

# SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA



## RAMAKRISHNA MATH

BELUR MATH

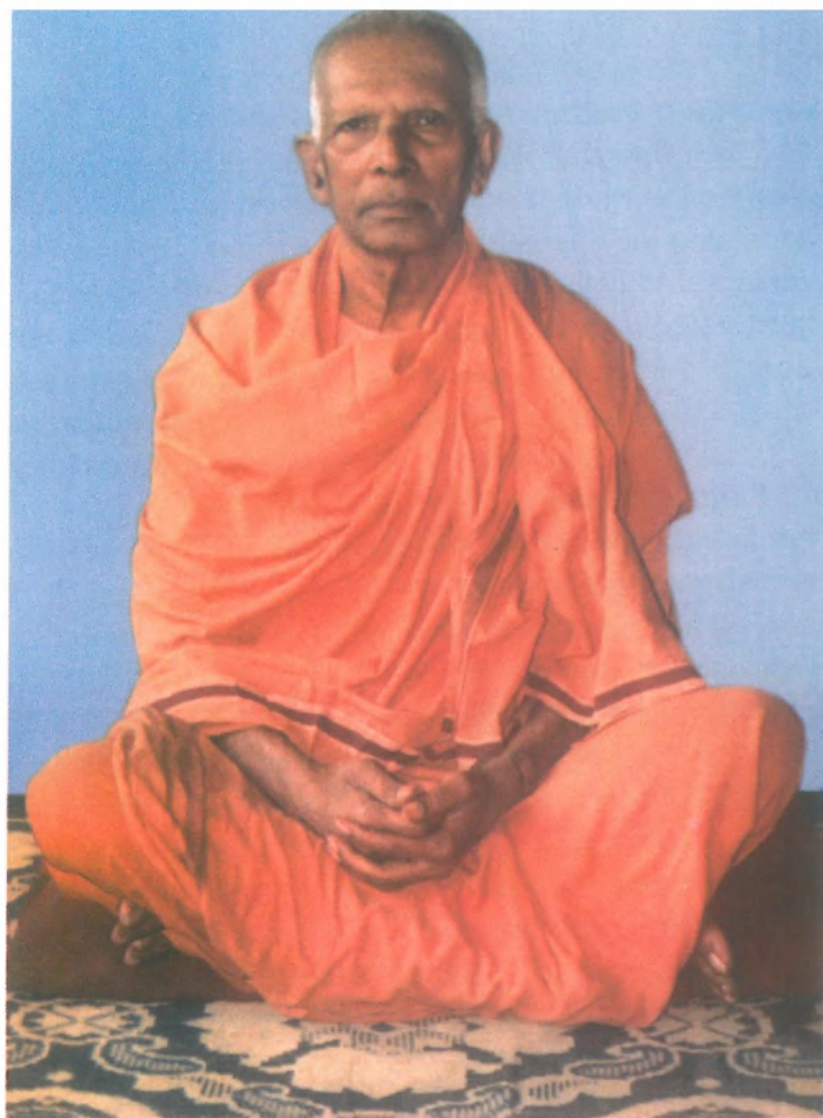
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Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj (1908–2005)

# SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

One of the unique features of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission is that they trace their origin to the Avatar of the present age – Sri Ramakrishna. The Avatar comes to revitalize religion and show a new path suited to the times. His power and message are preserved by an unbroken *Guruparampara* (succession of teachers). This is the holy tradition that sustains the succession of Presidents of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj was the 13th link in the unbroken chain of Presidents of the twin institutions.

*Shankaran*, who was later to become the 13th President of the Ramakrishna Sangha, saw the light of day on 15 December 1908, in Trikkur, a quiet village near Trichur (or Thrissur) in Kerala, on the bank of the river *Manalipuzha*. (The day also happened to be Holy Mother Sarada Devi's birthday that year.) His parents, Neelakantha Shastri and Lakshmi Kutty Amma, who were quite well off with their substantial agricultural income, fondly called Shankaran, their second son, Kochappan. Neelakantha Shastri was a pious Brahmin. Mother Lakshmi Kutty Amma also was very pious and a woman of strong character who exerted much influence on Shankaran (Shankar). During his boyhood Shankar accompanied his mother to the nearby Shiva temple. The kid loved to pick flowers and collect *bilva* leaves for his mother's worship. He once said that, as a young boy, he had a vivid dream that a bright light came out of the Shiva temple near his house and engulfed him. Growing up as he did on the bank of a river, he was a good swimmer.

(Later, when at Belur Math, he used to spend a lot of time in the Ganga. Mahapurush Maharaj, Swami Shivanandaji, noticed this once and said: "Tell the fellow, this is not Kerala; he will catch a cold if he stays too long in the water.)"

Water sports seemed to fascinate him throughout his life. Once, during his Karachi days, while going by boat with several companions, he jumped into the Sindhu river and disappeared! His companions heaved a sigh of relief only when, after some time, he surfaced and swam back to the boat. He repeated this feat a few years later in USA at Lake Tahoe, a deep lake with temperatures near freezing point.

Shankar completed his High School education in the neighbouring village of Ollur. About these early days Maharaj said that though he was born and bred in a village environment, he somehow succeeded in cultivating a broad outlook in life. He broke rules of untouchability and caste superiority and did not hesitate to eat fruit from the hands of a pariah tenant couple. Later when Shankar left home, this couple wept.

He makes this interesting comment about himself: "Though born and brought up in Kerala, my feeling of identification was never confined to that one state but became national and international. Whichever state I visited for a lecture programme, I felt I belonged to that state. The same feeling I had in the international sphere also. For nearly fifteen years, I have gone every year to countries like Holland, Germany, USA, Australia and Singapore. And the people there also treated me as belonging to them....The one parting sentence after a programme in any town or city was—Please come again! That is a blessing coming to a representative of *Amar Bharat*, Eternal India."

Once, when he was ten years old, his mother fell ill and medicine had to be procured from an Ayurvedic doctor living a mile away on the other bank of the river. It was raining heavily. The family cook agreed to go by boat if one of the older boys in the family went with him. Shankar volunteered, for two reasons as he clarified: love for his mother and love of adventure. He said that it was play and fun for him to row the boat. This love of adventure and dislike for an easy life, or as the German philosopher Nietzsche expressed in his dictum, 'live dangerously,' had been his trait from boyhood.

Since the village school had classes only up to class 3, Shankar had to study in class 3 itself for three years! It was then gradually upgraded. A turning point in his life came at the age of fifteen when he was in class 8. A friend brought a book in English from the Thrissur town library and asked him: "Would you like to read this book?" Oh yes! The book happened to be *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He could put down the book only after reading almost the first 100 pages. To quote him: "The appeal of Sri Ramakrishna to my heart was simply instantaneous and tremendous." He said that the reading of the book produced a deepening and broadening of his view of life. Next came to his hands three or four volumes of Swamiji's *Complete Works*; Sister Nivedita's *The Master as I Saw Him*; and so on. It was around this time that he also memorised Swami Abhedanandaji's immortal hymn to Holy Mother beginning with *Prakritim paramām abhayām varadām*. The seeds for his guiding philosophy of life "Godward passion transmuted into manward love" (an expression that he himself coined) seem to have been sown around this time.

(After the first reading of the *Gospel*, Shankar developed a great love and respect for 'M', Mahendra Nath

Gupta, the chronicler of the *Gospel*. When he came for *brahmacharya diksha* to Belur Math in 1929, he met M and paid his loving respects to him. He also visited M's residence once in the company of other sadhus. They spent about three hours with M who, Maharaj remembered, spoke only about Sri Ramakrishna.)

When Shankar was 12 or 13 years old, once in his mother's presence, he used some foul words against a person. His mother immediately reprimanded him, lovingly saying: "My boy, your tongue is the abode of *Vāni* or *Saraswati*, the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom. Don't soil it by using foul language against others." The advice, he said, went straight to his head and heart. Little wonder then that the Goddess manifested so tangibly through his blessed tongue for over eight decades.

It did not take long for the urge to renounce all for the sake of Sri Ramakrishna to dawn in the heart of Shankar. He said about this later: "That was in 1924. I was only fifteen and a half years old then, and was waiting for an opportunity to join the Ramakrishna Order. In 1926, after finishing my school final examination, I joined a typewriting Institute in Thrissur to learn shorthand and typewriting. Some fee had to be paid. I took Rs.3 from home and came to Thrissur. From there I wrote to Ramakrishna Math, Madras, that I wanted to join the Ramakrishna Order. A *brahmachari* replied that since there was no room in the Madras Math then, I should join the newly started Ashrama at Mysore."

Shankar accordingly wrote to Gopal Maharaj (Swami Siddheshwaranandaji), head of the Mysore Ashrama. Fortunately, this Swami himself came to Thrissur on personal work. When Shankar told him of his intention to join the Order he consented but queried whether the boy had the fare for the journey from Thrissur to Mysore (via Ooty). As

stated earlier, Shankar had just three rupees with him. He also had his gold ear-rings (It was customary even for boys to wear these in the Kerala of those days.) He offered to sell this pair, but that day was a Sunday, and the shops were closed. But one person gave him two rupees and Swami Siddheshwaranandaji gave him two more. In all he was left with Rs.7. Since even this sum was not enough for the journey, he was greatly disturbed.

To continue with his narration: "I was very young then, only seventeen and a half years old. I went to Sri Ramakrishna shrine in Thrissur Vivekodayam High School to pray for Thakur's grace. I often used to bring flowers from my house for worship in that shrine. With tears in my eyes, I prayed to Thakur to arrange for my renunciation and departure to Mysore with Swami Siddheshwaranandaji. Even now after 70 years (Maharaj was talking about this in Belur Math in 1995 when he was a Vice President of the Sangha) the memory of the event in that shrine stirs me."

Undoubtedly the boy's tears moved Thakur. At 8.30 pm that day Swami Siddheshwaranandaji and Shankar got into the train and reached Ooty the next morning. Another milestone was reached at Ooty. Mahapurush Maharaj, Swami Shivanandaji, was then staying there in a rented house. The present Ooty Math was being built. Shankar would have his breakfast in Mahapurush Maharaj's room, but had to buy his own lunch and dinner outside. This continued for a week.

On 30 June 1926, he got his *mantra diksha* from Mahapurush Maharaj. This is what he said about his initiation: "I entered the room in which Mahapurush Maharaj was sitting for the ceremony. To his left was my seat. I sat down and looked at the whole scene. A dream I had three or



four years earlier came to my mind. I used to worship regularly Shiva in the village rock cave temple. In that dream, I was lifted high up in the sky; then I reached a beautiful place. An old venerable-looking person was sitting there, and my mind recognised him as Shiva. He asked me to sit to his left and gave me some spiritual instructions. That was the dream, and I found an exact reproduction of that dream in that room in Ooty. Mahapurush Maharaj asked me, 'Do you worship Sri Ramakrishna?' I said, 'No, I don't actually worship, but I keep a picture of his and salute it regularly.' And he said, 'That is all right.' He then gave me the mantra and asked me, 'Have you brought any guru dakshina?' 'Nothing,' I said. Only one shirt, one dhoti, and one towel—that was all I had brought from my house. He took two or three mangoes from his right side and gave them to me and said, 'Now give them back to me as guru dakshina.' I offered them back to him, made pranams to him and came out of the room."

A couple of days later when the newly initiated disciple went to make pranams to his guru before leaving for Mysore, the only instruction that Mahapurush Maharaj gave him was, "Serve Gopal", meaning Swami Siddheshwaranandaji. At his guru's behest, Shankar served the Swami at Mysore (and later at Bangalore) for nine years until Swami Siddheshwaranandaji left India to start a new centre in France.

Maharaj has some interesting things to say about his early days at Mysore: "For the first time I saw a big town with electric lights and all that. As a village boy, I did not know about town life. I did not know even how to post a letter, how to cash a cheque, etc. That night at 9 o'clock, for the first time in my life, I got a glass of milk and two pieces of bread for my supper from a boy who was living in the

Ashrama as a *bhikshannam* student. I still (November 1995) remember the taste of the first meal, of bread and milk, that I had in Mysore Ashrama seventy years ago. That was on 2 July 1926. On 3 July, my long hair was cut and my earrings were removed."

Thenceforth began a rigorous routine which continued for six years (and a further three years at Bangalore): washing dishes and kitchen utensils, cooking (incidentally Maharaj was a good cook, having done cooking at his home in Trikkur), collecting monthly subscriptions, gardening, looking after the hostel for school and college students, and so on. When talking about Maharaj's culinary skills, one interesting incident deserves mention: On 14 October 1956, while Maharaj was returning from Fiji he had to spend about twelve hours at Sydney airport. Instead of waiting at the airport, at the request of a devotee, Marie Byles, he spent some time at her home in Cheltenham (New South Wales). She was a famous conservationist, feminist, pacifist, and Australia's first lady-solicitor who helped bring Buddhism to Australia. She requested him to rest while she went about the cooking and asked a few guests to come over. Maharaj said that it would be ridiculous that she, an elderly lady, should be sweating in the kitchen and he, resting. The wise lady retorted that Hinduism prescribes that a guest is to be honoured as God. Maharaj said, "That may be all right with other guests, but it is different with the followers of Sri Ramakrishna who has taught us to find joy in service." She had then to yield and Maharaj prepared vegetable curry, *pāyas*, and other dishes.

Despite this demanding routine, he always found adequate time for study and japa-meditation. A Study Circle for monks was going on at Mysore Ashrama in those days.

Subramanya Iyer ("uncle" as he was called) taught Shankar Bhashya and Ramanuja Bhashya on the *Brahma Sutras* to (among others) Swamis Vimurtanandaji, Bhuteshanandaji, Tapasyanandaji and Brahmachari Shankar. While at the Mysore Ashrama, he enjoyed reading William McDougall's *Character and the Conduct of Life* (The author was a Professor at Harvard University then and the book was quite popular.) One particular sentence in this book left a lasting impression on Shankar: "Young people seek praise; but it is better to seek to be praise-worthy."

Someone questioned him how with very little formal education, he could pick up Sanskrit and master the scriptures. He replied: "At Mysore Ashrama I would keep rice, vegetables, etc on the stove for boiling. Then I would go and stand near the room where Vedanta classes were being held by Prof. Subramanya Iyer. In this way I slowly picked up both Sanskrit and the Shastras." He narrated how he memorised the Gita: "Whatever Swami Vivekananda said is law to me. Since Swamiji said that the Gita should be memorised, I started to commit the Gita to memory. I was then in Mysore. There was so much work. Still I decided I must fulfil Swamiji's instruction. I decided to commit to memory one chapter every month. In this way I could memorise 18 chapters in 18 months. Sometimes 5 to 6 shlokas would remain on the 30th or 31st of a month. But since I had taken a vow to complete the chapter in one month, I would not sleep until I had committed to memory the remaining shlokas. Then only I would go to sleep." As a *brahmachari* he had acutely felt the need to own personal books so that he would have the freedom to mark, write notes, etc on the pages. Therefore in later years he saw to it that other *brahmacharis* and students did not suffer for want of personal books.

He remembered that he was always happy and cheerful and enjoyed doing any work as Thakur's service, never experiencing any fatigue. Wrestling seemed to be a popular sport with him. At Mysore and later at Belur Math too he would visit the *akhadas* for wrestling. He remembered that Swami Apurvanandaji (Mahapurush Maharaj's sevak) was a good wrestler. Sometime later, volleyball too captured his imagination. Even when he was a trustee of the Sangha, he would play volleyball with the *brahmacharis* of the Training Centre at Belur Math. A senior monk recalled that once, when Maharaj saw a volleyball match in progress, he immediately adjusted his dhoti and joined the players!

During his three-year stay at Bangalore, he interacted with many students and teachers. He conducted Sunday morning Gita classes for the Bangalore Central Jail inmates. (For some time he also addressed inmates at the Mysore Jail.) In fact, in 1936, Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary was also celebrated there with a harikatha and distribution of prasad. About 1000 inmates made pranams to Maharaj that day. Some of them said, "We have never enjoyed such happiness and joy before."

On Buddha Purnima, 23 May 1929, at Belur Math Mahapurush Maharaj gave him the *brahmacharya* vows and the name *Yati Chaitanya*. Maharaj spent about four months at Belur Math on this occasion. (But for Swami Shuddhanandaji's constant reminders to go back to Mysore, he would have continued to stay happily at Belur Math.) He was assigned various tasks during this sojourn: sweeping the spacious front courtyard of the Math (the place in front of today's *Math Office*), washing puja vessels, serving tea, sadhu seva in the dining hall, bringing water from a tube-well in Liluah for Mahapurush Maharaj's bath and so on. Added to all this, he would exercise on the parallel

bars in the Math compound (These were installed on the eastern side of Sri Ramakrishna Temple where these days the platform is erected during celebrations.) As he himself said: "I was very young then, and full of tireless energy.... I had time for everything. I was also hungry all the time except after lunch and dinner."

Regarding the food served in Belur Math in those days, Maharaj said: "Morning breakfast was tea and a thin slice of bread, as thin as the knife blade, with a little butter on it. As for tea, only one glass of milk was used to prepare tea for all the inmates with plenty of water and sugar." To satisfy his hunger he would eat a lot of *muri* (pop-rice). Though he had a ravenous appetite in his youth, in later years he developed stomach ailments owing to frequent travels worldwide, irregular meals, and the taking of unsuitable food.

Swami Vivekananda's birthday in 1933 (January 23) was the day on which Mahapurush Maharaj gave *sannyasa* vows to Yati Chaitanya at Belur Math and the name Ranganathananda. Owing to ill health, Mahapurush Maharaj could not come to the (old) shrine for the ceremony proper. The guru, however, gave the *sannyasa mantras*, the *gerua* cloth, and the monastic names to the new monks (9 in all) in his room. It may be mentioned here that Mahapurush Maharaj had permitted Shankar to wear the *gerua* cloth from 1927, just about four or five months after joining the Order. So he had been wearing *gerua* clothes even as a *brahmachari*. *Sannyasa* was therefore a matter of inner transformation for him.

After *sannyasa*, with his guru's blessings, Maharaj went to Sargachhi to pay his respects to Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj. It was quite inexpensive to go to Sargachhi those days. There was a system of weekend-return railway

tickets—go on Friday to return on Sunday. Maharaj had a wonderful weekend there.

When the time came for leaving Sargachhi, after making pranams to Akhandanandaji, he said, "Maharaj, I want your blessings. I am working with the people, especially young people. Bless me that I become an instrument of Swamiji for inspiring our young people with Swamiji's ideas. With your blessing, I am sure, I will get that capacity. I have not seen Swamiji, but I have met you, and he loved you very much." At this Akhandanandaji became very grave and, placing both his palms on Maharaj's head said, "I bless you, I bless you!" And Maharaj felt a tremendous feeling of elevation within, a new power arising within.

Maharaj had also the good fortune of coming into close contact with Khoka Maharaj, Swami Subodhanandaji. Khoka Maharaj used to lie on the verandah of Swamiji's bedroom-block facing the Ganga and enjoy the hookah like a child.

His brief association with Vijnananandaji Maharaj and Abhedanandaji Maharaj may also be narrated here. He went to Allahabad seeking the blessings of Vijnananandaji Maharaj. After accepting his pranams, Vijnan Maharaj remarked, "You have seen me, now go and take drinking water from the tap and you can go back." Maharaj enjoyed that remark! Apart from meeting Swami Abhedanandaji in his Calcutta Ashrama, Maharaj attended his Town Hall lecture during Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Centenary Celebrations in 1937. He also heard Rabindranath Tagore's lecture at the Calcutta University Institute.

Although he appeared to be jolly outwardly, he was all along growing inwardly in stature. Along with keen intelligence and scholarship he was also developing

leadership qualities which did not escape the attention of senior monks at Belur Math. At the young age of 31 he was chosen to be the head of the Mission's Rangoon (Yangon today) Society. He went there in 1933 doubling as secretary of the centre and its librarian. It was here that he blossomed forth as an eloquent speaker. His weekly classes on the Gita and Upanishads, as well as occasional lectures on philosophy and cultural and educational topics started attracting record audiences. Here perhaps were put together the chemicals for evolving *Vedantic Thought Bombs* (his words) which, in the not-too-distant future, he was to throw at unsuspecting audiences the world over, regardless of religion or caste, gender or nationality, civilian or military, young or old!

He organised flood relief operations in Rangoon in 1939. A 200-bed hospital also started functioning there. It was a very popular hospital, about which he would say, "Ministers came to our hospital for treatment; they would not go to government hospitals." Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru visited him in Rangoon. Gandhiji wrote in the visitors' book: "I see here the successful combination of dexterity in work and service." (Maharaj had already met Gandhiji at Mysore and again at Bangalore.) In 1942, during the Second World War, when Japan bombed Burma (Myanmar today) and the centre had to be wound up, Maharaj came back to Dhaka preferring the adventurous land route trekking along with thousands of other refugees, although more comfortable alternatives were available.

An excerpt or two from a letter to a friend in Mysore about this within a couple of days after he reached Dhaka reveals the indomitable spirit of adventure and service: "We left Prome in Central Burma on 22 February 1942. At

Paduang village, on the other side of the Irrawady river, we had to halt for a day, as bullock carts were not available.... From here began an informal life, in the fashion of homeless nomads.... We left Paduang for Tungup.... The journey took five and a half days through a waterless and mountainous track of about 100 miles. Hundreds of refugees, poor and rich, men and women, as also babies a few days old were also moving along, enduring all sorts of hardships.... The road all along was strewn with the bodies of the dead and the dying.... We did what we could to instruct people on the way, and kept a record of the dead bodies [we] noticed.... From nooks and corners came the stench of decaying bodies.... It was a most heart-rending scene—from a party, one man or woman is attacked with cholera, and he or she drops down.... Everyone who travelled by that road and witnessed this tragedy must have developed reflections within himself or herself.... In a Buddhist monastery in Prome, I had seen a pictorial illustration of the teaching that beauty is but skin deep. I doubt whether many have been impressed with the truth of the saying by studying those illustrations. But to see hundreds of human bodies in varying stages of decomposition—from the live colour of the living, through the pallor of the dying, to the dropping flesh of the decomposed—is to get the truth of the saying driven home into one's mind and heart....

"I did most of the cooking for the party of five, on the way. We were a joyous and cheerful group, and I enjoyed the trip immensely, except for the awareness of suffering around. I am thankful to have decided to come by this route, forsaking offers of plane or steamer journeys from Rangoon itself; otherwise a rich experience would have been denied to me.... Thus we spent four nights and five days on (for us) uncharted waters.... I got down and went



ashore (at Kyaukpyu,) where a Gujarati young man..., hearing that I belonged to the Ramakrishna Mission, requested me to stay with them at Kyaukpyu, and help them in their work of refugee relief. I gladly consented to stay with them for a short period. When my party got down, all others also got down, unwilling by themselves to proceed further.... Here at Kyaukpyu the tired and depressed refugees experienced for the first time since leaving their homes in Rangoon and elsewhere the warmth of welcome and sympathy and help.... I was glad to live and work in such company, for however short a period it be...."

When he reached Dhaka he had become a mere skeleton weighing just 80 pounds (about 36 kg). He was later sent to Kankhal centre for rest and recuperation. The Belur Math authorities wrote to Kankhal centre, "Take care of him; he is a precious monk." In four months, Maharaj was his usual self and wanted to play volleyball! And the order came from the headquarters at Belur Math, "Go and take charge of Karachi centre."

He became the head at Karachi Math from 9 August 1942. Here, apart from various philanthropic activities, Maharaj collected substantial donations and shipped over 1250 tons of rice by a special steamer to Calcutta during the gruesome Bengal famine of 1943. A unit of rice cost Rs.9 then in Karachi as against Rs.100 in Bengal. Swami Madhavanandaji, the then General Secretary of the Sangha, visited Karachi centre once. The Sunday lectures by Swami Ranganathananda were very popular. Madhavanandaji asked a monk at the centre why Shankar (as he was known to his seniors) did not invite him to hear his lecture? Maharaj replied, "You are my senior. How can I ask you to come?" Madhavanandaji did attend Maharaj's lectures subsequently and commented to another sadhu, *Thakur Shankarke kole*

*niye khela khelcchen*; "Taking Shankar on his lap, Thakur is playing."

The partition of India took place on 15 August 1947. The exchange of Punjab population on communal lines took place—all non-Muslims from West Punjab came to India and Muslims from East Punjab went to Pakistan. The Mission started the Punjab Refugee Relief work on a massive scale at Kurukshetra. Soon after partition, it became difficult for the Math centre at Karachi to carry on normal activities. Maharaj and five other monastic members were staying there continuing the work under very risky conditions. The Math building became a victim of vandalism in January 1948. It was forcibly occupied by a high official from India who had opted to go to Pakistan to serve there. All monastic inmates had to shift to a nearby bungalow offered by a close friend. Finally, Maharaj and the others wound up the work there and left Karachi on 9 August 1948.

He said later: "My old Pathan watchman and two Sindhi Muslim youths working as cook and housekeeper wept when I took final leave of them in 1948 to take charge of our Delhi centre. It is a great experience to give love to and receive love from men, women, and children of all communities and races."

It was not just through organised relief camps, dispensaries, and so on that Maharaj applied his doctrine of *Godward passion and manward love*; there were several other instances in his personal life which showed how he followed this integral principle. Out of scores of such instances, just a few are narrated below by way of illustration.

\* While he was in Burma, a postman used to come with the mail, sweating profusely in the heat and humidity of summer. Maharaj once requested that he be given a

glass of chilled water and asked him to sit on the sofa, while Maharaj acknowledged receipt of the registered letters. The postman, however, sat on the floor and would not occupy the sofa despite repeated requests. Maharaj literally carried him to the sofa and made him sit on it.

\* When he was at Hyderabad, a devotee from Arunachal Pradesh came to see him and gave him a costly blanket. A little while later another devotee from Kashmir came to see him, who narrated to Maharaj the difficulties pundits in Kashmir were facing. On hearing this he gave away the blanket he had just received.

\* Once a lady from Chennai wrote to Maharaj (then at Hyderabad) that her husband was to undergo an eye operation; this required money, which she could ill afford as she lived in the slums. Maharaj asked his sevak whether he could send the money by a demand draft. On being told that the poor lady might find it difficult to cash the draft, Maharaj wrote to the Manager of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, to send her some money. When the money was given to her at her home, she wept out of sheer gratitude.

\* A young man who had just joined the Order wrote to Maharaj that his parents were financially dependent on him and were now suffering after his joining the Order. He too was feeling depressed owing to this and was unable to decide whether he should go back home. Maharaj immediately arranged to send money to his parents.

\* A private organization working for tribals in Wayanad in north Kerala wrote to Maharaj seeking financial assistance for their school building. Since the organization was not affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission, objections were raised about sending money to them. Maharaj, however, overrode the objections and sent some money to them.

\* He wanted that, at least in Jayrambati, no woman should suffer for want of toilet facilities as Holy Mother had to during her lifetime. He provided funds for the construction of eighty low-cost toilets in Jayrambati.

\* A well-wisher in Eluru (Andhra Pradesh) once gifted Rs.80,000/- to Maharaj. He gave away the amount immediately to our Rajahmundry centre for their tribal activities.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "A man may live in a mountain cave, smear his body with ashes, observe fasts, and practise austere discipline, but if his mind dwells on worldly objects, on lust and gold, I would say 'Fie on him!' But I would say that a man is indeed blessed if he eats, drinks and roams about but keeps his mind free from lust and gold." The truth of this statement was seen in Shankar Maharaj. He never cared for austerities or external observances. But he built a strong character based on absolute purity. This gave him not only great inner strength but also inner freedom. Because he was inwardly free he was always happy, could mix with all freely and do all his work with innocent cheerfulness. He maintained this innocent cheerfulness throughout his life.

Maharaj was also gifted with a keen sense of humour. Once when at Mysore Ashrama, he took a few days off to visit nearby places. At night he had food at a devotee's house, but noticed that the place was too small to accommodate the guest. He, therefore, decided to spend the night in a wayside shelter. On waking up he found that he was surrounded by cows, sheep, cats, and what not. He later remarked that he felt as if he had attained the *avadhuta* state.

He was once being attended to by an ENT specialist to treat the buzzing sound in one of his ears. After treating the affected ear, the doctor asked Maharaj, "Has the saa, saa, sound stopped, Maharaj?" And he replied, "No, the child is crying no more!"

Maharaj did most of his travelling (including air travel) with just a cotton sling-bag. Once his sevak showed him a new leather bag (like the ones commonly used) and requested Maharaj to use the new one thenceforth. To this Maharaj replied, "This fellow has travelled with me for many years, but has never asked me for food or water. I cannot leave it."

Once Maharaj was to fly back from Dhaka to Kolkata. On the day before the return flight, a sevak reminded him of this. Maharaj asked him, "And when are you leaving?" "All four of us (meaning Maharaj, his secretary and two sevaks) will fly back together," was the reply. Maharaj responded, "No, it should not be that way! Rather we should fly separately in batches of two, so that, if something were to go wrong, at least two will be left to report what happened!"

Simplicity is one of the hall-marks of greatness. Maharaj's life was an object lesson in simplicity. He never possessed anything in his life except bare necessities and minimum comforts. He never cared for his personal appearance. An ordinary dhoti, a shirt, a *chaddar* and a pair of sandals were all that he ever wore. In winter, he put on a cotton cap with ear flaps which was, however, seldom found properly positioned! He never liked luxury in food or furnishings. Before he became President, he never allowed anything in his bedroom, other than a simple bed and a small stool, on which was a small picture of Sri Ramakrishna. When he became President of the Order, for

several months he refused to accept more than two sevaks, although owing to his deteriorating health, at least two more were needed. Indeed, he lived such a simple life that it is difficult for most people to imitate it.

Maharaj was often asked, "Why don't you have a car?" His reply was: "Car? I don't need one. What I need I have. So many devotees send me their cars when I need one. Taxies are also cheap. Keeping a car is very costly. People think in terms of prestige. You think your status requires a car; that is foolish. That is a worldly attitude. We sadhus have no such status. With our ideal of poverty, we have a very high status. People come to us, the top people, because we are poor, because we have renunciation. I have always maintained that I am a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order. Nothing more can be added to that. It is the biggest title."

One great sentence in Swamiji's *Complete Works* helped him immensely to shape his life and character, said Maharaj: "Can you combine seriousness with childlike naivete?" And he would remark, "naivete" means *saralata* in Sanskrit. This *saralata* endeared him to children wherever he went. Once he gave a particular name to the child of a devotee. The child grew up and by the time it was 3 years old, could sing *arati* hymns. Once, when Maharaj visited the branch near their house, the child came to the Ashrama with its family. Maharaj had forgotten the name of the child and so asked it its name. At this, the child immediately replied: "What is this? You have given me this name and you have forgotten it yourself?" Indeed, children found a playmate in Maharaj.

It is well known that the main thrust of Maharaj's speeches and discourses was the message of Swami Vivekananda, and exposition of Swamiji's ideas was the

chief mission and passion of his life. His devotion to Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is also well known. But not many people are aware of his intense devotion to Holy Mother. His devotion to Holy Mother was in no way less than his devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. On the *ashtami* day of Durga Puja in 2003, he said to his sevak, "Let's go to Mother's temple." The sevak asked, "To the Durga Puja *pandal* Maharaj?" He replied, "No, No! To Holy Mother's temple. She is the living Durga." He used to say, "I will do anything for Jayrambati." He once had a plan to make Jayrambati an ideal village, and an Australian millionaire promised financial help. But unfortunately, the businessman suffered loss in his business, and so the plan fell through.

It was his love for Holy Mother that made him a staunch supporter of Sri Sarada Math and its social service wing, the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission. Several branch centres of these twin organizations owe their existence to the active help from Maharaj. Out of his personal *pranami* fund he extended financial support to several of these institutions on several occasions.

In this connection we are giving in full, a remarkable dream which Maharaj had about Holy Mother. It had been recorded by Maharaj himself and was found after his passing away: "2 June 1968: Early morning at 4.30 am had a vivid dream. I was going with a few monastic brothers to an ashrama where special puja was being organized. I saw puja materials, flowers, and offerings already arranged and getting arranged. Several separate puja vessels and pictures of Thakur, Mother and Swamiji were there in the same *pandal*. I went to make pranams to the Mother's picture in one of the groups; as soon as I saluted, Holy Mother came out of the picture in living form and touching me asked me to attend to washing some of the puja vessels yet remaining

unwashed. Her touch sent a thrill of joy through me when I realized that it was not the picture that was before me but the all-loving living Mother Herself. Ah! The joy of it! I placed my head in her lap and saluted again and weepingly asked her to show her living loving form to me at least once a day. She agreed and enfolded me in her arms with an expression of unutterable love and tenderness. Then I went to wash the puja vessels with a deep sense of joy and blessedness and I woke up in great joy and looked at the pictures of Guru Maharaj and Raja Maharaj in the room prayerfully. I looked at the watch and found it was 4.35 am. This was my first dream of the Holy Mother. I had a blessed dream of Guru Maharaj at Mayavati during my last visit in 1952 or 1960 and again in the Institute in 1963. Recorded at 11.30 am on 2.6.68. R."

Maharaj loved to listen to music also. He would ask the newly ordained sannyasins generally to sing Ramprasad's songs and he would keep time by happily clapping. Once, at Narendrapur he was listening to hymns being sung to the Divine Mother. The singer swami observed tears in the corners of Maharaj's eyes.

A monk once asked him, "Is this my last birth?" Maharaj replied, "Yes, this is your last birth; but I shall have to come again to do Swamiji's work."

After his return from Karachi, Maharaj took a year's leave from official assignments and toured several places, including Andhra Pradesh. He also visited Hyderabad at that time since some of the devotees and friends from Karachi had settled in Hyderabad after partition.

In 1949 Maharaj was made head of the centre in New Delhi where he remained till 1962. At the Delhi centre he built a spacious public library, a large university students' textbook library and an auditorium. All through his life,



Maharaj attended to the needs of students by providing them with books and by starting libraries. Study was indeed a passion with him. He would often remark that if the Goddess of wealth, Laxmi, was invoked alone she might run away after some time. But if the Goddess of Learning, Saraswati (*Vāni*, as she is also known, was a word which Maharaj liked very much) was first invoked, Laxmi also would come, and the two sisters would stay with us always.

The beautiful Sri Ramakrishna Temple at New Delhi was built during his tenure. He organised bands of dedicated workers for social service and medical service including service to leprosy patients. His Sunday morning discourses at the Delhi University and the Sunday evening discourses in the Mission premises, which attracted large audiences, became outstanding features of the cultural and intellectual life of India's capital. The number at the Mission rose sometimes to more than two thousand, the overflow audience sitting on the lawns outside. He became one of the most admired speakers, attracting high officials of the Government, bureaucrats, businessmen, even ambassadors and members of embassy staff. The US ambassador, Chester Bowles, regularly attended Maharaj's lectures.

From Delhi he was once to fly to Afghanistan on invitation. As was his wont, he did not carry any money with him. At Delhi airport he was told that entry into Afghanistan was subject to having at least Rs.500/- in one's pocket. Maharaj just went to a devotee's house which was close to the airport. The lady of the house very gladly handed over the amount to him. Later when someone from Delhi centre went to return the money, the devotee simply refused to take it back, saying that they were indeed blessed for having had the privilege to be of some help to Maharaj.

During his stay in Delhi and later in Calcutta, he undertook repeated lecture tours within India, addressing universities, colleges, schools, cultural institutions and administrative training academies. At the request of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, he also undertook extensive lecture tours of foreign countries from 1946 to 1972 covering Japan and several South-East Asian countries, 17 European countries (including 5 communist countries: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, USSR, and Cuba.) When in Czechoslovakia, he went to the house of Miss Helena Dvorak, sister of Frank Dvorak, whose painting of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother endears Frank to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Helena showed Maharaj a *gerua* cloth used by Swami Vivekananda which she had received as a gift from Miss Macleod.

In 1961 Maharaj was elected a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission.

In 1962, he was transferred to Calcutta to head the Institute of Culture at Gol Park. Here he continued his discourses on the Gita and the Upanishads. He also gave several broadcast talks at the invitation of the All India Radio. For the first time a monk of the Order was invited by the University of Calcutta to give the convocation address on *India's Educational Vision* in February 1966. Another convocation address followed at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, in June 1967, the topic being *The Indian Philosophy of Social Work*.

After undertaking extensive lecture tours from 1946 to 1972 covering 50 countries, he visited annually Australia, USA, Holland and Germany from 1973 to 1986. During his second lecture tour of Britain in 1976, he was invited by the (Anglican Church) Dean of Westminster and his wife to visit

them. Later at their request he addressed students of classes 8 to 10 of Westminster High School for about 40 minutes. As Maharaj recalled: "The students listened with rapt attention and the headmaster remarked that they were difficult to control in their classroom but they heard the lecture with perfect attention." Later the Dean and his wife told Maharaj that they were then reading with great delight *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

After all this extensive travel abroad Maharaj simply remarked: "One important thing which life has taught me is that India's Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna appeal directly to many thinking minds in the West through books, without the intervention of any Indian teacher."

A senior swami remarks, "Maharaj always preached Vedanta as the only panacea for all the ills of life, individual and collective. Not only did he preach, he applied this in his life, and succeeded." This swami once attended a lecture by Maharaj in Orissa and said about it, "He spoke for an hour and forty-five minutes, and I sat spellbound all through the lecture." He also remembers another instance which occurred at Wardha (Maharashtra) at the Gandhi Ashrama; there Maharaj spoke for just 5 minutes—but it seemed that he completely conveyed all that he had to say.

It may be mentioned here that although Maharaj travelled all over the world several times, he always remained a *sannyasi*. True to the spirit of *sannyasa*, he seldom carried money with him, depending solely on Providence. He said he never experienced any difficulty on this account except on one occasion. Once when Maharaj landed at Sydney airport, he found that no one had come to receive him. Since he was not in the habit of carrying any money with him, he could not even make a phone call. He approached a person sitting on a bench at the airport, explained the

situation, and requested him to lend a coin for the phone call. But the man responded rudely. Just then a lady, who had been watching the scene, came to him and asked whether he needed help. Maharaj said he needed just 50 cents to make a phone call. She gave the amount and Maharaj made the phone call.

Maharaj rubbed shoulders with Presidents and Prime Ministers, kings and dignitaries, ministers and bureaucrats, capitalists and communists, executives and workers, monastics and householders, young and old, with perfect equanimity.

None went to him and returned without a word of hope, encouragement or inspiration. Swami Yatiswaranandaji (an earlier Vice President) once said: "Ranganathananda knows how to make friends and keep them." Maharaj was obviously established in what Swamiji said: "I do not believe in humility, but in *samadarshitva*—same-sightedness." Another swami recalls that Maharaj never criticised anyone, either in the person's presence or otherwise.

Between 1973 and 1993, Maharaj was President of the newly affiliated Math at Hyderabad (which moved to its present location in 1978). During his stewardship the Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna was constructed. Among other memorable additions then are the Vivekananda Auditorium to seat about 1000, the Vivekananda Library and Reading Room, and the Vivekananda Health Centre. Today the Hyderabad Math has become an important landmark in the twin cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad, owing mostly to the indefatigable energy of its first President.

Maharaj was very particular that perfect silence was maintained in the temple. Once, some devotees were talking a little too loudly in the *nat-mandir* of the Hyderabad temple.

The *pujari*, who was in Thakur's bedroom, came out and requested them to talk softly. The devotees responded saying that there was no one else in the temple, so why all this fuss. The *pujari* pointed out in a harsher tone that there could be others meditating behind the shrine. At this the devotees became quiet. A month or two later, Maharaj called the *pujari* and said to him that the headquarters wanted to know why the *pujari* was rude to the devotees. The *pujari* explained in detail all that had transpired. After hearing everything, Maharaj took out a paper from a file, handed it over to the *pujari*, and asked him to read it. It was a poem titled "Speak Gently" by David Bates, the first few lines of which went as follows:

Speak gently; it is better far  
To rule by love than fear;  
Speak gently; let no harsh words mar  
The good we might do here;

It may be mentioned here that the lectures which Maharaj gave were not mere intellectual exercises. They were outpourings of his soul. Whatever ideas he gave had been absorbed and assimilated by him and had become a part of his deepest convictions and thinking. So when he spoke, he spoke from his own life supported by his own personality. Swami Vivekananda once told Sister Nivedita, it was the character of the speaker that creates the impact and not his words. This was true with Ranganathanandaji Maharaj also. He put his heart and soul into his lectures so much so that he had little awareness of the needs of his own body and would not bother about food. One senior Swami has narrated a day's lecture programme as follows:

Maharaj and this Swami left one of our centres at 5 am to visit several (private) Ashramas that day. They were

to board the train for the return journey at Ongole (in Andhra Pradesh) at 11 pm. In the course of the day, Maharaj gave as many as eight or nine lectures without any trace of fatigue! He was utterly unconcerned about his food, being content with a glass of milk now and then. But at about 1 pm he said to the accompanying Swami, "You must be hungry." He arranged for their food in a devotee's house. This Swami who was tired and sleepy wanted to have some rest. But Maharaj would have none of it. It was once again "travel and lecture" immediately after the meal. When they reached Ongole at 10.15 or 10.30 pm, the station-master requested them to eat and rest at his home since the train was running one hour late. Accordingly they went to his house and had their meal. The station-master, however, with the permission of Maharaj, had invited some neighbours telling them that Maharaj would give a lecture ! Maharaj started to talk in English and it fell to the lot of the poor Swami to translate the lecture into Telugu even as Maharaj spoke. He was dog-tired and drowsy but there was no way out. This continued until about 11.45 pm when they were informed that the train would soon be arriving.

The innumerable lectures given by Maharaj have been brought out in the form of several books. The major ones are: *The Message of the Upanishads*; *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* (4 volumes); *A Pilgrim Looks at the World* (2 volumes); and *Universal Message of the Bhagavad-Gita—An Exposition of the Gita in the Light of Modern Thought and Modern Needs* (3 volumes). There are also several smaller books such as *Democratic Administration in the Light of Practical Vedanta*; *Social Responsibilities of Public Administrators*; *The Role of Local Government Institutions in our Democracy*; *Vedanta and the Future of Mankind*; *Vedanta and Science*; and *Neurology—What lies Beyond*; and so on.

The Gita volumes were released at the Raj Bhavan, Mumbai, in February 2001. Dr. P.C. Alexander, the then Governor of Maharashtra, said while releasing the book: "Will Durant...has given great tributes to India's ability to teach the West 'the tolerance and gentleness of the mature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit and a unifying pacifying love for all beings'...If I am to give a good example of a spiritual guide and teacher living in our times who really embodies the great virtues mentioned by Will Durant, I will unhesitatingly point out to the great sage of Belur Math, Revered Swami Ranganathananda."

To the above, Dr. Rafiq Zakaria, a Muslim scholar from Mumbai added: "I have read several translations of the Gita in English—from Sir Edwin Arnold's to Annie Besant's, to Gandhiji's, Vinobaji's and Radhakrishnan's and some others also... I find the exposition of Swami Ranganathananda in many respects unique.... Even the greatest scientists like Einstein or famous neurologists like Sir Charles Sherrington and poets like Wordsworth and Shelley and philosophers like Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell are brought in by Swamiji to give us an indepth understanding of the real meaning of these shlokas."

His book on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* was the last to be published. In all he has about 50 books and booklets to his credit.

These apart, there are also about 600 audio tapes and 50 video tapes which contain Maharaj's talks on a variety of topics: *Education in the Modern Age; Education and Ethical and Social Values; Vivekachudamani; Srimalad Bhagavatam; Re-education of the Educated; and the Bhagavad Gita.*

On 1 April 1989, Maharaj was elected a Vice President of the Order. He initiated the first batch of 35

candidates at the Cossipore Garden-house on 9 May 1990. He was at Belur Math in July 1998 to attend the four-monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees (Math) and Governing Body (Mission). Owing to health complications, he could not attend even a single session of the meeting; but had to be rushed to hospital. His health had been sinking rapidly and there were serious doubts about his recovery. In the meanwhile, the then President, Swami Bhuteshanandaji, had also to be hospitalised. As it turned out on 10 August 1998, Sri Ramakrishna called back Bhuteshanandaji to His Eternal Abode. Ranganathanandaji's health began to improve under the care of Dr. Subrata Moitra and a team other medical experts. The Board of Trustees in their meeting held on 7 September 1998 elected unanimously Ranganathanandaji Maharaj the President of the Order.

One of the Vice Presidents had gone to the nursing home to intimate to Maharaj his new status as President of the Order. Maharaj responded: "What! The cook of Mysore ashrama to be the President of the Sangha?" He was then recuperating at the Institute of Culture, Gol Park; the first person to get mantra *diksha* from him here was an American married to a Hindu woman who was a disciple of Maharaj.

As President of the Order, Maharaj continued his responsibility of spiritual ministration for about six and a half years. When health permitted, he went to New Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Mysore, and Hyderabad and other places for *diksha*. He also consecrated the temples of Sri Ramakrishna at Pune and Chennai. He was very keen that the project at Swamiji's birthplace be completed during his lifetime. At the time of the foundation stone laying ceremony (10 April 2001) his health did not permit him to participate in the function. He, however, assured the monk-



in-charge of the project that he would certainly be around at the time of inauguration of the completed project. The date fixed for the inauguration was 26 September 2004. Maharaj's health was playing truant even weeks before this date. He, however, assured the project-in-charge, "Don't worry; I'll keep my word. I will come." And he did come and bless the inaugural function.

Even in his nineties, Maharaj followed a strict regimen like a novice. (One of his favourite expressions was, "There is no holiday in spiritual life.") On days when there was no initiation, his daily routine went as follows: At 6 am he would sit for his japa. He would have a small quantity of *chhana* (cottage cheese). Next would be some exercise and walking. At 7.15 (except on Thursdays and *diksha* days) sadhus and *brahmachiris* would queue up for pranams. Like a small child he would gleefully throw chocolates at random to the assembly on that occasion. He would ask his sevaks to show the monastic brothers any new toys gifted by devotees. Concerned as he was with the welfare of all everywhere, he would read newspapers next. Breakfast would be at 8.30. Then followed attending to the mail and some study and reading till 11 am.

He read with great concentration. Once he began reading a book, he would become oblivious of time and space. Once a senior sadhu went to make pranams to Maharaj. He found Maharaj totally absorbed in reading *Sri Ramakrishna—The Great Master*. The sadhu did not feel inclined to disturb him, so he waited. It was only after a little while that Maharaj looked at him and asked in surprise, 'When did you come? Why didn't you call me?' He would always read books himself. Only when he was very ill would he ask others to read out to him. Even in advanced age, he would make margin-notes in books and underline important

passages. He spoke only as much as was required. He had read very early in life, *yogasya prathamam dwāram, vāg-nirodhah*, that is "The first step in Yoga is control of speech." He discouraged wastage of psychic energy in useless talk.

After accepting devotees' pranams, he would have his lunch at 12 noon. The amount of food that he consumed and its taste, would put anyone off in just a day or two. He never considered food an important item in his routine. As Maharaj would say, 'I take food only for the sake of routine.' After siesta, he would be back at his books once again. At 4.30 pm, he would exercise as advised by his doctors. Next was reading the *Kathamrita* (in Bengali). A little reading was followed by accepting devotees' pranams. Then he would sit for his japa. At times, the sevak, touched by his strict routine even at the age of 96, would request him to do his japa lying down on his bed. Immediately Maharaj would say, "No no, I shall do japa sitting." Again reading for some time; then, food at 9 pm; and going to bed around 9.45 pm.

After becoming President of the Order he gave *brahmacharya* ordination to seven batches of probationers and *sannyasa* ordination to seven batches of *brahmacharis* at Belur Math. The last *brahmacharya* ordination (for forty-five candidates) took place on Swamiji's birthday, 1 February 2005, and the last *sannyasa* ordination (also for forty-five candidates) took place on Thakur's birthday, 12 March 2005. He gave mantra *diksha* to four people on 8 March 2005. This was the last batch he initiated.

The concluding celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother at Belur Math from 4 to 6 January 2005 was an important event in which nearly ten thousand delegates participated. Maharaj gave a short but forceful

Benedictory Address at the inaugural session of the function. In that address Maharaj emphasized the need to put into practice at the social level Holy Mother's equality of vision by abolishing untouchability and caste distinctions from Indian society. This was the last major public function that Maharaj blessed.

He suffered a partial brainstem stroke in 2001. Doctors were amazed at his speedy recovery. He recovered most of his ability to speak and could walk fairly well with support. During the early part of 2005 he developed gastrointestinal bleeding. This required frequent blood transfusions and admission to hospital. He was admitted to the Woodlands Medical Centre, Kolkata, on 28 March for the treatment of chest infection. He returned to Belur Math on 8 April. Again on 17 April, he developed fever with rigor, for which he was readmitted to Woodlands Medical Centre on the same day. When the infection turned to septicemia, he was shifted to Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU). Though he initially seemed to respond to the treatment, he developed fever again. He was treated with a variety of antibiotics, but the chest infection could not be brought under control. On top of this, his kidneys also began to deteriorate. In spite of the best medical attention by a band of dedicated doctors, his condition grew worse. On 25 April, he had some breathing trouble at about 2.20 pm and the doctors rushed in. They did their best to bring him back to normalcy from the cardiac arrest, but failed. Maharaj attained *Mahasamadhi* at 3.51pm. He was fully alert till the end. He was 96 years, 4 months, and 11 days. His last words were: "Lift me up; I want to sit up. Lift me up."

Shri Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Chief Minister of West Bengal, sent a floral wreath as homage to Maharaj at the hospital as soon as he got the news. His body was brought

to Belur Math at 6.40 pm and was kept in the cultural hall adjacent to President Maharaj's quarters. A large number of our monastic brothers, as well as nuns and *brahmacharinis* from the Sarada Math, and thousands of disciples, devotees, friends and admirers, poured in all through the night and the day next to pay their last respects and homage with floral offerings. On 26th morning at 10.15 am, the body was taken in a procession to the courtyard in front of the Math Office and kept on a high platform in a decorated *pandal*, where it remained till 12.10 pm. The last rites of cremation started at 12.40 pm and were over by 3.15 pm.

In his condolence message the President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, called him "a swamiji of indomitable spirit and a great spiritual leader." And he added, "Swami Ranganathanandaji was a noble soul who immersed himself into the mission of spreading the message of the Vedanta to humanity spread throughout this planet. I fondly remember my meeting with him during my visit to the Belur Math in October last year."

The Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh said in his condolence message: "In the passing away of Swami Ranganathananda, the world has lost a true Sannyasi, in every sense of that term. We are all poorer today."

Messages have also been received from Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal; from other State Governors; Smt. Sonia Gandhi, All India Congress President; Bharat Sadhu Samaj from their headquarters at New Delhi; and from dignitaries, officials, organisations, and persons from different walks of life in India and abroad. On the 26th, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha (both houses of Indian Parliament) paid homage to Maharaj by standing in silence for a short while as a mark of respect to his memory. There was extensive coverage in the press as also

on Doordarshan and All India Radio. Newspapers in Bangladesh also published the news prominently.

Swami Ranganthanandaji Maharaj was a nationally and internationally well-known personality who made significant contributions to human welfare and progress. As such, he has an assured place in the history of the contemporary world. But he considered himself first and foremost a member of the Ramakrishna Order. Indeed, his unwavering faith in, and undivided love for, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda was the real power that freed him from all bondage and sustained him in all his noble endeavours. His life and work have become a part of the legacy of Ramakrishna Movement. Although his physical presence has been withdrawn from mortal gaze, the memory of his loving personality, indomitable spirit, earnest exhortations and joyful countenance will continue to inspire and support all of us for a long time.

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