

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA



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Swami Yatiswarananda, known as Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya in his pre-monastic life, was born on Wednesday, the 16th January, 1889 in his maternal uncle's house, in a village named Nandanpur in the District of Pabna, which is now in East Pakistan. His father, Ishan Chandra Bhattacharya, a teacher in a Government School, was a devout Brahmin and his mother Bidhumukhi Devi too was a pious lady and he was fortunate in being born in a religious family.

He had his early education in Jalpaiguri and Bogra and passed the Entrance examination from a school in Rangpur. He studied at Rajsahi and Cooch-behar colleges and afterwards at the Bangabasi College, Calcutta. Finally, he got admitted into the Presidency College, Calcutta, from where he passed the B.A. examination, securing a gold medal for having stood first in Sanskrit in the Calcutta University. He continued his post-graduate studies in Chemistry up to the sixth year, but did not come out successful, obviously because of his indifference to his studies. At this time, he was being filled with the spirit of renunciation as a result of his contact with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math. His parents naturally wanted him to lead a householder's life, but he plainly told his mother some day towards the end of 1911 that he was going to join the Ramakrishna Order to attain God-realisation and that, if he failed in his mission, he would surely come back and accede to their wishes.

With the little money that his parents gave him

he came straight to the Belur Math and joined the Order in 1911 at the age of 22. He was an initiated disciple of Srimat Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and was invested with Sannyasa by him in 1917 at Madras.

In 1921 he became the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, in which capacity he continued for two years. Thereafter, he was made the President of the Sri Ramkrishna Ashrama at Bombay for about a year. In 1926 he was appointed President of the Madras Math and he continued as such up to 1933. In 1928 he was made a Trustee of the Belur Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. At the invitation of a group of earnest souls, he was deputed to Weisbaden in the Rhineland (Germany) where he arrived in November, 1933. From the winter of 1935 to the end of 1938 he extended his activity to Switzerland, forming study circles at St. Moritz, and later at Geneva and other places, and also worked for several months at the Hague, in Holland, as also in Paris and London. In 1940, at the beginning of the Second World War, he left Germany and went to U.S.A. There, in December, 1942, he was able to start a Vedanta Centre at Philadelphia and was the head of that Centre up to 1949. He returned to India in 1950 from the U.S.A. via Europe. In 1951 he became the President of the Bangalore Ashrama, and in view of his sterling spiritual attainments, he was authorised by the Trustees of the Belur Math in 1952 to give initiation to spiritual aspirants. In 1962 he was elected Vice-President of the Ramkrishna Math and Mission.

The Swami was well versed in Eastern and Western

philosophies. He was an impressive speaker, a good writer, and was the author of *Adventures in Religious Life*, *Universal Prayers*, and *Divine Life*. His winning manners, feeling heart, catholic views, and spiritual attainments earned for him the admiration and devotion of a large number of friends and admirers, devotees and disciples in India and abroad whose lives were very much influenced by him. From about the middle of 1965, he had been suffering from various physical ailments. He was brought down to the Belur Math from Bangalore in December 1965 for change of climate along with treatment as advised by the attending physicians there. Unfortunately, his health went on deteriorating and on the 24th of January 1966 he had to be admitted to the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, due to a sudden flare up in his diabetic and other complications. In spite of the best medical care, the end came at 1-15 a.m. on 27th January, due to shock from diabetic acidosis with acute cardio-respiratory failure.

For some time before the final end, he had been feeling that the end was approaching. He was often heard saying : "Sri Maharaj has taken away all power from me. There is no use of this body any longer. Better it is cast away."

Thus ended a dedicated life of renunciation and service.

Om Shantih ! Om Shantih ! Om Shantih !

REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

By Swami Yatiswarananda

In 1906, while reading in the F. A. class in Calcutta, I had my first acquaintance with the life and thought of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna's *Gospel (Kathamrita)* and Swamiji's *Raja-Yoga* came to my hand almost simultaneously. By studying these and other similar books I entered into a new realm of thought. At this time I resolved to take initiation from Swami Brahmananda and lead a religious life, but its materialisation took time.

After appearing for the F. A. examination in 1907, I went to Rajsahi to join the B. A. class there. After two years' stay there, I came again to Calcutta towards the end of the summer of 1909. Swami Brahmananda, having returned from Madras, was staying in Orissa at that time. It was in 1910 that I saw him for the first time during the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna. After the celebrations he left for Puri. At this time I went to Belur Math with my friend Sitapati (later Swami Raghavananda) and met the monks there. Since then, I started staying at Belur Math on Saturdays and Sundays. Revered Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda), Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda), and other Swamis, by their love and affection, endeared me to themselves. Towards the end of 1910, when Sri Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) came to Calcutta before the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, Revered Mahapurush Maharaj introduced me to him. I felt as if I had a special

relationship with Sri Maharaj and I was overwhelmed with love and devotion towards him. It was not so with regard to other Swamis. In Calcutta and at the Belur Math I visited Sri Maharaj frequently and sometimes got the opportunity of doing a little bit of service to him. One day there was some celebration at Binod Babu's house. Many monks and devotees were present there. I was fanning Sri Maharaj with a big hand-fan. Suddenly he told me : "Look, if the body and mind are given over to the world, the world destroys everything ; but, if given to God, He keeps everything—body and mind—in good condition." I had a great desire to become a monk and Sri Maharaj made this ideal shine brighter before me. One day I and a friend of mine went to Belur Math to meet Sri Maharaj when we heard that he with Baburam Maharaj had gone to Balaram Mandir (Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta). We therefore went to Balaram Mandir. Sri Maharaj asked my friend to show his palm to him. Having looked at it he said : "Lust will be of some hindrance to you, but if Sri Guru Maharaj wills it will disappear." Baburam Maharaj loved me. He requested Sri Maharaj to look into my palm also, but he did not do so. At this I felt sad at heart and thought that my friend had some possibility of monastic life while, perhaps, I didn't have that even.

A few days after this incident, as I was entering the Belur Math, Sri Maharaj's attendant saw me and said : "Well, Sri Maharaj was telling that you would become a monk." This gave me a lot of mental strength and, in due course, I became a monk. My friend, however, had to enter a householder's life. He is a high ranked

official, but is a great devotee of the Master and a disciple of the Holy Mother.

One day Sri Maharaj went to Dakshineswar with a big party in two boats. I also went with him. He was in wonderful spirits. He said, "It is a great fortune to live at Dakshineswar even as a dog."

When we sat with Sri Maharaj we felt as if there was a charmed circle around him and we had come within it. One day he revealed himself in a novel way to me. As he was strolling on the Math grounds, I felt as if he was a superhuman divine personality.

Sri Maharaj blessed me with initiation in 1911. A few days afterwards he went to Puri when I wrote to him that I wanted to become a monk. He asked Swami Shankarananda to write to me that if I had enough mental strength why should I not go over there. I therefore went to Sri Maharaj at Puri in October that year and joined the holy Order. During this time Sri Maharaj got the worship of Devi Jagaddhatri performed by me at the house of Atal Babu. Revered Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda) was the officiating priest and Nirod Maharaj (Swami Ambikananda) was his assistant. *Kumari Puja* (worship of a virgin girl as the goddess) was also performed. Thus he helped bring into my life a deep spiritual fervour shortly after I became a monk. Some time after, Sri Maharaj asked me to go to Madras with Swami Sharvananda. Before going I requested him to impart some spiritual instructions. With great solemnity and intense compassion he said : "Struggle ! Struggle ! Struggle !" This has been the keynote of my life—as if his words are still ringing in my ears.

I am reminded of a few incidents that occurred during our stay at Puri. One day Atal Babu told Swami Sharvananda : "What kind of monks you are ; you have no occult powers." Hearing this Sri Maharaj said : "It is easy to get occult powers, but difficult to acquire purity of mind. It is this purity of mind that matters really." Another day Sri Maharaj was ill—he had pain in the waist. On that day there was a special celebration at the Puri Temple. Almost all of us thought that Sri Maharaj's attendant alone would do for looking after him and went to the temple. And after passing a good deal of time there when we returned after dusk, Sri Maharaj rebuked us rather sharply for our selfishness and said in the end : "I do not expect anything from you. Only I wish you well, and whatever I tell you is for your welfare alone." After that I took upon myself the work of attending on Sri Maharaj at night. One night he felt very hot and asked me to open the shutters. I was new to this work of personal service and was lacking in understanding, too. So I could not think that it was necessary to close the shutters after a time. The next day Sri Maharaj felt feverish. At this I became very sad at heart. But Sri Maharaj not only didn't rebuke me himself, but told others also that I was a mere boy and did not know things well. None therefore told me anything about it, but I had my lesson all right.

I went to Madras towards the close of 1911 and was there for five years. I saw Sri Maharaj there again in 1916. I had to work hard as the manager of the Madras Math. Seeing me sitting on the manager's chair for hours together, he said one day : "Have I sent you here to do this

clerk's job ?" He scolded me much and took Swami Sharvananda also to task, saying, "Without giving this boy any opportunity for study etc., you are making him do the work of a clerk."

Viswaranjan Maharaj (Swami Hariharananda) was Sri Maharaj's personal attendant. He used to ask me to get for Sri Maharaj good gingili-oil from the market and I used to make enquiries and get the best thing available. Pointing to this, one day Sri Maharaj said : "Have I sent you here to enquire and find out where good gingili-oil is available ?" Taking all rebukes as expressions of his love and grace, and feeling in the heart of my heart that he was mine and I was his, I used to feel happy at all this.

During this time Maharaj ordered me to pay special attention to study and contemplation and asked me to recite daily *Vishnu Sahasranama*. By his grace the mind used to be in a very good state and the heart felt a sort of union with him and was filled with great elation.

Sri Maharaj was kind enough to take me to Kanya Kumari along with his party. I had never read the *Chandi* (*Durga Saptashati*) ceremoniously before. I didn't like the fighting and killing mentioned therein. I used to recite only the prayer hymns. Coming to know all this, Sri Maharaj scolded and asked me to recite the entire *Chandi* ceremoniously at least once a fortnight. He asked me to recite the *Vishnu Sahasranama* and *Chandi* for three years. I did so for more than that time.

So as to avoid becoming conceited, I did not write articles or deliver lectures and refrained from religious discussions etc. One day, at the Haripad Ashrama in Travancore, Sri Maharaj commandingly said : "Tell

others what you hear and learn from us." Again, one day at Madras, he said : "The habit of study must be made such that you will feel ill if you miss it any day. If the mind does not remain on a high spiritual plane, at least it would remain absorbed in studies—it won't come lower." On another occasion he said : "Why not write one article each week ?" To this I said : "What shall I write ? No ideas come." He then said : "Learn to think deeply and you will find that it would be difficult to cope with the onrush of ideas." Afterwards, by the grace of my Guru, I never suffered from want of ideas. One morning, while we were at the Bangalore Ashrama, he showed me a few physical exercises and asked me to do them daily. I was already doing some indoor exercises and to them I added those shown by Sri Maharaj. He had told me more than once : "Physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress have to go hand in hand." After coming to Madras, Sri Maharaj himself suggested many a time that he would ordain me into Sannyasa. Other monks, however, advised me to go to him in advance and pray for Sannyasa. I went to him and like a fool said : "Maharaj, if you consider me fit, please be kind to initiate me into Sannyasa." To this he affectionately said : "None can be considered fit for Sannyasa, but I would initiate you into it."

On the day of my Sannyasa, I felt that Sri Maharaj was vibrating with a wonderful spiritual fervour. After the Homa etc., when I paid my obeisance to him, he put his hand on my head and I immediately had the experience of a vast Presence—as if he, the world, and myself were merged in an infinite existence.

He graciously gave me the idea of what a Guru really was. Then I realised the truth of the hymn : "Salutations to the Guru who has made it possible to realise Him by whom this entire universe of moveable and immoveable objects is pervaded."

That day, after nightfall, many of us sat round Sri Maharaj. Swami Sharvananda also was there. Sri Maharaj's mind was tuned very high spiritually. I thought that he would speak about spiritual practices and contemplation, but without doing so, pointing to me, he said : "What spiritual practice will you do ! Go from door to door and let people listen to the holy name of God. That in itself is a great *sadhana*." Calling Swami Sharvananda, by name, he said : "Sharvananda, these days I very much appreciate the attitude of Sri Ramanujacharya—helping everybody hear the name of God." That day Sri Maharaj brought into me a new inspiration and directed my thoughts into a new channel. That direction is still there. On account of this new inspiration received at Madras I began laying stress on study, meditation, etc. and started taking classes and speaking at meetings. It was later that I took to writing articles earnestly.

The construction of the new building of the Madras Math also reveals Sri Maharaj's divine power. The old Math building having been damaged, the monastery had to be shifted to a rented house. Swami Sharvananda and ourselves could not make out at all how we would build the new house for the Math. Land, of course, had been bought earlier. Coming to Madras, Sri Maharaj said that he would lay the foundation of the new building and asked Swami Sharvananda to collect money, even to take

some loan, for the purpose. Help, however, came unexpectedly, and within eight months the entire building except the front hall was made ready for use. Sri Maharaj, after his return from Bangalore, and shortly after our initiation into Sannyasa, consecrated the new Math building.

On that day—the day of dedication of the new Math—I was performing the evening *arati* of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Maharaj was standing a little behind me. While performing the *arati* I felt as if everything was filled by a great Presence. I perceived that great Presence in all the pictures and in Sri Maharaj as well as everyone present as I was doing the *arati*. Even now, when I try to perform *arati* I get that feeling. This is the special blessing of Sri Maharaj. That same evening, we were sitting in front of Sri Maharaj on the terrace of the rented building. Sri Maharaj said : “I fervently told Sri Ramakrishna : ‘They are just boys. How would they build a new house ? Thou shouldst kindly make everything possible. And so, you see, by His grace, the new building has come up.’”

At Madras I used to be preoccupied with various activities. I used to get very little time for studies or meditation. As soon as Sri Maharaj arrived at Madras, he understood that I needed a change. He wished that I should leave Madras and go to Bangalore. But I had no desire to go to Bangalore. But Maharaj knew what was good for me. So he said one day : “Fool ! you don’t understand your own interest ! There is no need for you to stay at Madras any more—proceed to Bangalore.”

Earlier, Tulsi Maharaj (Swami Nirmalananda) had requested Sri Maharaj to send me to Bangalore. I had

heard that Maharaj had also more or less agreed to it. In obedience to Sri Maharaj's wish, I went to Bangalore in the summer of 1917 and stayed there for a year.

In early summer of 1917 Sri Maharaj left for Puri. A few days later I, too, left for Bangalore. While there I was given to much spiritual practices and religious studies. At the Bangalore Ashrama, I used to conduct the Sunday classes, too. In late summer of the same year, I had enteric fever and had a severe burning sensation all over the body. I was admitted into a hospital. During this time, there was an influenza epidemic on. One morning an old man was brought in and placed in a bed next to mine. He had double pneumonia and was in a serious condition ; by evening all was over with him.

I was experiencing great pain. But my mind was very clear then. There was no fear of death But I did feel that it would be difficult to bear any increase in suffering. Death would have been more welcome. When such a thought arose in my mind, I had a vision of Sri Maharaj. He said : "How can you die ? You have yet to do Sri Ramakrishna's work !" Saying so, he disappeared. My mind was filled with a new fervour. Tears began to roll down my eyes profusely. There was no question of any fear of death ; on the other hand, a wonderful peace and a sense of resignation came over me. And the disease, too, took a turn for the better.

After spending more than a year at Bangalore and another year of spiritual practices at various places in the Madras Presidency, I went to Bhubaneshwar to meet Sri Maharaj at the end of December 1919. There I got the rare privilege of spending a few days in his holy

company. The construction of the Bhubaneswar Math was nearing completion at that time. It was during this period that, one evening, Sri Atal Maitra of Puri arrived with his first wife. The old man was very much downcast, filled with sorrow. Sri Maharaj asked Swami Varadananda to sing. Varadananda sang the song beginning :

‘O mind, make thy refuge the feet of the
Divine Mother who dispels all fears.’

Hearing the song, and more than that by having the *darshan* of Sri Maharaj and hearing his words, the old man’s face brightened and he was filled with joy. We all felt very happy at this transformation.

After a few days’ stay at Bhubaneswar, Sri Maharaj sent me to Calcutta with Swami Gokulananda who was sick. From Calcutta I went to Belur Math, where I spent a few months. During this time, in 1920, before Swamiji’s birth anniversary, Sri Maharaj arrived at Belur. We all used to go and sit in his room and meditate and chant various hymns.

My last *darshan* of Sri Maharaj was at Varanasi in the year 1921, a few days before Swamiji’s birth anniversary. Then I was staying with Revered Hari Maharaj. Sri Maharaj brought about a new spiritual current in the Varanasi Sevashrama and Advaita Ashrama. At this time, he gave me, too, much spiritual inspiration. One day he enquired about my spiritual practices. I said : “I feel as if there is no inner awakening. So I am not getting peace of mind. We have been born with such bad *samskaras* (mental impressions) that they prove to be hurdles to spiritual growth.” Maharaj replied : “Don’t think that way. Practice *japa* at dead of night. Do

purascharan (a ritual involving a particular number of *japa*). Inner awakening will come of its own accord."

Another day I went to him, feeling restless in mind. Seeing me approaching, he got up and came towards me and gave me many instructions within a short time. He said: "Your mind becomes restless only because you don't want to do what I tell you to do." Placing his palm on my head, he blessed me and filled my heart with peace.

It was Sri Maharaj's desire that I should go to Mayavati and take charge of *Prabuddha Bharata*. But he did not tell me anything himself. It was Revered Sudhir Maharaj (Swami Suddhananda) and Nirmal Maharaj (Swami Madhavananda) who told me several times about going to Mayavati. But I was disagreeable to this.

One morning, while I was with Revered Hari Maharaj, busy attending on him, I felt as if something was breaking down within me and a wail coming up from the depth of my mind. Tears also poured down the eyes. The more I wiped, the more the tears came. Along with it I noticed an attitude of self-surrender coming over me. I understood that it was the play of Sri Maharaj. He was graciously removing the obstinacy and the obstacles of my mind. By evening my mind settled down.

After this, one morning, as I went to pay my obeisance to him, he said: "Look, they all wish that you should go to Mayavati and take charge of *Prabuddha Bharata*." He had already broken my stiffness. I therefore without any hesitation said: "Maharaj, if you order, I would surely go." Sri Maharaj was much pleased with my reply and blessed me. After this it was

settled that I would go to Mayavati. One morning, after prostrating before him, I along with Sudhir Maharaj, Nirmal Maharaj, and other monks sat near him. Sri Maharaj asked me at the very outset : "How are your spiritual practices going on ?" In reply, I said : "There is much work to do. I do not get enough time." To this he said : "It's wrong to think there is no time because of work. It is due to the restlessness of the mind that one feels like that." And this opened the flood-gates of Sri Maharaj's speech. With great feeling he said : "One should prepare the mind by doing work and worship together." These instructions are there in the "Work and Worship" chapter of the *Eternal Companion*. These were addressed particularly to me. On that day he established a special relationship of love between myself, Nirmal Maharaj, and other brother monks. He said : "Just as Nirmal is dear to me so are you and others too." When I think that all are dear to Sri Maharaj, then I also feel that all are dear to me as well. Sri Maharaj regarded his own disciples and those of the Holy Mother equally dear to him. He used to say that all had come to do Sri Guru Maharaj's and Swamiji's work. One day, pointing specially to me, he said : "By doing their work in this spirit, bondage can never come. Rather through it will come all progress—spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical. Surrender yourself at their feet ; offer body and mind to them ; be as a slave unto them." This and other instructions of Sri Maharaj have become the stay of my life.

I had a desire to talk some day to Sri Maharaj with a very open heart. I was nursing a bit of wounded feeling

against him. When he had gone to Madras he told me that he would take me with him to Bengal on his return, but instead he sent me to Bangalore. Again, towards the end of 1919, when I went to Bhubaneshwar, he did not allow me to stay with him for long and sent me to Bengal. For all these I had a complaining heart and was feeling unquiet within. I was seeking for an opportunity of speaking out my mind to him, and one day it came. On Sri Maharaj's auspicious birthday in 1921 Kali Puja was performed. I planned that I would see him the next evening when others would go to the bank of the Ganga for the immersion of the image. I did not, however, tell him about it. That evening I went to his room. Swami Visuddhananda was sitting near him. Peta Puri was also there. As soon as Sri Maharaj saw me he, like a child, exclaimed to Peta Puri : "Look, what a Yogi I am !" I learnt that a little while ago he had asked Peta Puri to see if I had come ; he knew that I would.

That day we had a lot of talk. Sri Maharaj said that he knew that I had a desire to move and visit places when I went to Bhubaneshwar and, therefore, sent me to Bengal. He also knew that this tendency in me would soon disappear. In order, therefore, to get this done earlier, he had sent me away hurriedly. I felt ashamed when I found how deep was his concern in all that he did for me. He removed all my mental depressions and made my mind clean. As a result of it a new bond of inner relationship was created between him and myself. Shortly after this Sri Maharaj went away to Belur, leaving behind within my mind his divine image firmly established. The spiritual fervour he instilled in me and the

ideas of piety and service he showed me while at Madras and Varanasi still continue to inspire me. He is even now, through his grace, bringing to me in a subtle way new light and fresh inspiration. As the days are passing, I am understanding the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's words that it is God Himself who comes in the form of Guru.

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