *The Problems of Spiritual Life*, also depicts my inner character and the nature of my general perception.

Apples were very costly, and nobody in the Ashram was entitled to have apples under any circumstance. Only Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was given one apple as a part of his diet. Every evening Swamiji had entrusted me with arranging for the evening Satsanga at about 6:00 in the evening, keeping Bhagavan's portrait, spreading the carpet on the ground, keeping the holy books for reading and arranging a special seat for Swamiji Maharaj himself. It so happened that my coming every day to Sri Gurudev Kutir at about 6:00 in the evening coincided with the time when Sri Gurudev was taking his supper, and by nature Swamiji used to keep a part of his evening meal, a little piece of the apple that he used to give me when I came for the work. Since this happened every day, almost at the same time by 6:00, the cook who used to deliver the supper to Swamiji suspected that I deliberately came at the same time in order to take part of the food of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. The cook straightaway went to the Secretary of the Ashram and told him, "The boy is coming regularly at 6:00 and eating part of the meal of Swamiji himself." The Secretary called me and told me that I should not go at 6:00 to Sri Gurudev Kutur, but may go a little later. The reason also he mentioned, because if I go at 6:00 I will make Swamiji part with his own diet. Then, next day I went late to Gurudev's

Kutir, whereupon Swamiji queried me why I was late while I was a very disciplined boy and doing things exactly as required. I did not say anything, but continued to come late for another two days, because it was a delicate matter for me. On the third day Swamiji was angry with me and asked me, "Why are you undisciplined so suddenly, while you were a disciplined man previously? Discipline is God," he added. Then I had no alternative but to tell the truth to Swamiji, that the cook had complained against me and the Secretary had asked me to come a little late. Swamiji did not say anything, but the next day when I came late Swamiji waited for my coming, and when the cook asked, "Why is Swamiji not taking supper?" his reply was, "Let the boy come, then only I'll eat". Shocked to hear this, the cook did not know what his duty was, and he went and told the Secretary that his advice had misfired. There is nothing more to say about this incident except that Sri Swamiji was bent upon doing what he considered as the best and proper.

At another occasion, I sat on the bench in the Annakshetra kitchen when Swamiji came suddenly after the Satsanga. He asked me why I was sitting there. When I said, "I came for a little milk," Swamiji said, "Have you taken the milk?" I replied that I had not taken the milk as it was exhausted and there was nothing more left at that time. He went away to his Kutir and I went to my room where I found in a few minutes someone coming and offering me a glass filled with hot milk, saying that it was Prasad from Swamiji. When I tasted it I found that it had the taste of ginger, and Swamiji alone was the person who added ginger to the milk. I was deeply touched at the goodness of my Guru, who parted with his own milk and evidently he did not take his usual part of it. These incidents are very interesting, and there are many more of this kind, if I can remember well.

One morning I came to Satsanga without a covering of blanket over me. This was in the month of January or February when it was indeed very cold. Swamiji immediately reprimanded me and said, "Why are you shivering in cold, why don't you put on a blanket? Attachment to Vairagya also is bad. This is no good." The next day I put on blanket and came to Satsanga, and every day I used to come covering myself with blanket, even in the month of March. Then Swamiji remarked, "Look at this man, he is attached to the blanket even now. Hey, attachment to blanket is as bad as attachment to Vairagya!" I was very much ashamed. The next day I threw off the blanket. These are some of the ways in which Swamiji used to teach and impart lessons to his disciples.

Every Saturday evening Swamiji used to tell me, "Tomorrow is Sunday, I do not want to see you here, you go and take rest." Thus saying, he would ask his assistant to pay me Rs. 20/-, knowing well that I would not myself take the money from the office. Every Saturday evening this practice continued, and he would tell me on the evening of Saturday, regularly, "The next morning I do not want to see you here." He uttered these words even when he was ill and could not speak with a paralytic stroke that he had. Such was the love for me, and his persistent remembrance of regard for his disciples.

The Government has exempted The Divine Life Society from the operation of Income Tax under Section 80(G) and also 10(23cv) in which I had the expert assistance of Swami Gurukripanandaji and Swami Maheshanandaji, the Head Accountant. The Divine Life Society also had exemption from the Bonus Act, Sales Tax, payment of License Fee under the Factories Act, and also certain other Sections of the Factories Act concerning timing of work in the Press. There were many other benefits that the Government has sanctioned to The Divine Life Society, all of which are difficult to

describe here because it involved very many difficulties in obtaining them.

For years, until I was laid down with physical incapacity of various types, I held Meditation Sessions every day for groups of devotees and the general public. My suggestions, solutions to problems of people who came personally to me, have made me a famous consultant in matters spiritual, social, educational, and practically every department of human life. My books *The Problems of Spiritual Life* and *Your Questions Answered* are specimens of the way I treat queries of different types. I have tried to be a humanitarian in my administrative capacity, apart from being a philosopher-guide and a religious teacher. The lectures that I gave are indeed galore, which people might not have seen at all, since they are not published yet. I consider speaking on these subjects as an educational process for me, and I feel happy and elated that I spoke to people who felt deeply benefited. I am leaving my lectures and books as my heritage to the world, for people who can see, if they have time to see, and hear, if they have time to hear.

It was my old habit right from childhood that I would never drink water without worshipping Gods, and every God I would worship, and my father used to vie with me, "See, see, he's closing the eyes." He didn't want me to close the eyes. My family had been extraordinarily religious, most orthodox, and accustomed to worship of the Gods, a tradition that I imbibed from him, grandfather, and the like. I had my own mini cane box in which I used to keep my items for worship, and no Brahmin would go anywhere without taking it with him, because it was a great treasure for anyone. Even when I was in Hospet, I used to do this Puja. I would take time to do it. I used to get up at about 3:00 in the morning and take bath and sit for worship till nearly 7:30 or 8:00 am, with assiduous concentration and accuracy of pronunciation, after which only I used to take my mini breakfast. Moksha is my aim, God-realisation is the goal of life; - this is what Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj insisted and never forgot to write in any of his books. His books would start with this admonition and end with it also.

The person who directed the way to go to Hospet was a person who belonged to Hospet itself; and I spoke to him personally, as he was an employee of the District Munsiff's Court in Puttur. He never revealed until the end that he was a trainee of the Government Training School in Hospet. The reason why he did not disclose this fact, that I came to know later, is that anyone who is trained and who holds a certificate of the Government Training School should perform a teacher's task for one or two years, because the Government has given him free training at its expense. But the gentleman did not want to pass through this period of teaching, which meant nothing for him, and so he found a job in the District Munsiff's Court in Puttur. This is legally an incorrect thing that he did, though practically he got a job. The fact that he had not gone through the regular course as stipulated came to my knowledge in Hospet, when the authorities of the Government Training School in Hospet were searching for the address of this gentleman. For a few days I did not reveal the fact that I knew where he was, but when they were searching for the address, as a legal obligation I mentioned to the Headmaster that I knew this person whom they were searching for. The Headmaster and the staff in the Training School were surprised that I knew the whole truth and did not reveal it. The Headmaster shockingly appreciated my truth-saying by adding, "Oh, you kept the truth secret though we were in search of this man." Anyway, the story ends here and I do not know what followed.

The Headmaster of the Government Training School was a kind of tyrant, his name was H. Krishnacharya, hailing from Tumkur in Mysore State. All the staff in the school hated him for his outspoken way and tyrannical manner in which he handled the staff. The teachers in the school were mumbling among themselves, "Horrible. We should either be the Head of the institution or run away from this place," though jokingly. I wrote to my uncle, incidentally, saying that this Headmaster is a tyrant and I cannot get on with him. The uncle wrote back, "If that is the case you can handle this man with a complaint to the higher authority." But I did not do such an act, since had I done it I would have been on the verge of losing my job. I was a hardworking person in the Training School; everybody liked me. A Deputy Engineer of the PWD, who liked me very much, came to ask me what was the meaning of the commentary of Shankaracharya on the Bhagavadgita in the Sanskrit book that I was carrying. The whole trouble with me was that I could not give lectures. That art I learned only in the Sivananda Ashram by the blessings of Swami Sivananda. Writing and learning in a tangible way I learned because of the insistence of Swami Sivananda, that we must be masters in everything and not be hesitant to take up any work. This brought me to the level of what I am today when I am writing this memoir. Glory to Swami Sivananda, the great Teacher, Master, Saint, and, I should say, Godman.

The teasing habit of the Headmaster came to light once again when all the staff arranged for a trip to a nearby mountain temple, which I foolishly joined without knowing the technicality of joining a party of these people. On the way, the Headmaster sarcastically remarked, "The clerical staff will give an explanation as to why it has trespassed the rule of not crossing the border of the Government Training School." Naturally I felt ashamed, because I did not know what that rule was. Many other things that I was expected to learn came to my light later on, stage by stage. For instance, there was a library of very good books that I was supposed to handle, though I was not told that it was my duty. One day a companion teacher told me that there were some printed forms that were supposed to be under my custody, and they should not be lost under any circumstances. I was stupid enough not to understand this thing, because I was not living in that room where those papers were kept. In certain matters I looked like a simpleton. It so happened a few days afterwards that the forms were seen to be lost, and nobody knew where they went. When my colleagues said, "You have to pay for it," I was shocked. From where would I pay? Then one gentleman told me the Government Secondary Training School in Bellary had a man who could give some copies on payment, and I had to shell out the cost, for no fault of mine; otherwise it would have been a guilt on my part, that would have been taken notice of by the Government authorities. I was also asked to study the fundamental rules of the Government (then British, and the subsidiary rules framed by the Madras Government). The third thing I learned was that I should have a service book, as every Government servant must have, about which I knew nothing. Some good gentleman told me where I could get the service book form in which every month the Head should write a good report about me. I thought that perhaps this procedure was followed in every Government office. I knew nothing of all these celebrated secrets, that were all to the detriment of a man like me, that added to my sorrow, all which precipitated my decision to leave the place forthwith and about which I wrote in my letter to my uncle. This is why he made a posthaste visit to Hospet, lest I may not run away somewhere.

In a piquant situation I decided to go away from the Ashram and stay in Gujarat for a long time. Dr. Krishna Rao, who is now in the Ashram, arranged for my taxi and took me straight to the residence of a friend of his that is just in front of the Balaknath Temple in Delhi. There I had a few days' rest, when also I had a little time to read the manuscript of my *The Philosophy of the Bhagavadgita*, to pursue which every day Devinder Kumar, my old friend, used to see me in that house and hurry me to complete the manuscript. He took the entire responsibility of printing, and sent the printed copies to my Gujarat address. My stay in Gujarat is a story by itself. Dr. Gandhara Bhatt of Dhrangadhra, Dr. Adhwaryoo of Virnagar, Sri Pran Lal Mehta of Rajkot were some of the highlights who took care of me while I was in Gujarat. At that time it was that I ventured to visit the holy Somnath Temple on the western ocean together with Dr. Adhwaryoo, and on the way I saw Bhavalka Tirth, where Sri Krishna is supposed to have left his body after a hunter of Bhavalka shot his toe by mistaking it for the beak of a bird. This story is beautifully narrated in the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana. I also visited nearby the place where Arjuna is supposed to have performed the last rites of Krishna's remains. I also saw a cave nearby into which Balarama seems to have entered in the form of a large snake, because Balarama is supposed to be an incarnation of Ananta, the Divine Snake, and Krishna being Narayana Himself. The present temple of Somnath is a stupendous structure in stone, all of which is the result of the Defense Minister, Sardar Patel, insisting against Jawaharlal Nehru that the funds for the building should be provided by the State, since he considered the temple as a monument of India's great culture, and not merely a religious place of worship. To this proposal Nehru had to give his consent, though against his personal desire. Nearby was a small temple that they say is the remnant of the Siva Linga, left after the ravage caused by the invasion of Mahamud of Ghazni in ancient times. The temple structure is expanding almost every year by increasing additional accommodation for pilgrims to witness the *Arati*. This temple is not like a temple that you see everywhere. People cannot go in, prostrate themselves before the Deity and do anything there. There is only one person, known as the Pujari, who alone is responsible for the timely worship. At twelve o'clock noon every day the bell rings and the Pujari raises the holy light, performs the worship, where the Puja ends. Very simple, but grand. There is an arrow projecting from the temple towards the sea, indicating the place where Ghazni Mahamud in his invasion broke the Lingum and threw it into the ocean.

I stayed for a week or so in the Rest House of the institution, known as Sharadagram, a High School run under Gandhian principles, where I was received well due to the arrangements made by Dr. Adhwaryoo lovingly. Dr. Adhwaryoo allotted his car, his driver and his cook entirely at my disposal, so that I may go wherever I liked and eat the food that I chose. Such was the goodness of Dr. Adhwaryoo. After a while Dr. Adhwaryoo came there and took me to a place called Diu, where his wife was born. Evidently, it was in possession of the Portuguese earlier. The distance of travelling was so much that it tired me and I felt like dying when I came back. However, this is part of the story. On the way I saw, on the instruction of Dr. Adhwaryoo, a large tree with the girth worshipped by people called Prachi-Vriksha. People told me that it was under this tree that Sri Krishna sat and gave his last message to Uddhava, as is recorded in the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana.

Shiv Narayan Kapur, a Trustee of The Divine Life Society, invited me to Bombay for a

three-day lecture in the Cowasji Jehangir Hall, which went on very well and people applauded the delivery and also the subject which consisted of metaphysical philosophy, psychology and practice of Yoga. Also Dr. Adhwaryoo took me from Virnagar to Bhavnagar, where I stayed for a night and spoke to the people gathered. Bhavnagar was the capital of one of the Maratha chiefs known as Gaekwad, the others being Holkar of Indore, Bhonsle of Nagpur, Scindia of Gwalior, and Peshwa of Pune. These Maratha chiefs, together with their leader Peshwa, embarked on an onslaught of conquest on Ahmed Shah Abdali, who overthrew the Marathas, and the Marathas fell in the battle of Panipat. On the way to Bhavnagar we were shown a temple where Nana Phadnavis stayed during his last days, when the British were pursuing him as a lieutenant of the Maharani of Jhansi, the other assistant to Maharani being Tantia Topi, who was caught by the British and killed. I am not writing the history of the British occupation of India, what I have just mentioned is only incidental and by the way.

While I was in Gujarat, Brigadier L.N. Sabharwal who was posted as a Brigadier there came to me. He took me to his house in Bhuj, a long distance indeed to travel in a car of his friend. I stayed for a few days with Brigadier, who took care of me lovingly and also gave me a ride to the famous reservoir mentioned in the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana called Narayana Sarovar, where the ancient ones took bath and prayed. I was then taken to an old man who spoke the future of a person by name. The old man asked Brigadier his name, and on mentioning the same, the old man indicated the possible time when he was promoted, and such other details of his life. As regards to myself, the old man said I am one who has eaten all the butter and thrown away all the buttermilk and the *chas*. Then we returned to his house in Bhuj, after which I went by plane to Bombay and stayed in the house of Mr. Sanghvi, a great friend and associate of Dr. Adhwaryoo, where was also Swami Chidananda, who had incidentally come there to tell me how things were happening in the Ashram and that all is well finally by the Grace of God.

I took the train back that arrived in Mathura. We reached Mathura station in the evening of the 9th of December, 1969, where Sri Chamanlal Sharma and family, Sri Devadhar Sastri from Birla Mandir, Smt. Vimala Shankar from Jaipur and Sri Baetibabaji of Vrindavan were there to receive us. From the station we went straight to Sri Krishna Janmasthan and attended the *Arati* in the temple. Sri Devadhar Sastriji took us around the place and explained the way in which the actual location of the birth of Sri Krishna was excavated beneath a *Masjid* that was built during the Mohammedan rule. The authorities concerned with the new work of excavation and renovation of this sacred place have already cleared the whole area, paved the ground with marble slabs, built a temple of Sri Krishna and kept in isolation the real spot of the 'birth', that is supposed to be a part of the prison near the palace of Kamsa, where the divine advent took place. A joint effort of the Birla and Dalmia families is now contemplating to construct a Satsanga Bhavan in which they will either engrave in marble the eighteen thousand verses of the Srimad Bhagavata or set up a painting and picture gallery depicting the life of the Lord.

We then moved to Vrindavan, where our stay was very beautifully arranged by Sri Chamanlalji and family. Immediately, we went to have the sacred *Darshan* of Sri Banke-Behariji, which is the name of the principal deity in Vrindavan. The idol of this temple is said to have been discovered, under a divine ordainment, by Saint Haridas, at a place called Nidhivan, in Vrindavan. This occasion of the discovery of the idol and the

founding of the temple is celebrated annually in a grand scale on the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Margasirsha (November-December). We also paid our respects at the temple of Sri Radhavallabh, founded under the sponsorship of Saint Hitaharivamsh. The Radhavallabh cult of devotion in Vrindavan is quite different from that of Sri Vallabhacharya, who taught the Pushti-Marga type of devotion, and the two should not be confused with each other, though both these types of devotees of the two *Sampradayas* are to be found in Vraja-Bhumi, which is a collective name designating the entire area of about 168 miles of circumference within which Lord Sri Krishna played his sports in his early days. Instead of regarding, as it is usual, God as the embodiment of love (Prema-swarupa Bhagavan), the followers of Radhavallabh Sampradaya consider love as the embodiment of God (Bhagavat-swarupa Prema), and try to live a life of such devotion to God, in their practical lives.

On the 10th, we visited certain other temples in Vrindavan, including that of the famous Sri Ranganatha-Swami, built in the South Indian fashion of the Srirangam shrine. We also were taken to Nidhivan, mentioned above, and to Seva Kunj that is of particular importance. It is believed that in the grove of Seva Kunj, Lord Sri Krishna plays his eternal Rasa-Lila with his divine consorts even this day, during the night, and any entry into this area during the night by people is totally barred. It is said that those who hazard access into this place during the night do not return, either due to their absorption into God or due to an aberration of mind in which they get involved. We also went to the beautiful cave-like small room in Vrindavan, where Saint Mira lived a life of devotion to the Lord during her days. In all these visits of ours to the various temples, we were ably assisted by Sri Sevak Saran Sharma of Delhi, who had an expert knowledge of life in Vrindavan.

On an invitation from the Principal of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, here, I went to address the students of the Institute in the forenoon of the 10th. I took up for discussion a pertinent theme of the relation of religion to practical life. It is seen that State Governments, perhaps almost everywhere in the world, try to make administration secular and would have nothing to do with religion. This should open the eyes of the protagonists of religion, who should be able to detect the reason behind this bifurcation of religion from practical life. It is quite evident that religion is not regarded as a part of life, but for which there should be no reason why religion should be ostracised from social and political circles. On a scrutiny of the matter it would become evident that there is on one hand a misunderstanding of the meaning of religion by the administration of governments and on the other hand a misrepresentation of religion by those who profess to teach it and try to live it. There has always been a fear haunting the haters of religion that it is concerned with life-after-death, which may be or may not be, and has little to do with the problems of life in this world. God, if at all He is, is not in this world, and so religion that is supposed to be a way to Him, cannot have relevance to life on earth. If this is a fact, religion can have nothing to do with social and political administration, which is a matter of this world and not the other world. There is also at the same time an obstinate clinging by the followers of religion to its forms, such as ritual, ceremony tradition and custom, with a secret suspicion that God is above and not in the world. As men who follow this religion are also those who set examples before the framers of the constitution, the members of the parliament, and the leaders of society, there should be no wonder in the banishment of religion from the circles of the latter.

But if life has nothing to do with religion, it should only follow that religion can be dispensed with in life, especially as no one has seen the after-life.

This is the malady that has been created by our religionists who seem to have done more harm than good by their dogmas and creeds. We have many religions, but not a religious consciousness. It should not be that we practise religion just as we go to the clubs and cinemas, as a kind of diversion or change after the day's labour. The *Pandits* of religion, unfortunately, seem to have created this impression in the minds of people, whatever they may say about the nature of an all-pervading God, who gets confined only to scriptures and religious gatherings. This kind of religion cannot survive, for it is not truth. What is not true cannot attract, for we cannot love even God if He has no relation to our personal life. God and religion should mean something to *us*, and not remain as objects of hearsay and tools that we can handle or cast away according to our needs. We lack proper teachers of the real religion which is not merely one of the functions of life but is only another name for life perfectly lived. Religion is thus a great science, surpassing the other sciences known to man, which while these latter tell man how to acquire things and create conditions outside, the science of religion tells him how to live, for nothing can be dearer than life, of which the objectives of the other sciences are only accessories. Religion which is the life of truth and justice is also life in God, for God is truth and justice, and vice versa. Religion in this sense connects man's existence with his cosmic relations and awakens him to the facts of his being a centre of universal importance, in which realisation humanity becomes a brotherhood and life a haven of peace and joy. No one can live without such religion and it should be the duty of every citizen of Bharatavarsha to strive to achieve this ideal and to prepare adepts and heroes who will spread this knowledge of the true life. Life cannot be without religion, for religion is the soul of life.

On the 11th, in the morning, we left for Barsana, which, among the shrines in Vraja, is, in importance, next only to Vrindavan. Barsana is reputed as the ancient dwelling place of Radha, the divine companion of Krishna, whose dalliances have been elaborately sung by many a poet right from the time of the Brahmavaivarta Purana down through the great Chaitanya Mahabrabhu to the ecstatic Vaishnava devotees of our own times. The temple of Radha is on a hill that is worshipped as a veritable manifestation of Brahma in celestial association with other two sacred hills nearby, the one in Govardhan, being the manifestation of Vishnu and the other in Nandagaon as the manifestation of Siva. Revered Sri Swami Harisharananandaji Maharaj, our elder Gurubhai, who was once resident of the Ashram at the Headquarters, is now staying in Barsana and performing Tapas and Sadhana. On a kind invitation from him we went to his Kutir in a Dharmashala, where we were put up for the day. Sri Chamanlal Sharma and family had accompanied us and arranged for this trip to Barsana. All our visits to the different shrines in Vraja were very lovingly arranged by these good friends, who had taken immense pains not only in taking us around but also explaining the importance of the holy places. Mention also has to be made of the silent but important contribution made by the son of Sri Hari Govindji, the famous Rasalila exponent and organiser of Brindavan, who saw that throughout our stay in Vraja we were provided the facilities of being taken to the widely distributed shrines in the area. In Barsana, after Darshan of Radha at the holy temple, we moved to the holy Ghavar Kunj (meaning, the deep grove) that is another renowned spot of the ancient Rasalila of Bhagavan Sri

Krishna with Radha and the Gopis of Brindavan. The plantations in Seva Kunj and Ghavar Kunj have some similarity and seem to hint at both these places having been the locations of the same divine sport of the Lord. There is deep silence and an air of solemnity in these parts of Vraja Bhumi. There are also two mountains whose rocks are respectively black and white and are known to be embodiments of Krishna and Radha in two hues. The narrow, single-person-passage between the two hills is said to be the path along which Gopis in olden days used to carry milk, curd and butter in pots and Krishna as a child used to encounter them on the way, demand the contents and make this a kind of frequent routine. As a memory of this Lila of the Lord, villagers even today pour down a little milk or milk-product on the spot when carrying the same along the passage. It is believed that if this custom is not observed there will be no good sale of the items.

We had a short Satsanga in the Kutir of Sri Swami Harisarananandaji Maharaj and then we left for Nandagaon. This latter shrine we reached by sunset and we paid our obeisance at the temple of Nanda, Yasoda, Balarama and Krishna. Then we reached back Vrindavan in the night of the same day.

In the morning of the 12th, we went to have Darshan of Gokul. This is a place, lying across the river Yamuna, to which Vasudeva, the father of Krishna, took the child from the prison-house, on divine command. Here we have also a temple dedicated to Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, with his consort Revati. The main temple is dedicated to the child Krishna and there are also a few other smaller temples dedicated to the childhood sports of Krishna. The early life of Krishna is spread over Mathura, Gokul, Vrindavan and their suburbs.

In the afternoon, we left for Govardhan. On the way we had Darshan also of Radha Kund and Shyam Kund, two tanks, dedicated to Radha and Krishna. Govardhan is the famous hill whose form Krishna is said to have assumed to receive the offerings made by the residents of Vraja, in opposition to Indra, a story which is familiar to us after the record of this incident in the Srimad-Bhagavata. People who visit Govardhan go near the hill and arrange small stones in the pattern of a house and the like with a *Sankalpa* (fond wish) that they want to fulfil in their lives. It is believed that this ensures the fulfilment of the wish and also promises in the holy spot an abode for the soul of the devotees after shedding their mortal coil. We went to Mukharavind, which is one of the mouths of the Lord in the form of the hill, through which he received the offerings. After making our prostrations here, we went to the other mouth below the temple of Srinath on the hill. We made our obeisance here again, and, having touched the sacred shrine, we returned to Vrindavan. On the way back, we visited Manasi Ganga, a sacred tank which contains the holy waters that are said to have been the visible manifestation of Ganga (Ganges) that issued forth in Vraja by the very thought of Krishna, for the benefit of his colleagues.

In the evening of the same day, I was invited to speak at the Rotary Club at Mathura. In this gathering of Rotarians I had an occasion to express some views, almost unexpected by the audience. What caught my eyes, on my stepping into the hall, was a phrase written on the board, as the motto of the Club: *'Service above self'*. I endeavoured to state before the audience that the motto of the Rotarians is really magnificent, because it has in it a hidden truth, rarely manifest in the public life of people. But the intention is

to manifest it. Work and self are two significant terms connoting two important aspects of the face of life, viz., *becoming* and *being*. While work is in some way inseparable from one's self, for it is the self that seems to express itself in work, it becomes difficult to understand how work can be above self. The effect is not above the cause. But, though this may be the surface difficulty posed by the ideal, it gets resolved on a closer examination of the nature of work and self.

There are two types of work, and for purpose of analysis they may be called the lower and the higher. The lower work is that which emanates from the personal self, as an external effect, of which oneself is the cause. Here the self is above work, in a causative sense. It is this type of work that produces secondary effects that turn back upon this causal self and bind it to nemesis. In this given circumstance, the self, though it appears to be the cause of action, stands on an equal footing with the reality of action, both being individualistic, spatio-temporal and mutually determinant of each other. The network of such personal selves with the retributive actions is the world of bondage.

But there is a higher kind of work that is not binding but liberating, and it is this work that goes by the name of service, and is above self. Normally, no action that is of the nature of an effect can transcend the agent who is its cause. But there is a special connotation in the service that stands transcendent to the individual self and this becomes possible when the motive behind action surpasses the desireful nature of the individual. Motive or intention behind an act decides whether it is going to fetter the agent or leave him free. The larger the motive behind an act, the greater is the freedom of the agent concerned and the higher also is the value of the act. The largeness of the motive consists in the extent to which it exceeds the limitations of personal longing, covetousness, greed or desire. There are degrees of this self-transcendence, and the highest self which is supremely transcendent above all particular notions of it is the ultimate reference and determining factor of an action or work when it becomes service and a spontaneous expression of one's freedom and goodness. The greater is one's approximation to the universality of the self, the more intense is one's freedom and intrinsic goodness of character and conduct. The dictum, 'Service above self,' signifies, therefore, not only an ethical principle but points to an unavoidable reference to the spiritual reality in our day-to-day life.

The 13th of December happened to be the day of the anniversary celebration of the temple of Banke-Behariji in Vrindavan, it being the *Panchami* on which the idol was discovered by the Saint Haridas. A magnificent music festival is held on this day in Nidhivan, where the image was found by the saint and, in this, many reputed songsters and poet-saints participate. From here a grand procession moves with *Sankirtan* and band music to the main temple. We witnessed the procession towards its end and offered our prostrations at the holy shrine. In the evening of the same day we had Darshan of Sri Dwarakadhish, known also as Mathuradhish, in Mathura, after a visit to Vishramghat, where Sri Krishna is said to have taken rest after the destruction of Kamsa. We moved again to Sri Krishna-Janmasthana and offered our concluding prayers at the spot which is identified with the actual birth-place of Krishna. We attended the *Arati* and then took leave for our residence at Vrindavan.

During our stay in Vrindavan, we also witnessed a part of the Rasalila, enacted by devotees. Rasalila, as it means today, is the enactment of the divine sports of Sri Krishna

in Vraja-Bhumi, in its several forms and phases, intended to rouse a devotional spirit and love of God in the hearts of people. There are at least two big Rasa-Mandalas or grounds for this play in Vrindavan. Here the Rasa is played daily throughout the year. The language used in these plays is the old 'Vraja' dialect, both in the song and in prose. The Rasalila is, however, not restricted merely to the rehearsal of the Rasa dance of Krishna with the Gopis, but is a general term indicating any sport of Sri Krishna in Vraja-Bhumi. The picturesque and melodious presentation of characters in action and song is indeed beautiful and touching and one cannot go without an elevated feeling after witnessing a well-performed Rasalila.

From Dhrangadhra, where I was living with Dr. Gangadhar Bhatt, who built in three days a big house for me under the title 'Krishna' about 7 miles away from his house, after staying there for sometime I went to Kurukshetra in Dr. Gangadhar Bhatt's car. I told him about a tradition that no one goes to Kurukshetra without encountering some tragedy. All things went well, when suddenly the car stuck to the ground in a mire and could not be lifted. I told my host doctor that the Mahabharata had already taken place as anticipated. He quickly ran out and brought a truck, tying the car with a rope to the truck, and asked the truck man to pull the car up. This was done and all went well. There were some friends known to me who were waiting for us for lunch. We ate quickly some rice and *dhal*. There was no time to take rest. I wanted to see any memento of a monument of Lord Sri Krishna in Kurukshetra, but I saw none. I complained vehemently at the callous attitude of people to this great Superman of India, that they could not think of erecting a monument. In disgust, I wanted to see the place where Bhishma fell. I was taken to a pond near which Bhishma ought to have lied down and felt thirsty, asking for water. Duryodhana hurriedly went round and brought a pot of water, but Bhishma said, "I want hero's water" at which Arjuna struck an arrow on the ground with such force that water gushed forth and fell directly on the mouth of Bishma. My trip to Kurukshetra did not satisfy me because there was no Krishna there, though he ought to have been the principal figure of devotion and respect.

From Delhi, Swami Chidananda sent a note that I should not miss the function in Delhi arranged by the Swami Sivananda Cultural Association, under the guidance of Sri H.D. Sharmaji. This function was for collecting funds in order to build the Cultural Association. The method adopted was to invite cinema stars like Manna De and some other well-known cinema stars, who came one by one from the screen and sang some *bhajans* and went away. Though they sang only a few sentences, the audience was so mad after these people that they were hounded again by the request, "Once more, once more!". Thus went the function. They had arranged also food for us in Ashoka Hotel, which was a cheap, insipid stuff. I wished to go away from there, but I could not due to social etiquette. I starved and then went away. One could imagine from this incident that people respect and love only cinema stars, and no one else.

I had a little time with President Zail Singh in the FICCI Auditorium, as they had arranged a function in honour of the President's visit. Though he knew some English, he always preferred people speaking in Hindi language. I too had to speak in Hindi, but the thing that I said was beyond ordinary understanding. After my speech, the President said, "You are a great man to have said these things. Your speeches should go into the All India Radio."

From Panipat we returned to Delhi and from there back to the Ashram.

When I was born on the 25th of April, 1922, on the ascending of the star Revati, I was told that I was a very weak-bodied child, yellow in colour, with a strange bilious effect. People around thought that this child would not survive. At that time my grandfather, father's father, was alive, who seemed to have cast a chart of horoscope of the birth of this child. He said, it seems, "If the horoscope that I have cast is correct, then this child will not die." My mother used to apply the paste of a leaf on my body to diminish the effect of bile, and this went on for a long time. The bile disappeared. Then I developed asthma as a legacy from my mother, which freed my mother from this agony immediately after my birth. It was something like the transfer of property. Strange indeed. My mother had another local recipe for asthma, and that was the boiled juice of the bark of the tree that produced drumstick. It was a very terrible potion to drink, but it had its effect for the time being. When the asthmatic attack became very acute at an early age, my father used to carry me on his shoulders to Dr. M.S. Satyasundar Rao, who was our family physician, and request the doctor to give me an injection against asthma. Then the father used to carry me back home. This doctor was a general physician for us in the family for every kind of illness. Surprisingly, this doctor visited the Sivananda Ashram many years back, to see me, and told me, "I did not know whether you would accept me at all, yourself being a big man and myself being a poor doctor."

Asthma is continuing even now in my case, with many doctors treating me in many ways, even up to cortisone that damaged my health. Nowadays it is diminishing and I seem to be well-off with the care-taking genius of one doctor, N.B. Srivastava of the Government Hospital in Rishikesh. I should however be careful not to give way to any lapse in my regimen, lest it should leap up again. I am a chronic asthmatic patient, but God has been taking care of me with great love, and all is well.

When I became all right and had my thread ceremony performed in a religious manner with three Brahmin priests performing three *havans*, I began to do my religious practices with great vigour. My mother used to get up at 3:00 in the morning and prepare hot water. I would take bath and then sit for Japa of Gayatri Mantra and any other mantra that I liked, and felt benefited. This Japa gave me a lot of strength inside. The gods of the Mantras began operating and I appeared to be the potential embodiment of the operating power of the gods.

I was a cynosure of all eyes wherever I went, for reasons I cannot understand. One of the visitors to the Ashram told me, "When I see you, I get strength." Another told me, "When I see you, I feel happy." Maybe so, but now I have discontinued seeing people, because I thought later that people who sit around me for the purpose of meditation go on looking at me but do not do any meditation. This obsession on the part of people has cost me enough, and instead of my spiritual energy going to people around, it appeared that their illness, their obsessed nature, interfered with me and I decided not to have a common meditation. I have closed it forthright. Let me be with God alone and not with people. The same is the case with Darshan, which also I have closed. Now I am alone and feel happy with God.

The End