

# SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA



Ramakrishna Math  
Belur Math, Howrah

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Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj (1899—1988)

# Swami Gambhirananda

It was the month of March in 1923. One day a gentle young man suddenly appeared in Varanasi. He had gone there to see his teacher, who was now a Sannyasin and lived at the Ramakrishna Mission Centre there. On arriving there he found that his teacher had gone somewhere else. The young man wanted to join the Ramakrishna Order. He met the Secretary of the centre and expressed his keen desire before him. The Secretary, however, declined because at that time revolutionary movement was going on everywhere and the British Government was keeping an eye on the Ramakrishna Mission. For this reason, as a rule, no unknown person was being admitted into the Order. The Secretary said, "We do not admit any unknown young man. You are highly educated. This Sevashrama may not suit you. You had better go to Belur Math." The young man gave a prompt reply, "Sir, you are not admitting me because I am unknown to you ; but the same problem will arise when I go to Belur Math. Will you kindly give me a letter of introduction?" The Secretary expressed his helplessness, "I do not know you. How can I give you a letter of introduction?" The young man made an intelligent request : "Will you kindly write in your letter that I had come to Varanasi to see Swami Jagadanandaji ? I hope you can write this much for me." The Secretary agreed to this. This young man with a remarkable presence of mind, who was refused admission into the Ramakrishna Order at Varanasi, subsequently rose to be the eleventh President of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

The pre-monastic name of Swami Gambhiranandaji was Jatindra Nath Datta. He was born on the 11th February, 1899 (29th Magh, 1305, Bengali Era) in the village Sadhuhati of Sylhet district (now in Bangladesh). His father's name was Dinanath and his mother's name was Tarasundari Devi. Dinanath was a local Zemindar. His family belonged to the Shakta

sect. Jatindra's mother was a very pious lady. Everyday she remained absorbed in Japa for a long time. Sometimes she herself made a clay image of Shiva and after worshipping it immersed it in the pond.

Jatindra was the last child of his parents. He had two elder brothers and one elder sister, namely, Jitendra, Surendra and Sushama. They are no more now. Jatindra belonged to a large joint family. He lost his father at a young age. He was brought up by his maternal uncles who were well-to-do. His eldest maternal uncle, Abhay Kumar Dam, was his guardian, as Jatindra had no paternal uncles. At the house of his maternal uncles, Sri Madanmohanji, the tutelary deity was worshipped daily; besides, Durga Puja and Kali Puja were celebrated with great pomp. The childhood of Jatindra passed in such an environment. From the very beginning he was very gentle, temperate and grave.

Jatindra's early education started at Sadhuhati. Later he was admitted into the Maulavi Bazar High School. He was a very intelligent student. For some time he studied at the Government High School in Shillong and then he joined the Maulavi Bazar High School once again. From there he passed the Entrance Examination creditably in the first division in 1917 and won a scholarship. For higher education he went to Calcutta and was admitted into the Scottish Church College. There he lived in the Ogiloi hostel just beside the College. The writer-editor Sajani Kanta Das and the writer Gopal Halder were his class-mates. During his student life Jatindra excelled in games like football, volleyball, rowing etc. In his later life also he used to listen to the running commentaries of matches on the radio and would take special interest in knowing the results of the match. While he was at the hostel, his eldest brother used to send him some money. He supplemented this money with his scholarship and managed to meet his educational expenses. In 1922 he passed B. A. with Hons. in Economics. His subjects in the B. A. course were English, Bengali, Mathematics and Economics.

After graduation, Jatindra worked for some time as an accounts officer in the military department at Rangoon in Burma. The life-style of the soldiers there made him think seriously about life.

He had studied some Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature at home. While staying with his maternal uncles, he had come into contact with the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission at Sylhet. He got his first inspiration from the books of Swami Vivekananda, which aroused in his heart a feeling of renunciation. In Rangoon, while sitting on the roof of his house in perfect solitude, he would keep on gazing at the sky studded with stars. While doing so he would feel a beckoning from an unknown world. And then his eyes would fall on the military barracks, where he noticed the immoral, shallow and inhuman life of the soldiers. Along with that he would observe their strict discipline, their obedience to the rules and their sense of responsibility. There would arise a conflict in his mind between the lure for military life and the call from Swami Vivekananda. Being an idealist, he never made a compromise with what was contrary to idealism. Ultimately, the ideals of Swamiji prevailed and he decided to renounce the world and to follow a life of austerity, discipline and obedience to the rules, as he was to be, in future, a distinguished soldier, a commander, in the army of Swamiji's followers.

Intending to join the Ramakrishna Order, Jatindra went to Belur Math from Varanasi. When he was a college student in Calcutta, he never thought of seeing the Holy Mother or Swami Saradananda at the Udbodhan Office or coming into contact with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. When Jatindra reached Belur Math, Swami Shivananda (popularly known as Mahapurush Maharaj), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was the President of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. What had happened to him at Varanasi was repeated here. Nobody at Belur Math knew Jatindra. Swamiji's disciple, Swami Shuddhananda, then Joint Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, gave a disappointing reply. Jatindra was deeply depressed. The ray of hope in his heart became faint. But he had already been chosen by the Lord. Hence all obstacles were removed. Just at that time Deoghar Vidyapith's Secretary, Swami Sadbhavananda and Chief Supervisor Swami Nirvedananda were present there. They proposed that Jatindra should go to Deoghar. He agreed to the same. Swami Nirvedananda kept him in a mess in Calcutta. Initially he thought that probably the young man wanted

a job. But Jatindra's clear intention was to be a Sannyasin. Then it was decided that he would join Deoghar Vidyapith. Before leaving for Deoghar, Jatindra went to Belur Math to see Mahapurush Maharaj and to seek his blessings. Mahapurush Maharaj said to him, "Stay at the Math. Let your character be built up first, and then you will do useful work." Jatindra understood the real significance of his words. The first thing needed in a monk's life is the building up of his character.

It was in May 1923 that he joined Deoghar Vidyapith as a Brahmacharin. He was 24 years old at that time. Swami Nirvedananda said to him, "In course of time you will have to do a lot of work for the Ramakrishna Order." These words were proved true in later years. Jatindra lived at Deoghar Vidyapith for about eleven years (from 1923 to 1929 and then from 1931 to 1935). He served there first as a monastic worker, then as the Headmaster and finally as the Secretary.

While he was at Deoghar he received spiritual initiation. Brahmacharya, and Sannyasa from Mahapurush Maharaj. From the very beginning he had decided to make Mahapurush Maharaj his Guru. Some people had advised him to get spiritual initiation from some other direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. But he did not agree to this. He had already placed Mahapurush Maharaj as his Guru in his heart. In his later years he gives an account of his first meeting with Mahapurush Maharaj thus : "When I came to Belur Math for the first time I was told that Mahapurush Maharaj was very strict and serious and that he was a man of few words. Hearing all this I had some fear in my mind. When I first met him, I sat quietly after the usual courtesies. One or two persons came and went away exchanging a few words with him. I was all the time looking at him. He also glanced at me now and then. He was extremely handsome, his complexion was very fair, and his eyes were full of love and affection. Therefore, even though I was not fully free from fear, I had decided that this very noble and quiet Sannyasin would be my guide in life."

While at Deoghar Jatindra once took a calculated risk. He had a keen desire to receive spiritual initiation and the vows of Brahmacharya from Mahapurush Maharaj. He had hardly spent seven or eight months at Deoghar when, without informing the Secretary, he wrote directly to Mahapurush

Maharaj expressing his desire. He received a favourable reply. Swami Sadbhavananda, the Secretary, was a little annoyed at this; but, on receiving instructions from the President of the Order he sent Jatindra to Belur Math.

It was the auspicious birthday of the Holy Mother in December 1923. On that sacred day at 9.30 A.M. rites were performed to administer the vows of Brahmacharya on him and a few others. On the seat of the Acharya was Swami Shuddhananda. The new name given to Jatindra was Saumya Chaitanya. That is why, on meeting him, Mahapurush Maharaj, recalling a statement from the Chhandogya Upanishad (6.2.1), called him, 'Sadeva Somya'. For three days he took self-cooked havi-shyanna (boiled rice with ghee) on the banks of Padmapukur (a pond which does not exist now) at the Math. Till now he had not obtained spiritual initiation. On the fourth day Mahapurush Maharaj, of his own accord, said to him and Mati Maharaj (later known as Shivaswarupananda) "Don't take any food today. Today your spiritual initiation will take place." It was the auspicious birthday of Mahapurush Maharaj himself. Now we quote Swami Gambhirananda's own words: 'The spiritual initiation took place at the Old Shrine. Mahapurush Maharaj was sitting in front of Sri Thakur facing the North and I was sitting in front of Mahapurush Maharaj facing the South. After the initiation, he wrote the Bijamantra on the floor with Ganga water and explained it to me. Then he said, "Give me Guru-dakshina." But I did not know any of the rules in this regard. I had not at all brought anything with me. Realising my predicament he said to me, "Go to the shrine-store downstairs and bring a myrobalan or any other fruit." I do not remember exactly what fruit I had brought for him, but he accepted it. He then asked me to go downstairs and prayed to Sri Thakur—"O Lord! bless him." This blessing of Mahapurush Maharaj was felt by him throughout his life.

Saumya Chaitanya could not enjoy the holy company of Mahapurush Maharaj for long. It was because he lived far away from the Belur Math. But he spent his Durga Puja, Christmas and summer holidays at the Belur Math. During his stay there he enjoyed the holy company of Mahapurush Maharaj. Whenever he got an opportunity, Saumya Chaitanya served his Guru whole-heartedly. He had met some of the



other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, viz., Swamis Saradananda, Akhandananda, Subodhananda, Vijnanananda and Abhedananda; but it never occurred to him to put any questions to them. He used to pay obeisance to them and come away. But he was close to Khoka Maharaj (Subodhananda) who was very sociable. Khoka Maharaj mixed with all monks and Brahmacharins sometimes like a child, sometimes like an elder brother and sometimes like an affectionate father. It never struck Saumya Chaitanya that Khoka Maharaj, being a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, deserved special respect. On the verandah beneath the room of Swamiji, Brahmacharins assembled for a friendly chit-chat. Several old Sannyasins joined such meetings. Discussions on various subjects took place there. Saumya Chaitanya learnt a lot from them. He came to know there the past history of Belur Math and the various incidents in the life of Swamiji. Once Khoka Maharaj, who was suffering from tuberculosis, was taken to the Udbodhan. Saumya Chaitanya was present there. Khoka Maharaj was to be carried to the first floor. Saumya Chaitanya lifted him on his arms unassisted and carried him upstairs. Then Khoka Maharaj stroked his head with great affection.

Once Swami Akhandananda asked him to be present at a meeting of the Board of Trustees. This made him nervous. Swami Akhandananda, President of that meeting, asked him to give a lecture at Sonargaon (now in Bangladesh). Saumya Chaitanya hesitated and said, "I have never given a lecture." Akhandanandaji insisted, "You shall have to go there and deliver a lecture." So Saumya Chaitanya went there, accompanied by an aged Sadhu. At Sonargaon he gave a short lecture taking only five to ten minutes. This was his maiden speech.

In January 1926 Mahapurush Maharaj visited Deoghar Vidyapith. On the day of Sripanchami he inaugurated the two rooms of the hostel, the kitchen and the dining-room, newly built by the Vidyapith. The responsibility of the kitchen was given to Saumya Chaitanya. Hence, he could not get much time to be in the company of Mahapurushji. By the side of the road in the Vidyapith campus there was a mound from where the pinnacle of Baba Vaidyanath temple could be seen. Pilgrims paid the obeisance right from there and some of them also stayed for the night there. There the drummers used to beat their

drums expecting some tips. The mound was called 'Darshaniya Tat'. Once when Saumya Chaitanya was cutting and trimming vegetables in the kitchen, he saw that Mahapurush Maharaj had come to the 'Darshaniya Tat'. On seeing him the drummers out of sheer joy began to beat their drums and dance. Highly pleased at this, Mahapurush Maharaj gave them tips and then came to the kitchen. Coming near Saumya Chaitanya he said, "Here I feel the manifestation of divine Shakti. In course of time great deeds will be done here." Saumya Chaitanya could not understand the significance of these words then; he understood it later. Saumya Chaitanya was a witness to a rare experience of Mahapurush Maharaj. He writes about it himself : "While staying at Deoghar I went to Mahapurushji one morning and found him sitting on his bed and panting. A few monks stood by his side. Mahapurushji was suffering from asthma and his trouble was aggravated by the cold at Deoghar. He told us that he had passed the whole night sitting on the bed. Touching his chest with his hand he said, 'When the pain became unbearable, I concentrated my mind on this and the pain subsided.' Immediately Omkaranandaji, who was present there, asked him, 'What is that Maharaj?' Mahapurushji replied, 'This is verily the Atman.'"

Saumya Chaitanya tried to cultivate this feeling throughout his life. In his later life it was found that he hardly told anyone about his troubles or illness. He did not even inform those who attended on him. The question of sending for a doctor did not arise at all. Once in 1977 when he was the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, there was a fracture in his leg but he did not tell anything about it to his attendant for quite some time. He was sent to the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan for treatment. With his leg plastered he came back to the Math. His face did not show any sign of pain. At that time, a meeting of the Board of Trustees was being held in his bedroom.

When a senior monk, Swami Abhayananda, enquired about his injury, he avoided answering it by simply saying, 'O ! That's nothing.' Later in his old age, when he underwent an operation for hernia, in 1983, he showed no sign of pain. In 1985 even when a pace-maker was fixed in his chest after operation, he remained unaffected. Moreover, when an old Sannyasin

enquired about his health, he said, "I know I am going towards the abode of Yama, the god of death." Then after a slight pause he said, "No, not towards the abode of Yama. Ekamevadvitiyam (the one without a second). Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman). Why should I go to the abode of Yama? Those who are to go there, may do so. I am not going there!"

In 1926 Saumya Chaitanya attended the First Convention of the Ramakrishna Order. There he had the good fortune of seeing the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1927 Mahapurush Maharaj came to the Seth Villa at Madhupur after the passing away of Swami Saradananda. Being quite ill, he was taking rest there. Saumya Chaitanya went there by bicycle covering a long distance to see Mahapurush Maharaj. All these experiences helped and sustained him in his spiritual journey.

When Swami Sadbhavananda, Secretary of Deoghar Vidyapith, had an attack of tuberculosis, he was sent to Madras for treatment. Then (in 1926) Saumya Chaitanya took up the responsibility of the Secretary of the Vidyapith in addition to his duty as the Headmaster. At that time the Vidyapith had many problems—paucity of funds, shortage of students and teachers and so on. Saumya Chaitanya was never very good at raising funds. He conducted the activities of the Vidyapith with voluntary donations. In spite of that, it was during his tenure that the school building of the Vidyapith and the hostel 'Brahmananda Dham' were built. As the Headmaster he had to do all sorts of work—ringing the bell to wake up the boys, supervising their ablutions, supervising their participation in prayers and study, and, taking classes. All this work started early in the morning and ended at about ten in the night. Even as the Secretary of the Vidyapith he continued doing these duties. He had to go out for shopping too and bring the purchased goods. He would also go to the post office and bring the mail of the Vidyapith on his bicycle.

Saumya Chaitanya lived like all the other Brahmacharins. In spite of being the Secretary he never took any advantage of his power and position. Like others he washed his dishes. He played football, volleyball and carrom together with others. He never wasted his time. He was very fond of study. Throughout his life he kept up this habit. When his eyesight became very weak, someone or the other used to read out to him regular-

ly from various books. At such times he would remark jokingly, "Even when you go to Ramakrishna Loka (the celestial world of Sri Ramakrishna) you will read out to me!" He had great love and affection for the monks and Brahmacharins at Deoghar, but it did not find outward expression. He lived an austere life and this austerity continued till the last day of his life. When necessary, he listened to the opinion of even the juniormost Brahmacharin. On special occasions, accompanied by monks and Brahmacharins, he used to spend the whole night doing Japa in Vaidyanath temple. While he was the Secretary there, Gauri Ma, a lady disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had visited Deoghar Vidyapith.

When Mahapurush Maharaj was staying at the Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi, a telegram was received suddenly at Deoghar : All those who had completed three years of Brahmacharya were to proceed to Varanasi where on the birthday of Swamiji, Mahapurush Maharaj would confer Sannyasa on them. On the one hand, Saumya Chaitanya was surprised to get this news. On the other, he was delighted to know that his Gurudev Mahapurushji of his own accord was going to confer Sannyasa on him. This was a rare opportunity for him. And, he was a fit candidate for the same. In 1928 on the auspicious birthday of Swami Vivekananda, Mahapurush Maharaj conferred Sannyasa on Saumya Chaitanya. The Acharya for Sannyasa ceremony was Swami Jagadananda, the erudite scholar. The would-be Sannyasins, according to the rules of Sannyasa, performed their own Shraddha (the funeral ceremony) at Manikarnika Ghat. After conferment of Sannyasa they relinquished their staffs in the Ganga at the Dashashvamedh Ghat. Of those who took Sannyasa with him, Swamis Shivasvarupananda and Kashishwarananda are still alive. In later years Gambhiranandaji would recollect the incident thus : "After taking Sannyasa we took bath in the Ganga, visited the temples of Goddess Annapurna and Lord Vishvanath and paid our obeisance to Mahapurushji by lying prostrate before him. After Sannyasa, one has to beg alms. Mahapurushji himself gave us the first alms in the form of a rupee and said, 'Buy and eat Jilipi (a kind of sweetmeat)'. We did so, sitting in the open courtyard of the Advaita Ashrama." At noon, he had begged his alms from elsewhere. The great Guru, himself

perfect being, giving a new life to Saumya Chaitanya, named him Gambhirananda. Now his life became meaningful and his dream realised. In fact, his external appearance was 'gambhir (grave)'. He was popularly known as Gambhir Maharaj. Ever grave in his demeanour he would reflect on the profundity of the Atman. Outwardly he was so grave that it was very difficult to approach him. But inside his heart there flowed a tender feeling of love and affection. Only those who became intimate with him could feel it.

Whenever he got an opportunity to stay at the Belur Math, Gambhiranandaji made the best use of it. He used to tell us about his memories of those days : "The stay at the Belur Math at that time greatly benefited us. It was because every morning we could meet and have the company of Mahapurush Maharaj. We drew inspiration from him for our ideals. In those days there was no supply of drinking water. Drinking water was brought on boats from Baranagore across the Ganga. For cooking and other purposes we Brahmacharins brought the Ganga-water on Ekadeshi days. (At that time the Ganga-water remains fairly clean.) To get the dirt settled down, this water was distilled with alum. This distilled water was used for cooking and other purposes. Four or five of us stood in a row and carried the Ganga-water for the toilets and for filling the large water-containers. Other monks also used this water. Eight to ten of us slept together in the Premananda Memorial Hall. There was no electric light in those days. We depended only on the hurricane lanterns for light. Once a lantern was filled with kerosene oil and given for use, we had to manage for seven weeks. The food was not good. It consisted of ordinary 'rice, pulses and vegetables.'" While he was a Brahmacharin, Gambhiranandaji worked as a priest for some time in the temple of Swamiji at Belur Math.

Gambhiranandaji had lived for about one and a half years (1929-31) first at the Udbodhan Office and then at the Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi. When the Udbodhan Office was in the grip of serious changes, it was decided that Gambhiranandaji's services should also be utilized there.

Before joining his new duties there, Gambhiranandaji went to see Mahapurush Maharaj. He told him everything. On hearing it Mahapurush Maharaj became grave and pensive, but

he did not say anything. Gambhiranandaji, however, had not to stay for long at the Udbodhan Office. Then he worked for some time at the Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi. There he led a life of intense Sadhana. He mostly kept himself engaged in meditation, Japa and the study of scriptures. The Head of the Advaita Ashrama was Swami Nirbharananda (Chandra Maharaj). The work assigned to Gambhiranandaji was shopping. Chandra Maharaj gave him six annas for shopping everyday. Two annas were meant for buying materials for the worship of Sri Thakur. The remaining four annas were meant for the purchase of vegetables for the monks. At times, Gambhiranandaji saved one or two pice from this amount and returned it to the Ashrama. He always brought things of good quality from the market so that the worship of Sri Thakur and the service to the monks might be done quite properly. He had such a deep attachment and love for this service to Sri Thakur that for the sake of this he did not hesitate to disregard the advice of seniors, even though he was a new Sannyasin. During his stay at Varanasi he studied the scriptures under the guidance of a learned Pandit.

In 1936 Gambhiranandaji went to see the Ardha-Kumbha fair at Allahabad. Some Sadhus along with Gambhiranandaji went to see Swami Vijnanananda at the Muthiganj Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Mission. Vijnanananda was upstairs. From there he enquired, "Who are you?" They replied from below, "We are Sadhus of the Ramakrishna Math." There was another enquiry from above, "Where are you coming from?" The reply given from below was, "From the Kumbha Mela area." Then Vijnanananda said, "All right, go back to the same place."

After a day or two Vijnanananda visited the Kumbha Mela area at the Triveni Sangam. Then Gambhiranandaji had the good fortune of going round the Kumbha fair walking along with Swami Vijnanananda. Whenever Vijnan Maharaj came to Belur Math, Gambhiranandaji enjoyed his holy company. Once a gentleman sent a lot of sweets, curd and fruits to Swami Vijnanananda. Gambhiranandaji was pleased at the prospect of getting of a good 'prasad'. But, alas, Vijnan Maharaj threw them into the river Ganga. Gambhiranandaji came to know that the gentleman was morally degraded. This incident left a deep impression on his mind.

Gambhiranandaji had been a member of the Working Committee of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission for nearly ten years (1936-41 and 1945-47). As a result he had to live at the Belur Math. In those days members of the Working Committee were elected at the conference of monks held every three years. First he worked as the 'office-master' at the Headquarters of the Math. The office was situated in a room in the middle of the Leggette House. At that time Swami Hiranmayananda was the cashier. He says, "Gambhiranandaji behaved with us very nicely. But he was not sociable. He was unemotional and stern. He, however, actively participated in the scriptural discussions of the Sadhus and Brahmacharins held in the Visitors' Room. When a Sadhu was transferred from the Math to some other centre, he generally wrote the farewell address for him". When he was posted at Belur Math for the second time, he was appointed as the Inspector of the Branch Centres (in 1945). In this capacity he was to inspect various branch centres and to submit his report to the Mission authorities.

Mayavati Advaita Ashrama is situated in the lap of the Himalayas. The *Prabuddha Bharata*, the English monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, is published from this Ashrama. Its editorial office is located there. Gambhiranandaji worked as the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* for three years (1942-44). Swami Pavitrananda was the President of this Ashrama then. The well-thought out editorials written by Gambhiranandaji on various subjects and from different points of view won the admiration of all. It was during his editorship that two famous paintings of the renowned artist Acharya Nandalal Bose—'Shiva Taking Poison' and 'Nataraja'—were published in the *Prabuddha Bharata*.

A Brahmacharin, who assisted him, (now he is a senior monk) used to type his articles. While handing over the articles to him for typing, Gambhiranandaji used to tell him to see how they had come out. Once the Brahmacharin noted a few grammatical and spelling mistakes in them. At first he hesitated, but finally told him about them. Gambhiranandaji was not displeased at all. He rather said to the Brahmacharin, "Well, you can make corrections where necessary." The Brahma-

charin wondered, "I am a junior Brahmacharin with only one year's standing and he is the editor holding such a high position. Only a real Sannyasin can be so modest!"

The same Brahmacharin of Mayavati Ashrama said later : "It was great pleasure to work with Gambhiranandaji." In fact, the monks and Brahmacharins of all those Mission centres where he worked held the same opinion about him. Much later Gambhiranandaji worked as the President of the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama for ten years (1958-1963).

During his presidentship, the Mayavati Ashrama progressed in many ways. He enlarged the vegetable garden, solved the long-standing problem of scarcity of water, increased the milk-production by bringing cows of good breed, started bee-keeping and arranged to get good flower plants from Calcutta for the flower garden. The then Chief Minister of U. P., Sri C. B. Gupta, visited Mayavati Ashrama during his presidentship. Through his help he got constructed a metalled road covering a distance of seven and a half kilometres from Lohaghat to the Ashrama. He named it 'Mayavati Road'. The problem of residence for the monastic workers of the Ashrama was solved, when the first storey was added to the residential building for monks. The publication department of Advaita Ashrama was situated at 4, Wellington Lane, in Calcutta. The scope of work was widening but the space available was inadequate for it. It was causing great inconvenience. Gambhiranandaji purchased a plot of land at 5, Dehi Entally Road, in the Entally area in 1958 for the publication department. The foundation-stone was laid on the 17th November of the same year. Within three years, construction of the building was completed. The new building was inaugurated on the 8th December, 1961. A public library with a reading-room was added to it. It may be mentioned here that construction of buildings was practically a hobby for him. While at Deoghar he had studied a number of books on engineering.

At Mayavati, Gambhiranandaji encouraged the monastic workers in all spheres of work. He often cut jokes with them. After lunch the monks played ludo. At times Gambhiranandaji, unnoticed by them, disarranged the pieces of ludo and disappeared quietly. The monks enjoyed his childlike pranks.

At Mayavati Gambhiranandaji did all his personal work



himself. The monastic workers never found him taking rest at noon. He used to utilize that time for writing. Extraordinary was his punctuality, which he maintained till the last day of his life. He would take scriptural classes for the Sadhus and the Brahmacharins at noon. While strolling on the verandah of his room he would hum to himself: "Jal phele jele rayechhe base (The fisherman, casting his net, keeps waiting)." At Mayavati Ashrama he was often heard saying, "The tradition of this Ashrama should be maintained by all means."

Gambhiranandaji was elected a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, in March 1947.

In April of the same year he joined the Headquarters at Belur Math as Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. He worked in this capacity upto 1953. He was again appointed Assistant Secretary on 5th October, 1963. Earlier he was appointed a member of the Advisory Finance Committee in 1949.

On Swami Vireshwaranandaji becoming the President of the Ramakrishna Order in 1966, Gambhiranandaji became its General Secretary on the 16th February of the same year. He shouldered the heavy responsibility of this office for about thirteen years with great efficiency. He had administrative skill and deep monastic ardour, a rare combination indeed. It was like a diamond set in gold. As the General Secretary, he exhibited certain distinctive qualities. He took decisions quickly and did not keep things pending. As far as possible he took decisions impartially. His work was very methodical. He followed a fixed time-schedule for every work. If it was necessary, he consulted his colleagues. When some difficult problem arose, he solved it very tactfully. When necessary, he could chide the monks harshly. Once he said to his old colleague Swami Bhuteshanandaji, now the President of the Order, "If you want anyone to be chided, send him to me. I cannot persuade anyone with sweet words. If that is required I shall send him to you." Bhuteshanandaji says, "Swami Gambhiranandaji was quite practical. He had a very strong personality. A great quality of his character was his sense of justice." Another colleague of Gambhiranandaji says, "The special characteristic of his character was earnestness. He had a single-minded devo-

tion to his work and spiritual practices. That his nature was wholly dry is not true. I have seen humour, wit and a sense of fun in him."

Gambhiranandaji regarded his daily routine as worship of God. The following verse from the *Shivamanasapujanastotram* by Vyasadeva was his favourite. He very often recited it gently and softly :

"Atma tvam girija matih sahacharah pranah shariram griham  
Puja te vishayopabhogarachana nidra samadhisthitih  
Sancharah padayoh pradakshinavidhih stotrani sarva giro  
Yadyat karma karomi tattadakhilam shambho tavaradhanam."

Gambhiranandaji had to remain always busy with administrative work. Quite often he had to go out for inspection of the various branch centres in India. In spite of all that he managed to find time for reading and writing. He had cultivated this habit from the very beginning. It was in this manner that he wrote invaluable books which brought glory to the Ramakrishna Order. He was a man with great intellectual gifts and deep philosophical thinking. He had profound knowledge of the scriptures. He had studied Vedanta under the guidance of Swami Jagadananda. While staying at Varanasi and other Mission centres he also studied Sanskrit grammar as also the scriptures under the guidance of learned Pandits. Besides, he himself studied sacred books with full devotion. In later years he used to say, "Monks should themselves study the scriptures and ponder over them. Only then they will understand their essence."

He entered the world of letters by writing an essay for the wall-magazine of the Scottish Church College hostel. As a monk he wrote his first essay for the handwritten magazine of Deoghar Vidyapith. The subject of the essay was Swami Vivekananda. At that time Mahapurush Maharaj visited Deoghar. He was greatly pleased to read it. His being pleased with the essay was like a blessing to Gambhiranandaji. Many of his learned essays were published in the Bengali Monthly *Udbodhan*, the English Monthlies *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Vedanta Kesari*. His thoughtful writings are to be found in the commemorative volumes relating to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji.

His first work was *Stavakusumanjali*. It was published in

the month of Ashvin 1346 (Bengali Era). It is a collection of various Sanskrit hymns. About his first work he often said jokingly, "After all, it will sell well." The number of books written, translated and edited by him is fifteen. The titles of these books with years of first publication are as follows :

(In Bengali) : *Stavakusumanjali* (1346 B. E.) ; *Upanishad Granthavali*—First Part (1348 B. E.), Second Part (1350 B. E.), Third Part (1351 B. E.) ; *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika*—First and Second Parts (1359 B. E.) ; *Sri Ma Saradadevi* (1360 B. E.) ; *Siddhantalesha Sangraha* (1365 B. E.) ; *Yuganayak Vivekananda*—First, Second and Third Parts (1373 B. E.) ; *Kah Panthah* (1393 B. E.) ; and (In English) : *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (1955) ; *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (1957) ; *Eight Upanishads*—Vol. I (1957) and Vol. II (1958), with Shankara's Commentary ; *Brahmasutra Bhashya of Sri Shankara* (1965) ; *The Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna* (1966) ; *Chhandogya Upanishad* with Shankara's Commentary (1983), *The Bhagavadgita* with Shankara's Commentary (1984), *Svetasvatara Upanishad* with Shankara's Commentary (1986).

The eighth volume of *The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda* in English (Advaita Ashrama) and the third volume of *The Cultural Heritage of India* (it contains essays on various philosophies) (the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture) were edited by him. His last translated work was the English translation of Madhusudana Sarasvati's commentary on the Gita. The translation was completed but the work of revision had proceeded only upto the second chapter.

His most remarkable book is the biography of the Holy Mother in Bengali. Before the centenary of the Holy Mother there was no such authentic biography. Quite a few incidents of her life were unpublished. He worked very hard and collected many facts about her life. At the request of the authorities of Belur Math in 1953, the centenary year of the Holy Mother, he devoted himself to writing this book. A learned Sannyasin once told Gambhiranandaji, "You are busy with so many things. With such a busy life nobody has written as many books as you have, but your biography of the Holy Mother is the most precious, the most authentic and the most comprehensive book written in a lucid style. By writing this

book you have spread her glory among the people in her centenary year." Gambhiranandaji replied : "By doing this work I have got great joy and satisfaction." Many readers after reading this book had asked him, "Have you seen the Holy Mother?" They thought that it was impossible for a man, who had not seen her, to write such a book. Gambhiranandaji's reply was, "I have not seen her with physical eyes, but when I meditate, the image of the Mother appears before me. She is always with me." The English translation of this book was done by himself.

His second important book is the biography of Swami Vivekananda in Bengali. The want of a comprehensive and authentic biography of Swamiji in Bengali was being keenly felt. Various facts about his life lay scattered in different books. Many new incidents of his life were being published in various books, periodicals and newspapers. Some incidents were known only to the old monks of the Math. Compiling all these facts, Gambhiranandaji wrote an authentic biography of Swamiji. Only an intellectually gifted Sannyasin like him could do it. While writing this book he was busy with responsible administrative work, first as an Assistant Secretary and then, as the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order. Even in the midst of this work he managed to write this authentic biography of Swamiji, entitled *Yuganayak Vivekananda* in three volumes. While he was an Assistant Secretary he had translated the *Brahmasutra Bhashya* of Sri Shankara into English. This translation has been acclaimed by savants. It has been prescribed as a textbook by the Universities of Nagpur and Delhi.

Gambhiranandaji had a profound knowledge of the scriptures. Especially, he had a remarkable command, knowledge and mastery over Acharya Shankara's works. This finds expression in his conversation, essays and speeches. An incident in this connection may be narrated here. In 1968 Gambhiranandaji visited Mysore Ashrama in connection with the foundation-stone laying ceremony of the *Institute of Moral & Spiritual Education* there. Swami Adidevananda, an authority on the philosophy of Acharya Ramanuja, also arrived there on this occasion. One evening when Gambhiranandaji was strolling, he was joined by Swami Adidevananda. Gambhiranandaji suddenly asked him, "Well, who was the tutelary deity (Ishta)

of Acharya Shankara?" Swami Adidevananda, quoting from various scriptures, commentaries and hymns, tried to prove that Acharya Shankara's tutelary deity was Vishnu. Gambhiranandaji differed from him on this point. Also quoting from various scriptures, commentaries and hymns, he tried to prove it wrong. The debate between these two learned Sannyasins went on for about an hour. A young Sannyasin who was a witness to the whole scene was listening to this interesting debate. He was amazed to see their profound learning and mastery of the scriptures. Finally he asked Gambhiranandaji, "Maharaj, which side prevailed?" Gambhiranandaji replied, "Neither side."

Gambhiranandaji's way of thinking had a philosophical strain. Through his various essays and lectures at different times he established the Seva-Yoga of Swamiji on a philosophical basis. This was a new contribution made by him. One day he was discussing Seva-Yoga along with other subjects with a Sannyasin. The Sannyasin said to him, "I heard a long lecture delivered by you on the ideal of service at Bangalore in 1968. I have marked that since then you have gradually evolved the principle of Seva-Yoga. This is a valuable contribution made by you to the world of thought in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission." Pleased at this Gambhiranandaji said, "Getting the hint from *Lila Prasanga*, I have proceeded. In order to give a concrete shape to Swamiji's ideal of service one will have to proceed by harmonising all the four yogas-Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Karma Yoga. Swamiji has told us to devise new paths of Sadhanas on the basis of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Thus the principle of Seva-Yoga may be formulated according to Swamiji's intention."

Gambhiranandaji had made his speaking debut with his first lecture at Sonargaon. He was by nature reticent. While he was the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* at the Mayavati Ashrama, he was reluctant to speak even in private homely functions attended by only ten to fifteen persons and would generally try to avoid it. He felt diffident about giving lectures. But when he did speak, he would do so nicely, in a systematic manner and bring an idea home to the audience. Subsequently he became an effective speaker in English and Bengali. His speeches were very charming and were admired

by even learned people. One could see eloquence in them. While speaking, he could put forward the essence of the matter before the audience.

While he was the General Secretary, some new branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission were established at Along, Tirap and Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh; at Guwahati in Assam; at Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh and at Raipur in Madhya Pradesh. For old and sick monks there was no proper arrangement for living at Belur Math. It was due to his initiative and efforts that the Arogya Bhavan was built at Belur. At the Math there was no special provision of funds for the support and treatment of old monks. Taking personal interest in the matter, he took steps to make a provision of funds for the service of the monks. At Belur Math the new Brahmacharins faced the problem of residence. Consequently the new entrants desirous of joining the Mission as Brahmacharins were sent to the branch centres. When a colleague of Gambhiranandaji drew his attention to this problem he made arrangements for their residence at the Math, and training centre for the newly arrived Brahmacharins (P.P.T.C.) was started at the Belur Math.

On account of studies and pressure of administrative work Gambhiranandaji could not find time for going on a pilgrimage. Advanced in age, when he was the General Secretary and the pressure of work was tremendous, he agreed to go on a pilgrimage at the request of many Sannyasins. During his pilgrimage he visited Kedarnath and Badrinath (October 1973), Pashupatinath in Nepal (March 1976), Amarnath (July 1976), Kanyakumari (March 1977) and Gangotri (October 1977). The vision that he had at Amarnath is worth mentioning. He visited Amarnath on the 26th July, 1976. One of his colleagues was with him. After offering worship to Lord Amarnath they came down. They smeared their foreheads with the ashes brought from Amarnath. As soon as the visit to Amarnath was referred to, Gambhiranandaji exclaimed, "Do you know what I saw there? I had a vision of Sri Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) sitting there!" On being asked he often told this to many persons, though generally he kept quiet over such things.

Modesty was a great quality of Gambhiranandaji. If somebody congratulated him on the books written by him or

praised his lectures or essays, he would keep quiet, unaffected by them. He would neither talk about it nor mention anything about it in reply to the letters of congratulation. Even when he was the President of the Order, he maintained the same attitude. He often said, "Even now I cannot quite understand that it is me whom they call President." He used to say that the work of initiating others was to him an act of discharging his responsibility. He was often heard saying, "This world is so huge. Asia is a continent in this world, India is a country in Asia, West Bengal is in India, Howrah district is in West Bengal and Belur Math is in Howrah district. Thus it is like a very small point in the map. In this point you find Gambhirananda." What he meant was that he was the humblest of the humble. A sense of humility was ever awake in him.

Gambhiranandaji maintained the traditions of the Ramakrishna Order. He took great care to see that these traditions were not violated. Once, when he was the General Secretary, Swami Omkaranandaji, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, came to Belur Math. He was sitting on a bench in the outer verandah of the Mission Office. Gambhiranandaji was standing by his side. A young Sannyasin was passing by. Omkaranandaji called him and affectionately made him sit by his side on the same bench. Seeing this Gambhiranandaji felt deeply concerned and said to the young Sannyasin, "What are you doing? Swami Omkaranandaji is now our Vice-President. Sitting by his side on the same bench is against our traditions!" Feeling ashamed, the young Sannyasin got up at once from the bench and stood with his head bent. This little incident shows his love for the old traditions.

Since his childhood days Gambhiranandaji had weak eyesight. Even from his schooldays he would desist from studying at night. As he grew older, his eyesight grew poorer still. In 1972 an operation (for retinal detachment) of his left eye was arranged at Boston in America. This operation gave him a temporary relief but provided no permanent cure. The same year on his way to Boston he visited all the branch centres of Ramakrishna Math in America and Europe from August to November. Earlier in connection with administrative work he had visited Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka (1969) and Dhaka and Narayanganj (1972 and 1977).

On account of old age and weakness of eyesight, Gambhiranandaji did not want to continue as the General Secretary any more. Though the authorities were reluctant, he expressed his inability again and again. Therefore, to begin with, the authorities granted him leave for three months. Finally, they relieved him of the heavy responsibility of the office of the General Secretary in 1979. He was appointed Vice-President on 1st April of the same year. He continued in this office for six years. As Vice-President he spent most of his time at the Morabadi Ashrama in Ranchi, but now and then he came to the Belur Math.

After becoming Vice-President he started giving spiritual initiation to the devotees. In spite of all the inconveniences, he showered his grace liberally on people. Ignoring all troubles he visited not only the various branch centres of the Math and the Mission, but also many private centres. He never wanted anyone to take troubles for his sake. At the Ranchi Ashrama devotees would come to him. Lest they waste time in frivolous talk, he would ask them to read aloud from some sacred book. One of them would read aloud before him and others would listen.

While he was the Vice-President, an operation for cataract in his left eye was done in Madras on the 19th May, 1981. During this time he translated Shankara's commentary on the Gita and the Chhandogya Upanishad into English. He also visited Mauritius to consecrate the marble-image of Sri Ramakrishna in the temple there.

Once, when he came from Ranchi to Belur Math and was staying there, a girl disciple of his, who was about 14 years old, often came to see him. The mother of that girl did menial jobs at others' houses for a living. The girl lived at somebody else's house. She was an extrovert. One day she came with her lady guardian to the Math. She told Gambhiranandaji that she was going to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganga. Startled at this, Gambhiranandaji said to her vehemently, "What did you say? You will commit suicide by jumping into the Ganga? If you die in this manner, you are bound to become a female ghost. Listen to what your guardian says. Her advice will do you good." Chided by her Guru, she realised her mistake. Obeying him, she saved herself from sure and ignoble death. Again, a husband and wife, who were his disciples,



were having very strained relations. Things had become so serious that the wife was prepared to commit suicide. But somehow it so happened that one day she told her Guru everything. Gambhiranandaji said to her in a deep and heavy voice, "Do not take any decision yourself. Endure, endure!" She realised her mistake. The unfailing grace of her Guru saved her from sure death. Now she has adapted herself to her circumstances. We do not know how many more such people he has guided on the right path.

Gambhiranandaji gave a lecture on the 17th November, 1980 at the Chandigarh Ashrama, on "Sadhana according to Sri Ramakrishna".

After the lecture was over, a Sannyasin, who attended on him, asked him, "What was your own way of Sadhana?" He replied, "It was the spirit of detachment as mentioned in the Gita: 'Jneyah sa nitya-Sannyasi yo na dveshti na kankshati.' 'Nirdvandvo hi mahabaho sukham bandhat pramuchyate.' This is the way of my Sadhana." Answering another question of that Sannyasin, Gambhiranandaji said, "I did Japa nine to ten thousand times every day. Along with that I practised the spirit of detachment. Besides, now and then I meditated on the divine Lila of Sri Ramakrishna." He added, "Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother are the living symbols of that shloka in the Gita. These days I have the vision of Sri Ramakrishna sitting in my heart, illumined with divine light and sometimes the Holy Mother of her own accord appears in my heart."

After the operation for hernia (1983) Gambhiranandaji was taking rest at the Arogya Bhavan of Belur Math. The manuscript of Marie Louise Burke's *New Discoveries* was being read out to him. After the reading was over he kept quiet for some time and then all of a sudden he broke into a song: "Samaya hayechhe nikat ekhan bandhan chinrite habe (The time has come when the bond has to be cut asunder)." From time to time the feeling of detachment grew intense in him. Now and then he sang spontaneously. Though he had never cultivated music as an art, he had a sound knowledge of the various styles of classical music—Thumri, Kheyal, Dhrupad, etc. One day he was seen guiding a Sannyasin regarding Tala (time or measure in music) and explaining to him the real significance:

of classical music. He loved the songs of Atul Prasad, Rajanikanta and Rabindranath. His favourite song was—"Pujar pradip jvalie rakhis hridaya deul majhe (keep the lamp for worship lighted in the temple of your heart)." Once he wanted to learn playing on the Tabla. At Deoghar he tried to learn it behind closed doors for about a month. Ultimately he gave it up.

There was no trace of luxury in the life of Gambhiranandaji. He did not keep anything unnecessary with him. This was his practice from the very beginning. Once he came to stay at the Leggette House at Belur Math. Somebody presented to him a dhoti (a male garment). He did not need it. He heaved a sigh of relief by presenting it to a novice-Brahmacharin who lived nearby. He had two pairs of shoes. Once a close devotee of his wanted to present a fine pair of sandals to him, but never used it. Another disciple of his requested him to accept some present, but Gambhiranandaji was reluctant to do so. On his insistent request Gambhiranandaji took the present but never used it. Another disciple of his requested him to accept some eatables, but he did not agree. When the disciple insisted, Gambhiranandaji said, "All right, give me a mango". Once a couple (both were his disciples) expressed their heart's desire : "Maharaj, kindly let us know whenever you need anything." Gambhiranandaji said, "I do not need anything." The lamp of Aparigraha (the spirit of non-acceptance of gifts) was always kept burning in his heart. To sum up, the guiding principle of his life during a long period of sixty-five years was 'plain living and high thinking.'

His food was very simple. From his very childhood he suffered from weak digestion. He gladly took tasteless vegetables cooked without oil, spices and chillies. Whenever the attendant monks asked him about the quality of food, he would reply, "It is quite good." He exercised great restraint in the matter of food.

On the 22nd March, 1985 Gambhiranandaji suddenly fell unconscious. He was admitted to the Seva Pratishthan. It was found that he was suffering from a weak heart. On the 23rd, a pace-maker was inserted in his chest. At that time the tenth President of the Ramakrishna Order had passed away. Gambhiranandaji was appointed the eleventh President of the

Order on the 9th April the same year. On taking over as the new President he said, "I shall live at the most for four years."

As the President of the Order Gambhiranandaji gave spiritual initiation to the devotees for the first time on the 29th May 1985, the sacred day known as Dashahara Dashami, in the old shrine.

Various incidents reveal his greatness. While he was at Deoghar, he wrote to Swami Kashishvarananda at the Belur Math asking him to send a Rudraksha rosary. Kashishvarananda bought such a rosary and sent it to Gambhiranandaji. After the latter became the President he happened to visit Kamar-pukur. Kashishvarananda was leading a retired life there at that time. As soon as Gambhiranandaji met him he said, "You sent me a Rudraksha rosary. It is still with me." Once at the Belur Math a Brahmacharin made a request to him for a pair of shoes. Gambhiranandaji did not have any spare shoes at that time. After about two and a half years a devotee presented a pair of shoes to him at Ranchi. Remembering the request of the Brahmacharin he accepted the present. He said to his attendant, "Take this pair of shoes to Belur Math. This is for the Brahmacharin." When this pair of shoes was brought to Belur Math and given to that Brahmacharin, he wondered, "How kind of him! Maharaj has remembered my request even after such a long time!" Once when Gambhiranandaji was at Jamshedpur, he went out for a walk in the Jubilee Park. He was accompanied by an old Sannyasin, Swami Adinathananda, Secretary of the centre there. Adinathananda (known as Kalida) requested him not to walk for more than ten minutes. Just after a ten minute walk Gambhiranandaji said to his attendant, "Now let us go back. Kalida is an old man. He has to be obeyed." So saying he returned to the Ashrama.

Gambhiranandaji had a wonderful memory. Whatever he heard and read remained embedded in his memory. It was so in both the spheres, of studies and administrative work. Whenever an enquiry was made, he gave the correct answer. Many old Sannyasins have corroborated it by saying, "It is rare to find a Sadhu with such a wonderful memory." A recent incident may be mentioned here. Gambhiranandaji used to

stroll along with his attendant monks in the Math compound every evening. One day there was some talk about Brahmasutra-Bhashya. One of them was studying the Brahmasutras in those days. Gambhiranandaji asked him, "What are you studying today?" He replied, "Anandamayobhyasat—" sutra of the first chapter. Then he began to recite the Bengali translation of Shankara's commentary. On hearing it Gambhiranandaji said, "It is not the opinion of Shankara. It is that of the Vrittikara (an ancient commentator)." The attendant monk said emphatically, "No, Maharaj, it is clearly mentioned in the Commentary that it is Shankara's opinion." Gambhiranandaji once again said to him, "No, it is the opinion of the Vrittikara." After two or three days the attendant monk while reading the commentary found that Gambhiranandaji was right. Acharya Shankara in his commentary had put forward the opinions of other Vedantins and analysed them. Then he had refuted their arguments. That was why the attendant monk had confused it to be the commentator's opinion. He was amazed at the wonderful memory of Gambhiranandaji. He knew that after becoming the General Secretary, Gambhiranandaji had not read any of the commentaries. It was twenty-four years since he had read them; but whatever he had read, had been embedded in his memory. He was all the more surprised when Gambhiranandaji told him that wherever the word 'opponent' (in his English translation of Brahmasutra-Bhashya) occurred it should be replaced by '*Prima Facie* view'. Gambhiranandaji in his Brahmasutra-Bhashya had translated the word 'Purva-paksha' into English as 'opponent'. However, it was more desirable to use the word '*Prima facie* view' in place of 'opponent'. While writing the preface to the second edition of Gambhiranandaji's book, *Brahmasutra-Bhashya*, an erudite scholar, Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan in a personal letter to the author had requested him to use that appropriate word. Even this had happened about sixteen years ago.

At the First Great Convention of the Ramakrishna Order Gambhiranandaji was merely a spectator. At the Second Great Convention (1980) he was one of the speakers. He presided over two sessions of this convention. By his thought-provoking speeches he impressed everyone. Presiding over the evening session on the first day of the Convention he spoke on

'The Ramakrishna Movement.' He concluded his speech by saying, "Thus the Ramakrishna Movement is expanding by its inner strength and pointing out to the world the real path of human progress. The world is athirst for such a message and its ultimate success can never be doubted; for the Upanishad says, 'Satyameva jayate nanritam.'" The first Youth Convention organised by the Ramakrishna Order was held in 1985 during his presidentship. It was inaugurated by him. Calling upon the youth to give a concrete shape to the ideal of Swamiji, he said, "Swamiji's ideal was—Atmano mokshartham jagaddhityaya cha (for one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world). The last words 'jagaddhityaya cha' should be understood in the light of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. You know that one day while speaking of compassion he had suddenly stopped and said, 'who are you to show compassion to others? It is only God who can show compassion.' This idea has opened a new horizon to our concept of Karma Yoga. It implies not only social service but also a spiritual Sadhana of purifying one's heart by doing good to others, which is as effective as a complete surrender to God. Sri Ramakrishna took this idea a step further and raised it from the level of Dvaita (dualism) to that of Advaita (monism). God is not different from the benefactor or the benefited and therefore, the question of offering the fruit of action to Him does not arise. On the other hand, what Sri Ramakrishna tells us about the spirit of service is that any action done with this spirit is worship of God. This kind of action brings about spiritual advancement. It serves no other interest. You are young; you have open minds. It is only you who can give a concrete shape to the high ideals propagated by the Raamakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission."

Gambhiranandaji kept a constant watch over his attendant monks. He took care about their getting time for regular studies, Japa and meditation. He often enquired about their welfare. They regularly read out sacred books to him. If any of them, leaving aside his studies, came to give him tea, he expressed displeasure, "Give me tea only when your time for study is over. It does not matter if there is some delay in my taking tea." On special days he sent them out for taking bath in the Ganga. He said to them, "If you don't do all this now,

you won't be able to do so in your old age." In their absence he said to some Sannyasins, "They take care of my physical well-being and I take care of their mental well-being." He sometimes cut jokes and enjoyed fun with his attendant monks.

Gambhiranandaji had great enthusiasm for village uplift and relief work. He often laid stress on expanding the scope of the activities of the Order. Even in his old age he attended various public functions of the Order and went to relief camps and villages. He had an attachment for the Ashrama at Gourhati village near Arambagh (Hooghly). Mainly at his initiative a temple having the marble image of Sri Ramakrishna had been built and the work of village uplift had been started there. During the presidentship of Gambhiranandaji ten new centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission were started : at Agartala and Barasat (1985) ; at Midnapore and Antpur (1986) ; at Madurai, Palai and Lucknow (1987) ; at Shikra, Jaipur and in Canada (1988). Three of these centres are situated at Barasat, Antpur and Shikra which are the birthplaces of Swamis Shivananda, Premananda and Brahmananda, all direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. At Midnapore and Lucknow new Math centres were opened. The Palai centre was separated from the Trichur centre. He remained President of the Order for a little less than four years. During this period he either inaugurated or laid the foundation-stone of many temples, libraries, etc. The following list will prove that till the last moment of his life he remained actively associated with the work of the Order without caring for his own convenience or comfort : In 1985 he inaugurated the new building for the library and the reading room at Shillong ; Sadhu Nivas, the kitchen and dining room, the library and the reading room, the office-building and the mobile dispensary at Rajahmundry ; the prayer hall at Jamshedpud-Sakchi ; the temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Narendrapur ; laid the foundation-stone of Sri Ramakrishna temple at Sarisha and Vishakhapatnam, Sadhu Nivas at Vishakhapatnam and administrative building of Ranchi Sanatorium. In 1986 he inaugurated the administrative building at the Ranchi Sanatorium ; museum relating to agriculture and Swamiji's life, the new building for the library at the Morabadi Ashrama of Ranchi ; higher Secondary School building at Narottamnagar ; the new building of Old Women's Home at

Varanasi ; consecrating the marble image of Sri Ramakrishna at Contai ; Sri Ramakrishna temple at Guwahati and Gwalior ; laid the foundation-stone of the new building for the charitable dispensary and the library at Barasat; Sri Ramakrishna temple at Chandigarh. In 1987 he laid the foundation-stone of Sri Ramakrishna temple at Ulsoor (Bangalore), and of the new administrative buildings at the Belur Math. In 1988 he inaugurated the Sri Ramakrishna temples at Guwahati, Rajahmundry and Chengalpet, prayer hall and auditorium at Pune, reconstructed Home of the Holy Mother at Koalpara; Workers' Home at Kamarpukur ; Old Men's Home at Barisha ; the kitchen and library at Madras Students' Home; reconstructed old Math at the garden house of Nilambar Mukherji near Belur Math; the Kitchen and the dining-room of Kankurgachhi Math; Computer Sections at Advaita Ashrama and Belur Math; Sadhu Nivas at New Delhi ; laid the foundation-stone of the kitchen and the dining room at Midnapore and of Sri Ramakrishna temple at Kishanpur.

An incident at Belur Math may be mentioned here. Exactly one year before Gambhiranandaji passed away, an attendant monk went to his room and found him ready to go out. On seeing him Gambhiranandaji said to him, "Do you see how ready I am to go out? Even if Yama (the god of Death) comes, he will find me ready like this!" In June 1988 he said to an attendant monk, "You will serve me for one more year. After that you will carry me to the cremation ground." These words gave an indication of his impending departure from this world, but at that time no one could understand them. While he was the President of the Order, he did not want to be engrossed in any administrative work. But if somebody came to him with some problem in this regard, he listened to him and gave him his advice. A year after he became the President he kept himself away from external activities. He answered the questions of inquisitive devotees. He had never done it earlier. Once a young man came to see the revered Maharaj. He had an appointment with him. Gambhiranandaji asked his attendant monk to go out of the room. The young man went into the room. The attendant monk suddenly heard the revered Maharaj speaking something loudly to the young man. Unable to follow it, the

attendant monk ran into the room. Getting inside he heard Gambhiranandaji saying emphatically to the young man, "I have seen Sri Thakur. You also can see him if you follow this path." The young man got the desired answer to his question. Out of sheer joy he paid obeisance to Gambhiranandaji and went away.

Since that time Gambhiranandaji had always been seen doing Japa. He was sometimes found doing Japa while lying in bed and sometimes using the rosary while sitting. The attendant monks had never seen him in such a state. He was all the time in an introspective mood. After Durga Puja he visited some branch centres of North India and came back to the Belur Math on the 10th December, 1988. The next day a senior Sannyasin went to see Gambhiranandaji. He said, "I find that you are walking better." Gambhiranandaji replied, "On the whole I am all right. I am just coming after a walk, but I have a feeling that I won't be able to live any longer." At that time, however, nobody could believe what he said.

On the 15th December, 1988 he went to Bamunmura, Shikra, Barasat (all these places are situated in the North 24-Parganas) and Navadvip. This was his last tour. Before leaving for Navadvip he went to the Barasat Ashrama temple to pay obeisance to Sri Thakur. While doing so he took a long time which was rather unusual. Coming out of the temple he looked back at it. The attendant monk noticed all this. Gambhiranandaji, was forever bidding adieu to Barasat, the birthplace of his Guru, Mahapurush Maharaj.

While at Barasat Gambhiranandaji developed a sore throat. In this state of ill health he reached Navadvip on the 20th December. There it was noticed that he had temperature as also some swelling on his feet. He was now under the treatment of a local doctor. The dates fixed for spiritual initiation were 22nd and 23rd December. There was an apprehension in his mind that the work of initiation might be hampered. After the initiation was over the time came for the initiated to pay obeisance to their Guru. Gambhiranandaji asked the attendant monk to take off his socks. When the latter objected to it, he said, "Take off the socks. They get this opportunity only once in lifetime." At the end when he came to his room he said, "I was afraid whether I could continue or not, but it went off



very well." The same day he signed a letter conveying his blessings to the son of a disciple of his at Ranchi on the occasion of his marriage. This was the last letter signed by him.

On the 23rd December, getting up early in the morning, he said to his attendant monk, "I am feeling quite indisposed. I won't be able to do Japa. I'll keep lying in bed." After having had some rest he got up. Now he felt much better. While shaving he started beating time on his thigh and spontaneously broke into a song, "Ekrup, arup-nama-baran Atit-agami-kalheen, desh-heen, sarbaheen, Neti Neti biram jathay." It was the day of initiation. Everything went off well. In the evening he vomited a few drops of blood while coughing.

On the morning of the 24th December he was going to leave Navadvip for Belur Math. Prior to his departure he consoled the devotees, "Yes, everything passes off well. I am feeling indisposed but it is not your fault." The news of his indisposition had already been sent to the Math. Reaching there he had his lunch. After having some rest he was taken to the Seva Frashthan and admitted there. He was placed under the treatment of Dr. Samarendra Nath Roy, Dr. Kanti Bhushan Bakshi and Dr. Niranjana Banerji there. He was kept under complete bed rest. Oxygen was given for smooth breathing. After complete examination it was found that his two lungs had been congealed with phlegm.

He was in the same condition on the 25th December also. On that day the Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was to be held. He was to preside over the meeting. Hence he sent a message of good wishes. It was read out at the meeting. This was his last message.

On the 26th December Gambhiranandaji felt better. There was no cause for apprehension. Lying in the bed he began singing, "Nadiyar pathe pathe, kangaler beshe hari, nam prem bilale, dharatale abatari." When the song was over he said, "Iti Sri Gauranga." Someone or the other came from the Math to see him everyday. At night he dreamt a dream—"There was a very large and open space and he was sitting there all alone." He generally did not tell anyone about his dreams, but on that day he told his attendant monk about it.

On Tuesday, 27th December his condition appeared to be quite good. It was like the last flicker of the lamp that was

about to go out. He was in a light mood. He had no fever. He had light meals. At 3-30 in the afternoon he took tea. Tea was given to him in a feeding cup. He was taking cold tea. While taking tea he said jokingly, "First, the tea is cold and then it is adulterated." The attendant monk was surprised. He said, "How is it adulterated?" The revered Maharaj replied, "You know you made me take that medicine before tea." Just before tea he had to take antibiotics. That was why he called the tea adulterated.

At 5-20 P.M. Swamis Hiranmayananda, Gahanananda and Atmasthananda came from the Belur Math to see him. Swami Gahanananda left after 5 minutes since he had to go somewhere else. The other two Swamis were now inside the room of revered Maharaj. He enquired about Belur Math. Swami Hiranmayananda told him about the opening of a new centre at Bomdilla in Arunachal Pradesh, the taking over of centres at Amtoli and Dhaleshwar in Tripura, the relief work in Hingalganj and Gosaba and the problem of a Brahmacharin being readmitted into the Order.

Gambhiranandaji listened to it attentively and said, "That's good, very good." The two Swamis noticed that speaking caused pain to the revered Maharaj. They said, "Please take rest Maharaj, and don't talk much." Then they took their leave. This was their last leave-taking. Even at that time nobody could have thought that a little later Gambhiranandaji would leave this mortal world.

He drank water at 6 p.m. He was feeling very uneasy. After resting for a little while he drank it slowly. The doctors examined his blood pressure and found it normal. The pulse rate however was faster. The temperature of his body was 100.6. Now he felt pressure on bowels. Even then the attendant monks could not realise the seriousness of his condition.

At 6.30 p.m. the revered Maharaj coughed. Drops of blood came out with cough. He said to one of his attendant monks, "I am running high temperature and blood pressure also is rising. Send for Dr. Roy." The attendant monk gave him a crocin tablet. The doctors were sent for. The Registrar of the hospital came. The revered Maharaj was feeling very uneasy. He was breathing hard and having perspiration. He said to him, "I am feeling uneasy." These were his last words.

The attendant monks noticed that the revered Maharaj took a deep breath thrice as if to pay the last obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji. Just after this his body became still. It was 7.27 p.m. then.

The sad news was sent to the Math. The senior-most Sannyasin, Swami Abhayanandaji was informed about the Mahasamadhi of Gambhiranandaji. Stunned at this news Swami Abhayanandaji exclaimed, "Gambhirananda too has gone away!" Old Sadhus rushed from the Belur Math to the Seva Patishthan. The news of the passing away of Gambhiranandaji was shortly broadcast by the All-India Radio and reported in the newspapers. His dead body decked with flowers was carried to the Belur Math. The next day, i.e., on the 28th December, it was kept under the mango-tree planted by Swamiji for giving an opportunity to the devotees to have the last darshan. At 2.15 p.m. the funeral pyre was lighted. His body composed of the five elements got dissolved in the five elements. There were light clouds in the sky then and the reddish hue of the sun was gradually fading in the western horizon.

The material body of Swami Gambhiranandaji has been burnt to ashes in the sacred fire of the pyre. That spot is now decked with flowers. It bears witness to the fact that he is no more in his physical body. But he is living in our memory. He is shining in the hearts of the devotees. He still remains an object of worship for them. His ideal life, his pure and noble character and his spiritual attainments will be a source of inspiration to all of us for ever. That is why the poet sings, "Tomar Samadhi phule phule dhaka, ke bole tumi nai, tumi acho mon bole tai, (Your tomb is all decked with flowers. Who says you are no more? Our heart says that you are still alive)."

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