

SREE SWAMI TAPOVANJI MAHARAJ

Wanderings in the Himalayas

(HIMAGIRI VIHAR)

By

SWAMI TAPOVANJI MAHARAJ

Published by

CHINMAYA PUBLICATION TRUST

175, RASAPPA CHETTY STREET - MADRAS-3

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THIS work has been a labour of love. Much as I admired the original, I should never have attempted its translation but for the fraternal pressure exerted upon me by Sri P. Krishna Pillai (Perambavoor), one of the sincerest devotees of Sri Swami Tapovanji Maharaj and the accredited publisher of Swamiji's invaluable books. The idea of translation was first mooted by Dr. Balachandran of the University of Madras. Sri Krishna Pillai (now Swami Mahadevavanom) then desired me to take up the work. I agreed without fully realizing its magnitude. If I have somehow succeeded in completing the task, it is simply because of the grace of God and the blessings of Swami Tapovanji Maharaj himself. The first few pages of the translation had the good fortune of passing through Swamiji's own hands. But for Swamiji's kind approval and permission to continue the work, and the highly encouraging words of his disciple, H.H. Swami Sri Chinmayanandaji Maharaj, I might not have proceeded with the work at all. I should never have been able to complete it except for the timely help rendered to me by Dr. A. G. Krishna Warriar, M.A., Ph.D. (Professor and Head of the Department of Sanskrit, University College, Trivandrum). Equally at home in Sanskrit and Philosophy, in Malayalam and English, he placed his services unreservedly at my disposal. If I have failed to utilize his services fully and make the rendering better than what it is, the fault is my own. For encouragement and help I owe my thanks to other friends too, friends like Prof. E. P. N. Pillai, M.A. (OXON.) (University College, Trivandrum) and Sri

Natarajan, Editor of "Tyagi," in whose columns the translation made its first appearance.

But the lion's share of my gratitude goes to Sri Chinmayanandaji Maharaj himself. He has taken upon himself the entire responsibility of bringing out the translation in book form. Over and above that, at my request, he has contributed an illuminating and invaluable Introduction to the volume. I do not know how to acknowledge my indebtedness to him.

I am thankful also to Messrs. Hoe & Co., Madras, for the patient yet expeditious way they have executed the printing.

In conclusion, I have only one or two things more to add. If a second edition of this English version is called for, I shall be happy to make use of any suggestion for its improvement. Secondly, if a better translation of this book appears at any time in the future, nobody will be happier than I.

INTERMEDIATE COLLEGE, }
 TRIVANDRUM, }
5th January 1960 }

T. N. KESAVA PILLAI.

P R E F A C E

The present state of affairs in Bharat deserve the utmost commiseration. We, the indigent, illiterate, lazy, enslaved, short-lived, purblind members of the present generation, can hardly claim to be the children of that Divine Mother. But, fortunately, even in these days of misfortune there are certain treasures of inestimable value which have not deserted us—our Himalayas, our Ganga, our temples and *theerthas*, and the hoary culture of our *rishis*. A recollection of these must be enough to reawaken us from our age-long torpor, to impart a message of peace and goodwill to a world torn with internal strife, and to generate even in the most callous heart the feeling that the world is our common home. When the smoke that envelops us today is wafted away, the flame will leap up as before ; when the lurid clouds that defile the atmosphere melt away, the fullmoon will shine forth in all her splendour.

Certain pedantic people have said in their childish prattle that Indians have lacked patriotic fervour. Alas ! What do they know !

अपि मानुष्यमाप्स्यामो देवत्वात् प्रच्युताः क्षितौ ?
मनुष्याः कुर्वते तत्तु यन्न शक्यं सुरासुरैः
अत्र जन्म सहस्राणां सहस्रैरपि भारते
कदाचिल्लभते जन्तुर्मानुष्यं पुण्यसञ्चयात्

So proclaim the Puranas. When the souls in heaven have exhausted the merit of their good deeds by the enjoyment of celestial pleasures, they pray to be born on the Earth again, so that they may do things impossible even for the *devas* and the *asuras* and a birth

in Bharat comes one's way only once in several millions of lives—so say the *rishis*. For people who long for heaven or *moksha*, Bharat is the sole *Karmabhumi*. The *rishis* praise our mountains as

“विस्तारोच्छ्रियणो रम्या विपुलाश्चित्रसानवः”

and our rivers as

“विश्वस्य मातरः सर्वाः पापहराः स्मृताः”

For an Indian who has not forgotten the past, wherever he wanders from Gandhara to Kamarup, from Kashmira to Kanyakumari, there is nothing to hear except heroic episodes of history, nothing to see except inspiring works of art and nothing to associate with except rousing, invigorating environments.

But, of all the things that contribute to the unique glory of Bharat, the foremost, of course, is the Himalaya mountain which glitters like a diadem of diamonds around her head. Fancied by poets as the “*mana danda*” of the earth or as the mighty pillar supporting the heavens, possessing a grandeur of shape and form that proclaims his sovereignty over mountains, inspiring not only those who see, but even those who remember, with wonder and admiration and deluging them with pleasure—there stands the grand sire of Gouri, the father-in-law of the Lord of Lords, immaculate, invincible. Who does not reverence him? Who is not moved to horripilation on listening to the description of the Divine Mountain by poets like Kalidasa?

यज्ञांगयोनित्व मवेक्ष्य यस्य सारं धरित्री धरणक्षमं च
प्रजापतिः कल्पित यज्ञभागः शैलाधिपत्यं स्वयमन्वतिष्ठत्

This stanza of *Kumara Sambhava* alludes to the

statement in the *srutis*,

“हिमवतो हस्ती यज्ञभागः”

meaning that Brahma gave Himavan his share of the sacrifice in the form of *hasti*, in recognition of his being the source of certain essential requisites of the sacrifice such as the *soma*. In his poem *Gangavatara*, Neelakanda Deekshitar says,

“यदीय नीहारकणानितस्ततः किरन् मृगाङ्कः प्रथते सुधाकरः
यदीय गण्डोपल एव कश्चन प्रयाति कैलास इति स्थिरं यज्ञः”

That is, the Moon acquires his title “Sudhakara” (Producer of the heavenly nectar) by sprinkling here and there the snow drops of these mountains and it is a mere rock of this mountain that we extol as Kailas. When Himavan is described as “devadatma” or “yajnabhuk”, let those who consider the description as hyperbolic or allegorical regard it so. One thing, however, is certain : there can be no two opinions when the northernmost boundary of Bharat is regarded as the very limit of Creator’s architectural skill.

But, do the people of Kerala know anything about this Crown of glory that adorns Bharat ? We bring up our children making them repeat certain distorted words like Everest and Kinchinjanga. I remember to have read somewhere that even in England there are such ignoramuses as consider Talisman a poet and (H. G.) Wells a place name. If that is so in a country so materially advanced as England, what shall we expect of our own ? How many Maharajahs of Bharat have travelled up to the Himalayas ? Only the Janaka-like Rajah of Mysore, Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar, had the good fortune to visit Kailas and

Manasarowar. What if Kerala is a small State at the southern tip of Bharat, hedged in by mountains and the sea ! Over a thousand years ago, an orphaned *Namboodiri* boy, depending solely on his intellectual acumen, mastered all learning, vanquished all antagonists in argument, wrote extensive commentaries on Brahmasutra, etc., resuscitated Vedanta, and with invincible prowess and far-flung renown, seated himself on the Throne of Omniscience at the Sarada Temple in Kashmir, installed Sri Narayana at Badari, appointed a *Namboodiri* Brahmin himself as high priest there, exhibited superhuman powers from moment to moment and merged with Brahman in his thirty-second year. Is it not, indeed, a wonderful life adventure capable of attracting any one's attention ? Among the children of Kerala, can there be one who does not desire to visit that temple of Badari and Jyothir Madhom which Sankara himself founded at the place ? But how many of us are able to translate our wish into action ? A visit to the Himalayas, of course, is no easy joke. From Kerala very few undertake that long and arduous journey ; fewer still remember the place of their birth on the completion of their hazardous undertaking. Even if some remember, those who have the necessary ambition, perseverance, and literary talent to record the knowledge so gained for the benefit of their less fortunate brethren, will be very, very few, indeed. Perhaps there may be one, perhaps none. It is true western writers have given us descriptions of the Himalayas in the English language. But, usually their observations and reflections are superficial and severely limited by their objectives. Besides, their writings are inaccessible to all unacquainted with their language.

Fortunately, this undesirable state of affairs has recently undergone a welcome change. The book that I introduce to the people of Kerala today is the Second part of Himagiri Vihar. The first part of the book was published in 1117 M.E. (1941). The great sanyasin who has written this book is now known to the world as "Sri Thapovanaswami". In his *Poorvasrama* he was known as Chippukutty Nair. He was born in an ancient and highly respected Nair family named Puthen Veedu in Mudappallur, near Alathur in Palghat Taluk. A brief sketch of his life has been given in Part I. The first part of Himagiri Vihar contains descriptions of (1) Hrishikesh, (2) Uttarakasi, (3) Jamnotri, (4) Gangotri, (5) Kedarnath, (6) Badrinath, (7) the Sarada temple in Kashmir, (8) Chandananath, (9) Khochranath and (10) Manasa and Kailas. Interspersed among these are descriptions of several towns, villages, temples, *theerthas*, *asrams*, rivers, lakes, hills, caves, thickets, forests, etc. In addition to these are observations on the flora and fauna of the Himalayas, the natural wealth of the region, and above all, its inhabitants—their dress, their language, their religion, customs and manners, their daily mode of life, etc. All these have been dealt with in the proper, balanced way.

"बिहारस्तु परिक्रमः" says Amarasimha. "बिहारो भ्रमणे" says Medinikara. The word is used in the book with scholarly precision, meaning 'travel on foot'. In Himagiri Vihar, Swamiji presents to the world the vast knowledge he gained while travelling in the Himalayas on foot. But it is wrong to take it as a mere travelogue. To provide his readers with entertaining details of an excursionary value was perhaps the least of the author's aims. Evidently he has several other objectives,

some of them far more important. Every spot in the Himalayas is sacred ; each is a treasure-house of beauty ; every nook and corner of the mountain has a wonderful history of its own. It was living here that our great rishis entered into *Asampajnatha Samadhi*, realised Brahman and rose to the Zenith of Perfection. When one of our great men has explored every inch of that holy land, learnt every one of its innermost secrets, collected, analysed, and codified everything that we ought to know about that sacred region, it is only natural that our hearts should glow with conscious pride, that we should get purified internally as well as externally and become qualified to ponder over the Ultimate Truth. Swamiji charms our minds with descriptions of Nature's beauty, renders them as pure as the Himalayan snow, and imparts to us rare, spiritual advice. He has firm faith in the ancient Indian practices ; at the same time, he does not doubt the value of modern dialectics. If, in the circumstances, people of old as well as new ways of thinking find Himagiri Vihar interesting, it is only natural. Swamiji imparts to us his profound knowledge of the Upanishads, of the different systems of philosophy, of the Puranas as well as of the local traditions, for our benefit here and hereafter. The author's mastery of the language adds to the charm of the book. He has command over a delightful style, lucid and eloquent, capable of expressing the finest, abstruse ideas so as to make them easily intelligible. Any object touched with his magic pen lives and makes a ready appeal to the reader's mind. In every paragraph of the book we experience the truth of the saying, " Beauty is Truth, Truth, Beauty ". When we have finished reading the book only three things are left behind in the mind—a regret,

a joy and a prayer—regret, that we were not born at least as a blade of grass or pebble near the sacred Himalayas—joy, that, without experiencing the fatigue and hardships of an arduous journey and without spending a paisa, we have been able to ramble over the entire region,—prayer, that Swamiji may be pleased to bless us by publishing the remaining parts of the book also without delay. Swamiji has already laid us under a deep debt of gratitude by the composition of this book. It is such books as these that deserve to be read. They lead us from darkness to light. They turn atheists into theists, make theists introspective and the introspective people become seekers of *moksha*. May Goddess Sarada bless us so that this *jivanmuktha* may, during his moments of leisure, give us the remaining parts of the book as well as new facts about the Himalayas, as a piece of active service to mankind.

ULLOOR

TRIVANDRUM, }
8th April 1943 }

(MAHAKAVI, SAHITYABUSHANA, RAO SAHIB,
 ULLOOR S. PARAMESWARA IYER,
 M.A., B.L., M.R.A.S., etc.)

INTRODUCTION

THE look of an object will depend upon the medium through which the observer views. In fact, our mental and intellectual conditions will determine the phenomenal world observed and experienced. The botanist viewing a flower will see it differently from a poet viewing the same flower. Each one of us interprets the objects that he sees, in terms of his existing knowledge. The man of God-vision sees Him and His play everywhere.

* * * *

A man of Perfection is one who has gained an experience of That which lies beyond the intellect. He has delved into and experienced the sense of Infinitude, when he transcended consciously from all his identifications with his outer equipments of experiences. One who has thus realised his own Universal Nature is termed in our Sastras as a *Mahatma*.

Such a Perfect Seer has, when once he has realised the Divine Self, in his experienced sense of fulfilment, no more any duty towards the world of objects, emotions or thoughts. He has neither any right to assert nor duty to perform. A God-Man, happy and contented in himself, constantly revelling in that Perfect State of Realisation, he strides along, ever a Master in all HIS world of experiences—environments.

The Perfect Seer experiences his own Self in everything, and roams round the world experiencing the Divine Presence everywhere, at all times. To one who is thus living inwardly this constant God-experience, to him every incident, every thing and

being around, is but a fugitive note from that Infinite Song. Whatever he sees and hears are to him but expressions of the Infinite.

* * * *

Sree Gurudev, Tapovan Maharaj, had been a reveller of this type in the valleys of the Himalayas. In the following pages you will read how such a man of Divine Vision beholds truth everywhere. Be it in the lifeless stones or in the dumb tree or among the singing birds,—in the cruel roar of the animals, in the silent womb of the jungle, in the bright expanse of the summer sky,—in the rise of the Sun, in the Crescent Moon, in the tiny stars, in the whispering darkness,—in the murmuring birds, in the dancing peacocks, in the jumping monkeys or in the tender cows—be it at the sight of some poor villagers of the Himalayan hamlets sitting round, smoking their native pipes, or on beholding the vigorous hill-maidens working on the fields—everywhere, at all times, here is a Master mind who detects and perceives the Play of the Unseen in and through the Seen.

The '*Himagiri Vihar*' consists of poetic descriptions of places of importance in the Himalayas, sacred in their cultural lore and in our traditional faith; they are at once as many captured pictures, framed by Sree Swamiji's mighty pen. pictures that smile forth their Infinite Beatitude.

Even when we used to move from Uttarkasi to Gangotri, Swamiji Maharaj had often stopped abruptly in the trek, alert and thrilled, tense and silent, and I had watched him : now lost in wonder at the snow-peaks, now aghast at the thundering laughter of the Ganges in her panting speed, rushing down, to serve

the mankind in the hungry plains. Even a long-tailed tiny bird fluttering across the bridle path is sufficient to tickle Maharaj into a visible horripilation, and, then he used to stand still, bathed in a vivid glow of joy, whispering silently his homage to the Creator.

In the early years of my study at his feet, he had once stopped *en route* in our trek to point out to me a spot in the distant sky where the golden colour of the Fantastic Painter had suddenly changed, in a mighty stroke of some inscrutable artistic inspiration, into a blue splash!! On one such occasion he had once cried to me, "Why can't man see the Divinity behind that mad Painter, who has painted this inspired beauty?"

And, I can, perhaps, fill up an equally big volume of instances wherein he had taken pains to point out to me spots around—sometimes a crab returning to its hide-out or a spider weaving its web down under our feet—sometimes two leaves in the passing breeze embracing an opening bud—sometimes the mighty pines whispering to each other secretly, both of them nodding away to each other all along very eloquently all the time—sometimes the majestic peaks of the snow-capped mountains divinely glistening above the lower hills—here an insignificant bull—there an uninviting herd of tired sheep—elsewhere an ugly rustic singing a disgusting tune with a joyous abandon that is almost Divine—at a thousand such instances he had laboured to direct my attention to SEE. But, alas, immature, unpoetic and intellectually sophisticated as I was then, in all these instances I must have sadly disappointed him.

But I *knew* what he had felt ; I had felt the warmth of his ardour, the thrill of his horripilation, the serenity of his maddening joy. I had watched his breathless

expectancy, his trembling lips and his welling eyes as he stood dissolved in a visible divine harmony with Nature. At such inspired moments, an unearthly tranquillity used to descend around him in which I had many a time vividly basked. As I read these pages I re-live those moments.

The sincerity of the writer lends a secret charm to his pen and it conveys truly the same feelings to the readers. Any reader who approaches this book, who has in his heart a reverence and devotion to Nature need not thereafter read the Scriptures or even go through the sorrows of any *Tapas*, to enjoy the Vision of the Infinite that plays in and through every form.

Who said that the Lord is formless? They are indeed blind—blind to His Presence. They are deaf—deaf to His Song which throbs everywhere around. Those who read “*Himagiri Vihar*” will come to develop in themselves the true vision in their eyes to see the Unseen, and a truer hearing in their ears to hear the Unheard. “*Wanderings in the Himalayas*” can open both our eyes and ears: Vedanta does its miracle in every student—makes the blind see, the deaf hear.

Sree Kesava Pillai is to be congratulated for having so faithfully captured in his simple romantic English the spirit and warmth, the rhythm and cadence of Sree Guru Dev’s thoughts, as he did express originally in his native tongue, Malayalam. I am extremely grateful to Sreeman Pillai.

‘*Chinmaya*’,
Belhaven Gardens,
Trivandrum-1,
1st January 1960

IN UTTER SURRENDER TO HIM,
WHO USED TO CALL ME ALWAYS,
SO LOVINGLY AS,
CHINMAYA

SWAMI SRI TAPOVANJI MAHARAJ

A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

Swami Sri Tapovanji Maharaj was born on the *Suklapaksha Ekadasi* day in *Margaseersha*, 1889 A.D. His mother, Kunchamma, came of an ancient and aristocratic Nair family at Mudappallur, near Alathur, in Palghat Taluk (Malabar). His father, Achuthan Nair, belonged to Kotuvayur. It was in his father's house that Swamiji was brought up from his childhood.

The saying, "childhood shows the man as morning shows the day", was fully borne out in his case. Even as a little boy he exhibited a marked partiality for spiritual life. Puranic stories manifesting the glory of God fascinated him. He delighted in worshipping idols fashioned with his own hands. The child's horoscope, it is said, puzzled the learned astrologers. The *Kemadruma* and the *Kesari yogas* were reconciled in him.

Sri Achuthan Nair aspired to give his son Chippukutty—(that was Swamiji's name in his *poorvasrama*) the best education. He hoped to see him at the top of the official ladder, some day. But that was not to be. Admitted to the local English School, the boy could not take kindly to the thoroughly materialistic education. He decided to quit the School. The decision annoyed his ambitious father. He remonstrated with his son but Chippukutty told him quietly, "I think of giving up only school, not my studies".

True to his word, he continued his studies in English and Malayalam with still greater vigour. He neglected no book that dealt with religion and spiritual life.

Sanskrit too, he now began to study in right earnest. Under competent teachers, he mastered poems, dramas, grammar and logic. Simultaneously he devoted part of his time to the study of Vedanta. He read all available religious literature in Malayalam, Tamil, English and Sanskrit. He devoured the lives of modern saints like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramatheertha and of old ones like Sri Sankara and Ramanuja. He spent part of his time also in spiritual exercises.

Swamiji's creative instinct manifested itself early in his career. It may be said of him too, "He lisped in numbers for the numbers came". He was hardly eighteen when he published his first poem, "Vibhakarā". On the death of his father (Chippukkuty was only twenty or twenty-one at the time. His mother had passed away still earlier) he wrote a memorial poem called "Vishnu Yamakam". Even these early works won the appreciation of reputed litterateurs like Kerala Varma Valia Koil Tampuran. Chippukkuty's worldly successes, however, did not swerve him from his goal. Long before he took to the ochre robe he had adopted the sanyasin's way of life. People had already begun to refer to him as "Sanyasi". Daily he had his bath early in the morning. He smeared his body with sacred ashes and devoted all his time, up to ten or eleven, to *Bhajan* and studies, even without breaking his fast. Young as he was, he was totally indifferent to worldly pleasures. He loved to spend most of his time immersed in thought. It was only natural that such a person should be regarded as out of the common run of men.

On his father's death, he became independent. But that marked no change in the mode of his life. He continued to lead a religious and tranquil life.

His relations pressed him to marry and settle down as a householder. But he avoided the snares of worldly life. He was equally indifferent to the advice of his relatives who urged him to safeguard and multiply his patrimony. To visit the Himalayas and spend his life there in study and meditation was even then the engrossing object of his existence. However, he deferred the fulfilment of his desire until his only brother completed his education. For the time being he had to satisfy himself with the study of higher texts in Vedanta.

Once he went to Bhavanagar (Kathiawar) and there studied a few books under Swami Santhiananda Saraswathi. Much as he loved that sort of life he could not stay for long at Bhavanagar. Circumstances forced him to return. Even though his stay was short, he had the satisfaction of having met many learned and holy men.

Since 1912, he resided at Palghat and edited a magazine 'Gopala Krishna', named after Gopala Krishna Gokhale. It ceased publication in two years. This period of his life was full of public activities in other ways too. Prompted by distinguished friends he delivered speeches on politics, religion, Vedanta, etc. His exposition was not only lucid but also dignified and pleasing. The young men of the time admired him and even veterans looked up to him with respect. Once, a well-known speaker wrote to him, "I wish you would kindly accept me as a humble disciple in the art of public speaking". Such was the impression he had made on laymen as well as experts. During the period he spoke frequently at public meetings held in big towns like Kozhikode and Tellicherry. He also contributed articles to newspapers published

from Malabar. Most of the articles appeared in the columns of the *Manorama* (Kozhikode). The last speech he delivered in Malayalam was at a meeting of the All Kerala Literary Association and it dealt with "The Main Objective of Literature".

All these literary and oratorical pastimes came to a close before Swamiji reached his twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth year. Now he ceased to take any interest in them. But his devotion to studies and spiritual exercises never flagged. At times he paid a visit to Madras to meet learned and holy men. There he came into contact with men well-versed in Advaita and Visishtadvaita. On one occasion he met Swami Sarvanandaji, then head of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission. During these visits, Adayar was his favourite resort in the city.

The important temples of South India attracted Swamiji. He visited them frequently. At the holy places, he came into contact with many learned and holy men. At Chidambaram, for example, he met Mahamahopadhyaya Dandapani Deekshithar and Chatti Swami, a great *avadhooth*. At Arunachalam he visited Sri Ramana Maharshi. He was already acquainted with Alathur Brahmananda Swami and Mankara Swami.

In 1920, Swamiji got a letter from Swami Santyananda Saraswathi who was then at Calcutta, inviting him to the City to pass some time in study and meditation. Swamiji was always eager to meet mahatmas and in response to the invitation he started immediately for Calcutta. He stayed with Swami Santyanandaji in an extensive garden on the outskirts of the City. Swami Santyananda Saraswathi had already been invested as the Sankaracharya of Sarada Peetam,

Dwarakai. During the stay they met many learned and holy men every day. Knowing that his young companion was soon to enter the fold of Sanyasa, Swami Santyanandaji began addressing him as “Chidvilas”. During this sojourn Swamiji visited Belur Mutt and met Swami Brahmananda and other members of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission. Later he proceeded to Haridwar *via* Banaras. At Haridwar he met Swami Sradhanandaji of the Arya Samaj. Next he visited Hrishikesh where he met Swami Mangalanandaji, Swami Moola Singji, Swami Prakashanandaji and others. Then he returned home *via* Delhi, Muthhura, Brindavan, Pushkaram and Dwarakai.

After these travels Swamiji’s life underwent a complete change. Now all his time was taken up with *bhajan*, *dhyān* and the study of the Sastras. He loved the solitude of forests and mountains. He ate only one meal a day. He fasted frequently. Consequently his body grew thinner and weaker. Nevertheless, he devoted himself entirely to spiritual thought and discussion. He gave up all company except that of spiritually inclined people. Two or three years were spent in this way. By this time his younger brother qualified himself for the bar. Having taken his B.L. degree, he set up practice at Palghat.

Swamiji now felt that the hour had come to fulfil his long-cherished desire. He could no longer suppress that indomitable longing to cast off all worldly ties. On *Janmashtami* Day in *Chingom* (August—September) 1923, he made his final renunciation and exit. He told his brother only that he wished to visit certain *theerthas*. When the train began to move out of Olavakode station, his brother who had a vague inkling of the elder’s intentions, requested him with

tears in his eyes, " Please, do return to us as soon as possible ". There was no reply.

Swamiji proceeded to Panchavadi, near Nasik, and spent some time there with a mahatma named Swami Hradayananda. Then he went to the bank of the Narmada and accepted Sanyasa. He took to the ochre robe and became a sadhu and mendicant. Proceeding to Prayag and Ayodhya, he passed some time in the company of mahatmas. Later he went to Hrishikesh and took up his residence there. Maintaining himself upon alms he began to practise samadhi. Before long he was initiated formally into Sanyasa by Sri Janardanagiri Swami, who was, at the time, head of the Kailas Asram.

He continued to stay at Hrishikesh all alone in a hut thatched with grass. In summer he trekked to Uttarakasi and such higher spots on the Himalayas. The account of these travels is found in this book, ' Himgiri Vihar '—' Wanderings in the Himalayas '. In 1925 and 1930 he visited Kailas and spent some time in Tibetan lamaseris. A detailed account of these visits may be found in Swamiji's ' Kailas Yatra ' (Malayalam) or Travel to Kailas. *Dhyan* and *bhajan* took up most of his time at Hrishikesh. Still he could spare some time to pursue higher studies in the Sastras. He mastered several books by himself. Where it was not possible, he sought out great scholars and took lessons from them. Sri Govindanandaji, for example, instructed him in *Brahadaranyaka*, *Bhashya* and *Warthika*. Another scholarly Brahmin friend helped him to go through *Khandana Grandha*.

In the course of four or five years Swamiji's fame spread through not only Hrishikesh, but also through the adjoining districts. His spirit of dispassion, his

spirit of sacrifice, and his thirst for knowledge evoked the admiration of all those who came into contact with him. Devotees now flocked to him, vying with one another in offering him service. But he hardly made use of their offers. Eager to study Vedanta, men and women came to him from far and near and sat at his feet all day long. For one or two hours every morning he spoke to them on the *Prasthanā thraya* but as the number of devotees steadily increased, Swamiji who loved solitude, began to dislike the change. So he made it a habit to leave Hrishikesh as soon as the weather improved, and go higher up to Uttarkasi, a hundred miles farther on. It may be mentioned here that ever since he entered the Himalayas as a sanyasi he never descended below Hrishikesh. Time and again, wealthy devotees, a Maharani among them, had entreated him to go down to the plains, but he never accepted their request. People began to esteem him all the more for his spirit of renunciation and his uncommon way of life. Swamiji's favourite spots in the Himalayas were Uttarkasi, Gangothri and Badri. The mountain folk living in and around these places and along the routes, worshipped him like a God. Sometimes, his sanyasi disciples accompanied him to these places in their eagerness to learn more and more of Vedanta. Although many had the good fortune to be instructed by him none had the privilege of being initiated into Sanyasa by him. Not only Maharajas and Maharanis, but also great savants like Pundit Madan Mohan Malavyaji visited him at his residence. Many offered to build him an ashram at Hrishikesh, but Swamiji did not like to stay there long as, with the passage of time, the place was being engulfed by the rising tide of worldliness. He preferred Uttarkasi

where one of his disciples, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Lucknow Small Cause Court, put up an ashram for him. Since then Swamiji used to pass most of his time there. Fifty-six miles up, at Gangothri also, another ashram was built for him. Until his samadhi he passed most of his time at these ashrams, enjoying samadhi and teaching *Brahma Vidya*.

During the first four or five years of his life at Hrishikesh he wrote a number of books in his beloved mother-tongue, Malayalam. Chief among them were the translations of the commentaries on Isa, Kena and Katha Upanishads. An extensive commentary on Sandilya Sutra was another. As already mentioned, Swamiji's other important works in Malayalam were Himagiri Vihar and Kailas Yathra. In 1929, he composed a book of hymns in Sanskrit at Uttarkasi, called Soumyakaseesa Sthothram. While he was composing the poem his custom was to recite every day before Lord Viswanath, the stanzas composed on that day. In 1931 at Badari he composed another Sanskrit work, Sri Badarisa Sthothra. Since 1932, it became Swamiji's habit to spend some time every year at Gangothri. During these periods he wrote several poems in Sanskrit at the request of the local people. Prominent among them are Sri Gangothri Kshetra Mahatmyam and Sri Ganga Sthothra. Of these, Badarisa Sthothram was published by the Ravalji (Head Priest) of Badrinath Temple. All the rest were published by Sri Vallabha Rama Sarma, a Gujerati householder—disciple of Swamiji. These books have been annotated in Hindi. Sri Badarisa Sthothram has been published in Malayalam also, with a commentary by a great Scholar, Sri Kollengode P. Gopalan Nair. Sri Soumyakaseesa Sthothram too has been recently

published in Malayalam with a commentary by Sri Paramanandatheetrapada Swamiji.

To satisfy the eager desire of his devotees, Swamiji has composed his spiritual autobiography in Sanskrit, called "Iswara Darshan". That book also was brought out by Sri Vallabha Rama Sarma. Sri P. Krishna Pillai (now Swami Mahadevavanom of Uttarkasi) has published the Malayalam transliteration of the poem.

In the midst of such varied activities from the beginning of 1916, Swamiji began to lose his health. Indigestion was the main trouble. He told nobody about it. The disciples themselves came to know of it only when his body was very much reduced. In spite of his failing health he strictly continued all his old observances, never giving them up till the last moment. His disciples wanted to give him medical aid. But he told them that the physical body would have its way. Even *jnanis* will have to suffer physically—to some extent at least. The real difference between a *jnani* and an *ajnani* in their attitude to suffering is to be found in the *jnani's* serenity which remains unruffled in the face of pain and sorrow. It is born out of the conviction that worldly existence is illusory and the soul alone is eternal.

On knowing about Swamiji's illness several mahatmas and lay devotees came to Uttarkasi. He spoke to them as before and blessed them. On the 16th of February, in the holy hour of Brahma, Swamiji entered into eternal Samadhi. It was an exceptionally auspicious day on account of the conjunction of *Pooya* and *Pournami* in the month of *Magha*. The annual festival at the Viswanatha temple, Uttarkasi, takes place on that day. It attracts crowds of devotees and

mahatmas from all over India. In the presence of such a vast concourse of people Swamiji's disciples washed his body in Ganga water, smeared it with sandalwood paste and holy ashes and decorated it with garlands. They carried it then in a litter to Bharadwaja kumda, near the Soumyakasi temple. In conformity with the ancient practice of the people of North India the body was immersed in the holy Ganga. Those who attended the function then bathed in the river with hearts full of devotion and dispersed.

It matters not when or where a *jivan muktha* casts off his earthly frame. It neither adds to nor subtracts from his Realization or Liberation. Yet Swamiji's samadhi was remarkable for both its time and place. One can hardly imagine a holier hour. It was in the *Brahma muhurta* on *Magh Pournami Day* in *Uttarayana*. And it was at Uttarkasi.

May the life and teachings of Swami Tapovanji Maharaj serve as a beacon light to the benighted humanity, leading them from darkness to Light, from the unreal to the Real, from death to Eternal Life !

Om Santi ! Santi !! Santi !!!

CONTENTS

PART I

						Page
Hrishikesh	I	..	..	..	..	1
„	II	..	..	..	..	6
„	III	..	..	..	..	10
Uttarkasi	I	..	..	..	..	16
„	II	..	..	..	..	19
„	III	..	..	..	..	24
„	IV	..	..	..	..	30
Jamnotri		..	..	..	..	38
Gangotri	I	..	..	..	..	38
„	II	..	..	..	..	43
Kedarnath		..	..	..	..	49
Badrinath	I	..	..	..	..	55
„	II	..	..	..	..	60
„	III	..	..	..	..	69
„	IV	..	..	..	..	71
„	V	..	..	..	..	74
Temple of Sarada	I	..	..	..	..	77
„	II	..	..	..	..	80
„	III	..	..	..	..	87

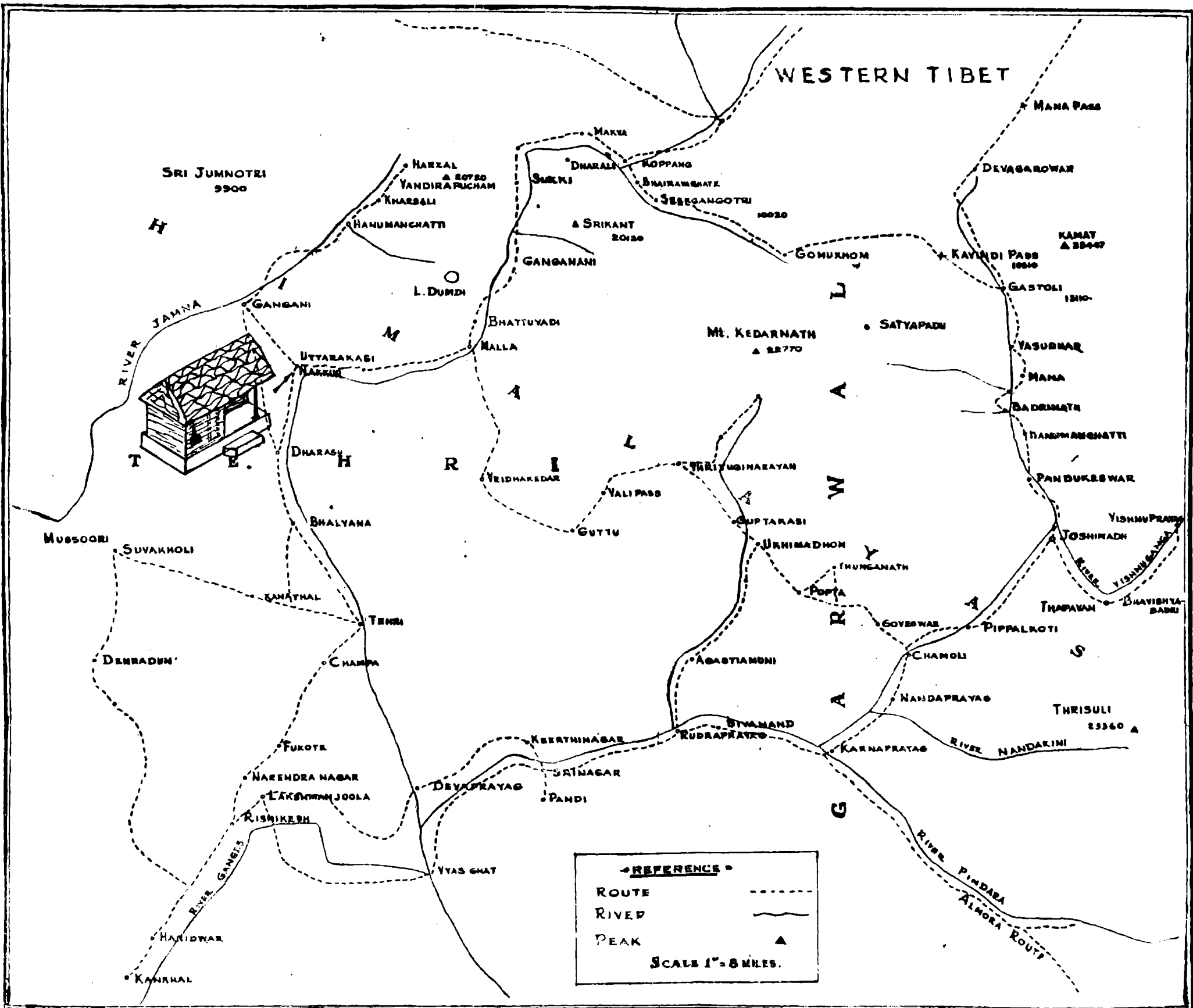
PART II

Amarnath	..	..	..	..	..	99
Jwalamukhi	..	..	..	..	..	109
Lake Reewal	..	..	..	..	..	121
Manikarnika and Vasishta		..	..	..	..	129
Thrilokeenatham	I	..	..	..	..	136
„	II	..	..	..	..	146

					Page
Pasupathinadham	..	..	..	..	.. 161
„ I	..	..	..	..	.. 169
„ II	..	..	..	..	.. 172
Chandanath	..	..	..	..	.. 185
Khochranath ..	..	..	..	..	.. 200
Manasa and Kailas	..	..	..	..	.. 220

PART III

Thholingamatam	..	..	..	..	.. 237
Mount Kailas ..	..	..	..	..	.. 250
Lake Manasa I	..	..	..	..	.. 267
„ II	..	..	..	..	.. 278
Sree Gomukham I	..	..	..	..	.. 288
„ II	..	..	..	..	.. 306



PART ONE

HIMAGIRI VIHAR

OR

WANDERINGS IN THE HIMALAYAS

PART I

HRISHIKESH—I

God is Truth, Truth is God. Devotees of Truth have a holy resort in Hrishikesh. Here, on the beautiful banks of the sacred Ganga, surrounded by the grand solitudes of the Himalayan forests, may be found people of various castes in various *ashramas* of life and holy men of different orders passing their days in the pursuit of Truth.

Starting from the famous Haridwar and threading one's way through the dense Himalayan jungles for fourteen miles in a northern direction, one may reach Hrishikesh. It is, indeed, a charming spot. On all sides it is surrounded by the rich greenery of tropical forests. To the east and north may be found mountains of imposing appearance like Mt. Manikutam. Close by, there meanders the broad, blue, sparkling Ganga. Every feature of the landscape here tends to invest the place with a Divine Beauty. According to local tradition, the place derives its name from the fact that an ancient *rishi*, Rybhia by name, made himself master of his senses (Hrishikesh) here. The place is called also "Kubjamraka"—Land of the Bent Mango-tree. The name was given to it, according to another tradition, which says that Lord Vishnu made Himself visible to Rishi Rybhia,

here on the branch of a mango-tree bent down under the Divine weight.

Whatever the origin of these names, it is certain that this place has been a favourite resort of great *rishis* from immemorial times. Here are still the hermitages of the *Saptarshis* and of *Rajarshis* like Sri Ramachandra, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna. Besides the ancient rishis, it appears, in the Middle Ages, holy men like Sri Sankara and Sri Ramanuja spent much of their time in this region in study and meditation. In the circumstances, it is no wonder that such a sacred place should remain even to this day the common resort of saintly men who have severed all connections with the world to concentrate on God. Until a few years ago, what with the inaccessibility of the region and the lack of food supplies, only a very few hermits living on fruit and roots and bent upon finding God, took up their permanent abode here. But, in course of time, on account of the exertions of *Bhaktas* devoted to the service of holy men, most of the hardships disappeared and the region became accessible as well as habitable. Still more recently the rising tempo of life has effected revolutions even in these mountain tracts. The place that was resounding with the roars of lions and tigers and the trumpeting of wild elephants a few years ago is, now, noisy with the hootings of motor cars and buses, and the whistlings and puffings of railway trains. The mountain region that could be reached only with the greatest difficulty by the most determined seekers of God (even that, only during certain seasons of the year) is now thrown open to all sorts of people at all times. Hrishikesh that remained almost deserted during the four months

of the rainy season for fear of serpents, scorpions and malaria is now teeming with life all through the year. To put it briefly, many changes have, in recent times, swept over the place, little to the liking of the sadhus who congregate here to enjoy *samadhi* in an atmosphere of tranquillity. But who can stop the ravages of all-conquering Time ?

But in spite of the startling changes brought about by the passage of time, Hrishikesh still remains the resort of saintly men. Its inhabitants are skilled not only in the control over external and internal senses, but also in the study of Vedanta. They find access to the truths of Vedanta, if not directly through the study of Sanskrit, at least through the study of books like *Vicharasagara* and *Vrittiprabhakara*. It is really surprising how even illiterate women here are able to discuss the Vedanta philosophy using purely technical terms. It bespeaks their association with great souls, their fondness for the stories of God and godly men and above all, their superior mental culture. In comparison with them, the people of the south seem to lag far behind. Even among scholars in the south, how many are there who can answer unhesitatingly questions such as, what is the nature of *Jiva* ? or of *Moksha* ? Of course, this is not altogether their fault. Environment is not everywhere quite congenial to the development of Vedantic culture. Whatever that be, the fact remains that in Hrishikesh not merely human beings, but even animals and plants seem to feel for themselves "*Sivoham, Sivoham*". (I am the blissful Self, I am the blissful Self.) They are possessed of the Divine qualities of self-control (physical and mental) love, and mercy. Here cows and monkeys, squirrels and

mice and birds of all types, live on terms of the closest intimacy with man. While the sadhus are at their meal these creatures approach them fearlessly and share their food. While the author is in Hrishikesh, squirrels and birds often insist on getting their share of bread, etc., from him. If he is at his meal on the banks of the Ganga, large fishes eat with him. Monkeys will not only accept food at his hands, but will even take it away sometimes by force. The love that cows bear towards human beings and their extreme gentleness are really wonderful. Now, how is it that these wild animals, which usually take to their heels at the sight of men, have come to love them and dominate them in this fashion? Love begets love ; hate engenders hate. No doubt, it is the peace of the great souls who are the embodiments of love and *Ahimsa*, that reigns over the place, permeates the entire atmosphere and imparts such sweetness of temper to birds and beasts alike. Indeed, in the presence of true *Ahimsa*, cruelty changes into kindness, fear into friendship, weakness into strength and fickleness into constancy.

It is but fitting, that such a spot should become the home of generations of enlightened men and sincere seekers after Truth. To the former, it provides a life of bliss in oneness with God ; to the latter, it affords opportunities for the study and practice of Truth. Here the sacred Ganga flows in a perennial stream. Her broad sand-banks and the beautiful forests stretching far to the north and east, are a standing invitation to the knowers of Truth who love to remain at one with the Supreme in serene contemplation. To them it is the Paradise on earth. It is only natural that they should cling to such a

place.

As for the devotees who wish to train and equip themselves for the pursuit of Truth, life at Hrishikesh is an undoubted blessing. The first duty of those who want to see Truth face to face is the constant hearing of holy texts and contemplation. Such practice depends inevitably on solitude and peace of mind. Both these may be found in the forest of Hrishikesh. It is a matter of common experience that a boy who attends school progresses much more quickly than another who tries to study at home. Similarly, a spiritual aspirant makes headway far more easily in the company of men who have already realized Truth or are constantly trying to realize It. In this sense it may be said that Hrishikesh is the biggest university for the spiritual aspirants all over India.

Besides, Hrishikesh provides opportunities of passing one's days on the banks of the holy Ganga. For dipping into the Ganga water in solitude and for spending one's days in lonely contemplation on her banks, Hrishikesh affords far greater conveniences than any other place down-stream. If purity of mind is essential to the realization of God, devotion to Ganga which is specially helpful in purifying mind, must be regarded as invaluable to all seekers of Knowledge. To bathe in the Ganga, to drink the water from the Ganga, to worship Mother Ganga, and sing devotional hymns to her—such are the ways of cleansing the heart of all its dross and if such devices fail, it is certain that in these days there exists no other method of heart-purification for man.

HRISHIKESH—II

The Sruthi says :—

यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।
अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥

“ When a mortal's desires are destroyed root and branch, he becomes immortal. Even in the earthly body he becomes one with Brahma.”

The Buddhist scripture, the *Dhammapada*, also says very much the same thing. “ Complete nudity, coils of matted hair, unwashed body, going without food, sleeping on bare ground, smearing one's body with ashes, not even remaining motionless in the same posture for days, can purify a man unless he has conquered his desires.”

Conquest of desire is *Kaivalya*—the highest goal of man. It is the end and aim of all man's activity ; it is his highest attainment. It alone yields absolute peace and supreme Bliss. Conquest of desire alone leads to fearless, free and happy life. The man who has conquered desire is not haunted by sorrows or worries. He alone is *master*. Emperors in this world and gods in the other are his servitors. But the conquest of desire is no easy joke. Only the devotees of *Jnana* can overcome desire. A man may fast and leave aside his food untouched, but his mind will still revert to the thought of food. Even so, by force of will, he may keep away from worldly enjoyments but his mind will still remain attached to such pleasures. In fact, until a man fully realizes Self his mind cannot be completely freed from desire. He who seeks to conquer desire except through the

realization of Self is verily attempting the impossible.

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते

There is nothing so holy as Knowledge. There is nothing so great, so divine. Hail to thee, O Realization, that driveth away all dark desires and lighteth up life.

In 1920, I passed sometime in Hrishikesh as a *brahmachari*. In those days I met and talked to many *mahatmas* (great souls) deeply learned in the Vedas—men, who had detached themselves completely from the world, who had conquered desire and realized Self. Many of them were very old and I find them no longer here. Their chief abode in those days was a small, thickly wooded island called *Jhati* surrounded on all sides by the sacred Ganga. Now even that island is almost gone, owing to the fluctuations in the course of the river. In this way and in several other ways the number of the holy men who once inhabited Hrishikesh has dwindled and is still dwindling but there was a time, in no distant past, when their number was considerable.

Just one look at them could lift up a man's soul, far more than the reading of several holy texts and numberless commentaries. To cite one instance, there was the *mahatma* who, oblivious of all sense of danger, went on repeating *Sivoham, Sivoham*. ("I am the blissful Self, I am the blissful Self") as he was being carried away by a ferocious tiger. If listening to his story can invoke such courage in the heart of the hearers and raise them to such high levels of thought, how much more effective should have been the sight of that holy person ! One such *mahatma* was Swami Visudhananda, more familiarly known as Baba Kali

Kamli Wallah.

Baba Kali Kamli Wallah came to be known by that peculiar name because he generally used only a piece of black cloth to cover his body. He was an ascetic among ascetics. His life, totally free from the acceptance and hoarding of wealth, was a perfect model of innocence and piety. In spite of his greatness, for a long while, he remained a stranger to fame. How true to say fame neglects those who really deserve her ! But, at last, paradoxically as it would seem, his fame began to spread and riches began to rain down at his feet. To pursue the man who spurns her is an odd but well-known characteristic of the Goddess of Wealth. Wealth and wealthy men now placed themselves at the disposal of the poor ascetic. The development was the result of the Swamiji's simple desire to provide the scantily clad, poorly-fed sadhus of Hrishikesh with clothing and food. But even when he had become lord of great wealth, he remained a *bhikshu*, completely detached from all worldly pleasures and desires. How a sadhu, who comes by wealth because of tendencies carried over from previous lives, should conduct himself is exemplified by the life of Baba Kali Kamli Wallah. The extensive and efficient arrangements he has made in Hrishikesh and other places in the Himalayas for ministering to the needs of sadhus are simply wonderful and as long as Hrishikesh and Kedarakhand (the land washed by the Ganga and the Alakananda) exist, his name will be remembered with gratitude and reverence.

Well, it has been my good fortune to stay, from time to time, and lead a blissful life at Hrishikesh, so sanctified by the presence of ancient *rishis* like

Atri and Angiras and modern saints like Kali Kamli Wallah. Here, where those sadhus were engaged in study and meditation in the solitary hermitages on the banks of the Ganga, days pass like seconds and it is certainly a covetable experience. But it is open only to a limited number of people who have realized the unsubstantial, painful and illusory nature of worldly life, who have, therefore, given up such life for a life of devotion and contemplation. No wonder, it is open only to a few. Divine law does not entitle every one to everything. Let him, who longs for such experiences, qualify himself for them and then he will have them, not otherwise. Of course, there are people who consider a life of contemplation as an idle life, a life of renunciation a primitive life, a life of rigorous spiritual discipline a life of foolish self-torture, a solitary life a sort of solitary confinement, and spiritual experiences the vague imaginings of a disordered brain. Let such people enjoy themselves in their own way. For the time being, they are entitled only to such joys. If they have the grace of God, they may, in a short time, that is, in the course of a few lives, realize the vanity of worldly life and turn round to the path of Truth. God has been creating atheists from the time of creation and very likely He will continue to create them till the end of the world. The learned know that even in ancient times, there was in the school of Brihaspati a sect of people who denied the existence of God and considered body and soul as one. We may consider the materialists of our time as the descendants of those *Charvakas*. In the scheme of the universe they too have their place. God may be creating them perhaps to test the firmness and intensity of the

faith of His devotees. We all know, opposition only strengthens feelings of devotion and adds to its solidarity, albeit indirectly.

HRISHIKESH—III

On both sides of the Ganga at Hrishikesh are primeval forests. *Atalotaka* plants with bunches of curd-coloured flowers, *vilva* trees with green fruits hanging down in hundreds from the branches, clumps of ancient bamboos which send down liberal showers of seeds, woods covered with dark green foliage, flowers and fruits, creepers and bowers—all these render the forests enchantingly beautiful. Elephants and wild boars, bears and tigers are found in large numbers in that region, rather on the far side, of the Ganga. The piercing cries of the peacock reverberate through the forests, and the birds, spreading their rainbow-hued feathers, dance in sheer joy. Monkeys—of two types, red-faced and black-faced—, satisfied with eating and drinking, abandon for the time being all their natural fickleness and sitting quietly in large numbers on the branches of trees or on the ground, watch the peacocks' performance with curiosity and reverence. Such forests I sometimes enter for diversion and share the joy of the dancing, by chance. At times I have wondered whether the joy-intoxicated dancers are not some great *rishis* who have lost themselves in the love of the Lord. Perhaps those monkeys who sit around them enjoying their performance, also are *rishis* who have assumed such forms at will. It is only natural that such fancies should haunt the mind of a man who believes in the divine character

of the Himalayas and the supreme powers of *mahatmas*.

Just observe the truly *satwik* conduct of the wild birds which admire the beauty of the peacocks, enjoy their dancing and sometimes express their appreciation with their loud cries. What a contrast to the human world where man, so proud of his learning and wisdom, finds it impossible to eat or sleep for jealousy and rivalry ! If only man had the good sense to take his lessons from these poor wild creatures !

If you are lucky enough you may come across, in the glades, flocks of gentle, timid deer frisking about in joy. These woods planted and watered by God's own hand and frequented by birds and beasts of every description are pleasure-gardens that infuse the highest joy into the hearts of naturalists and sadhus. It is a well-known characteristic of beautiful, solitary forests that they intensify man's feelings, whether it is devotion or physical love. It helps concentration in a state of meditation. That is why sadhus resort to such forests to develop their devotion and practise concentration. But here it may be mentioned that because of the ravages of man, the beauty of Hrishikesh is disappearing rapidly and it is to be feared that if civilization maintains its present pace, the forests here will be wiped out before long.

Even while I was in my native place in the far south, the Himalayas and Hrishikesh were not unknown to me. But it was only in 1920 that I got specially acquainted with Hrishikesh. It was after my peregrinations in north India and visits to various holy men that, as a young seeker after Truth, I paid my first visit to this sacred place. That was followed

by another visit in 1923. If, on the first occasion, I came to Hrishikesh as a Nair youth, full of humility and full of ardour in the search after Truth, it was as a Malayali sadhu, no longer in doubt about Truth, but still bent upon practising austerities, that I returned to the spot three years later. Ever since, I have been spending sometime here every now and then in study and meditation and devotion to the Ganga.

During these sojourns here I got opportunities of coming into contact with sadhus from all parts of India, belonging to different orders and different castes, and in that way was able to learn a lot about different sects and discuss the merits and demerits of the beliefs of each. Although according to some of the law-givers of ancient India only Brahmins by birth could be initiated into *Sanyasa*, I found that in North India even scavengers and *Chakiliyans** took to the *sanyasin's* way of life. Some white men, too, have embraced Hinduism and adopted the *sanyasin's* way of life. As time passes on, new ways of thought and revolutions occur, not only in politics but also in religion. Though narrow-minded people may not relish liberal views and reforms, others with a wider outlook and a higher sense of values are sure to welcome them.

To bathe in the ice-cold Ganga, to drink her waters, to eat strange food, to endure the extremes of heat and cold, —these are the rigours to which South Indians are exposed at Hrishikesh. But even these penances are only external. There is another type of discipline—discipline of the mind which alone leads to self-realization. The man whose mind is not disciplined profits little by a stay at Hrishikesh or Kailas.

* Cobblers.

On the contrary, a person who has such discipline may dwell in the midst of alarms, in his own home or in the city, and yet reach the state of Peace, though gradually.

The winter in Hrishikesh is a delightful time, pleasant and peaceful. Many sadhus from different corners of India congregate here during the season. Sadhus are as independent as kings, but with a difference. If it is wealth that enables a king to do what he likes, it is wealthlessness that enables a sadhu to lead the sort of life he lives. A sadhu's lack of possessions, and contentment with what chance gives him, stand him in good stead wherever he goes. Among the Himalayas, even in these days of remorseless materialism, one may come across sadhus who touch no coin with their hands, who know not when or where they might get their next morsel of food and whose only occupation is communion with God. Startling is the contrast between the Indian and European travellers who proceed to Tibet : the latter with equipments worth tens of thousands of rupees, and the former trekking bare-footed joyfully across the highest mountains of the world, without a pie, without a piece of bread, or an extra piece of clothing and no wonder. Compared with soul force, the might of gold and silver is nothing. What a king is unable to achieve with all his wealth, a sadhu achieves easily with his soul force. That soul force brings with it perfect indifference to worldly attachments, perfect happiness and a perfect sense of resignation which are the invaluable possessions of an ascetic. It is thus usual for the great ascetics from the higher regions of the Himalayas, and others from the lower regions like the Punjab, to meet at Hrishikesh in

winter time.

Almost every winter, I, too, leave the higher levels of the mountain and pass some time in Hrishikesh where I come into contact with Malayali sadhus, who indirectly remind me of my native region and on all such occasions I pray whole-heartedly for the prosperity of my homeland. The rishis have said : “**नातिमातरमाश्रमः**” that is, no body, at any stage of life, not even a *sanyasin*, should forget his mother and his motherland.

Those blessed persons who travel on pilgrimage to Badrikasram, Gangotri, Jamnotri, and other holy places, start on their journey from Hrishikesh. Here they cross the Ganga and pass into the interior regions of the Himalayas. The true pilgrim who follows his course up the Ganga along her valley, forgets all about his worldly occupations in the presence of the grandeur and the beauty of the mountains and the river. His mind rises to a higher *satwik* level where he enjoys a supreme sense of peace and joy. The loveliness of nature at once removes all the dross from his mind. Along this route, a pilgrim may not find the great forests or massive rocks which are seen elsewhere among the Himalayas, but yet lovers of nature will have no reason to be disappointed with what they see around them. The two rivers, the Ganga, and the Alakananda, making their way through the clefts in the mountain ranges, and rows of mountains taller and yet taller, add immensely to the grandeur of the landscape. However, I should like to utter here a note of warning to my readers. I describe the glories of the Himalayas as I have personally experienced them. If people with a totally different attitude of mind find the scenery dull and

uninteresting, if they find among the mountains and streams nothing but a promiscuous mass of earth and stone and water, I shall not be surprised. That is their view ; this is mine. Tastes differ as men differ and their views must necessarily differ.

Seven or eight miles to the east of Hrishikesh there is a holy spot called Neelakantam. The way to it lies through thick forests, dark green with the rich foliage of *vilva* trees. Herds of wild elephants roam about these woods and the place resounds with the cry of peacocks. Ascetics and lovers of nature cannot fail to be attracted by the beauty of the scenery.

For them there are also other spots equally charming in the neighbourhood. But common men may not come under the spell of the wild beauty.

Three miles to the north-east of Hrishikesh there is a place of pilgrimage called Lakshmanjhoola. From there sometimes pilgrims pass on to Brahmapuri. However, only men of faith will find anything specially attractive about such places. For people lacking faith the Ganga is but a river, and Hrishikesh, Haridwar and Badrikasram, Kasi and Rameswaram are merely so many places on the map of India. In their eyes there is nothing sacred or beautiful about them. It is no use finding fault with such people. They are at the mercy of their senses. They can understand only what they perceive through their senses. They cannot go beyond. In such cases perception itself is limited because the senses themselves are limited. That is why well-known logicians among philosophers refuse to be hedged in by the gross testimony of the senses in matters of religion and accept the authority of the *Vedas* and *Sastras* as final. For people who have no faith and who consider the gratifications of

the senses as the be-all and end-all of existence, there is no question of holy places and pilgrimages, good and evil, a world beyond and a Supreme Being.

UTTARKASI—I

Celebrated in the Puranas and centrally situated in the Himalayas is a mountain called Varanavatha. Its top and sides are covered with forests of deodar and various other kinds of trees. The sides of the mountain are dotted with small villages. The holy *Bhageerathi* (Ganga) washes the feet of the mountain to the east and south and flows on, raising the *pranava* sound. Between the Varuna and the Asi, two tributaries of the Ganga, is a beautiful mountain tract, ten miles in extent. This lovely spot is the famous Uttarkasi of the *Puranas*. But the central point of Uttarkasi is a small plain on the bank of the Bhageerathi, in the eastern valley of Varanavatha. As in Varanasi (modern Banaras) here are gods like Viswanatha and *theerthas* like Manikarnika. But there are certain important differences between them.

Banaras is a modern city steeped in luxury and materialistic civilization. Its citizens are people generally dominated by *rajoguna*. On the contrary, Uttarkasi is a simple, old-fashioned, little village in the Himalayas, uncontaminated by materialism. Its people are mostly *satwik* in character. The Lord of Banaras is ever pestered by the pressure of worshippers, the hubbub of sight-seers, and the showers of flowers rained down by devotees. The Lord of Uttarkasi reposes in perpetual *samadhi*, in the solitude of

undisturbed silence. While the sadhus of Banaras lead an unquiet life in positions of power and splendour, the ascetics of Uttarkasi pass their days in peaceful *samadhi* among the mountain caves and hermitages.

Uttarkasi is surrounded by high mountains on all sides. To the east is Hariparvatha ; to the south is the high Valakhilya mountain famed in the *Puranas*. Even today one may see in the Valakhilya mountain the wonderful caves where *Rishi* Valakhilya and others passed their days in penance and meditation. Old and faithful sadhus hold that even today the great *rishis* who can assume any form at will are present in the Himalayas in various disguises. The *puranas* go farther and suggest that the great souls are to be now found as birds and trees. Close to the Valakhilya mountain, in the heart of the forest, is still pointed out the place where Nachiketas had his hermitage. Nearby is a lake still called Nachiketathalaw.

The story of Nachiketas who went to the realm of Death and learnt the great Truth from the God of Death himself, is well-known in the *puranas*. His great wisdom and his detachment are celebrated in them. To hear the sound of his name is a holy experience ; how much more holy should be the sight of the place graced once by his corporeal presence ? In the past there was a Golden Age for India when the *rishis* who had conquered their senses and lived upon fruits and roots, spent their time in the solitude of forests steeped in meditation. Compared with that age ours is a stone age in spiritual life. Our ancestors were never satisfied until they had fully realized Truth. They did not rest content with hearing spiritual texts quoted from scriptures or

expounded by learned teachers. It was because of their tireless efforts that India became famous as the land of spiritual wisdom. Their experiences have been embodied in a number of invaluable books which have hardly any parallel in the literature of any other nation. But that Golden Age is gone. Gone are those Truth-seekers who cast to the winds all worldly pleasures and immersed themselves in introspection. God alone knows whether, at any time in the future, India will once more have such a race of men, so noble and so intent upon the pursuit of Truth.

In the increasing worldliness that encompasses man in our time, he finds little time to look into himself and discover the Inner Spirit. People dominated by *rajoguna* can hardly pass a day without seeing other people and mixing themselves with worldly things. They cannot spend a few days in solitude. In our time little value is attached to qualities like *Santi* (peace) and *Vairagya* (dispassion). Love, hate and greed, egotism and the avidity for sensual pleasures are the ruling passions of our age. There are but few people who can discern and appreciate *satwik* qualities. If spiritual elevation was the objective of our ancestors, material happiness is the goal of our generation. Thus the aims of our ancestors and of ourselves appear poles apart. We can only console ourselves with the thought that the wheel of Time will go full round. Good and evil, prosperity and adversity, come up by turns and disappear by turns. Whatever that be, I must confess, I can hardly pass through the solitary plains in the lovely Himalayan region without casting a longing, lingering look at the past and without being saddened by the changes

that have come over our motherland. I believe, no man who loves his native land and who has some power of thought still left in him, can traverse these regions without feeling a touch of melancholy.

UTTARKASI—II

In the pursuit of woman and gold, man suffers infinitely. Yet, alas ! he will not abandon that mad pursuit. If enjoyment is the body, suffering is its head. Nobody can live without the head. Still, man forgets that the more he enjoys the more he will suffer. Life is but a span and as man draws nearer to the other end he reaches a stage which the moralist describes in his felicitous words :—

अङ्गं गलितं पलितं मुण्डं
दन्तविहीनं जातं तुण्डम्

(the body has become worn out, hairs have turned grey, the teeth have fallen,) yet they do not give up their attachment to their bodies. Even in extreme old age, when the body is in a state of dissolution, man clings to it as if it were still young and healthy and full of vigour. Thus aiming at pleasure and eagerly longing for the prolongation of life, man goes on revolving with the endless circle of *samsara*. In our world of opposites, who can separate joy from sorrow, life from death, good repute from ill-repute and cold from heat? Wonderful are the workings of *Maya* ! (Illusion).

Man is like a caged lion. He cannot get out of the limitations of the senses. He does not recollect

how he has fallen from a high state of freedom into abject slavery. Every book of religion refers to man's sad fall. Religious texts and teachers of religion may differ widely on other points but they are all agreed that man has fallen into a low state and his paramount duty is to understand his degradation and reclaim himself from that state.

So long as man, however learned, remains in this bondage of illusion, there is hardly any difference between him and the meanest worm. God has given them both power to know and power to do. Both remain attached to bodily senses ; both seek worldly pleasures and suffer greatly. Man can hardly consider himself superior to other creatures so long as he fails to use his Reason properly for breaking the bondage he is in. If it only serves to bind himself faster to the world, if it gives only sorrow and servitude, how can it make man superior to other animals ? Everywhere around us we find people who are bound down to the body and who inexorably pursue the illusive pleasures of the senses, under the belief " I am this body ". If this is what Reason does, who can fail to say that Reason is the cause of greater bondage and greater sorrow. ?

This is the state of the people who pride themselves upon being gifted with Reason and steeped in learning. For every little pleasure that Reason brings, there is a lot of suffering in store. But from what I have stated here let no man jump to the conclusion that I hold human life and Reason responsible for all man's suffering. The *sastras* esteem them as the result of great good deeds. With Reason man has great things to achieve. Properly utilised, it is the chief requisite for breaking the illusory bondage and realizing

God. But the mere possession of it cannot make man worthier than other creatures. It ennobles man to the extent it serves to achieve the main purpose of human life, namely, the conquest of *Maya*.

Into that holy presence of Viswanatha, Lord of Uttarkasi or *Soumyakasi* as it is some times known, I came for the first time in April 1924. The Himalaya seemed to welcome me, a new-comer, to his home with peals of thunder and showers of hail. For, sadhus are welcome everywhere whether it be among the peaks of mountains or in the streets of cities. *Sanyasins* are Lord Vishnu in so many shapes. During this visit I was overjoyed to find the low clouds that spread around me like a canopy and the beautiful rainbow that looked like an arched doorway. The beauty and the solitude and the eternal sacredness of the place at once endeared it to me. In spite of the hearty welcome offered by the Mountain I did not stay there long during that first visit but since then I have visited the place again and again and spent much longer periods there in the contemplation of God.* Another place so congenial to meditation and study and to a *Satwik* way of life is rather difficult to find even in the Himalayas. A temple of Lord Viswanath among the peaks of the Himalayas, on the banks of the Ganga, associated with the memory of the great *rishis* of the past, a solitary forest resplendent with Divine Beauty—can there be a place better fitted for the abode of a seeker of *Brahman* ?

Two miles to the north of the temple is situated

* In 1935, after this article was written, some friends built me a hermitage at Uttarkasi and from 1936 I have spent most of my time at the Ashram. But from May to August I generally stay at Gangotri and in certain years I pass the early part of February and the first half of March at Hrishikesh.

a rather extensive field where paddy is cultivated in the season. If you proceed still higher up, you reach the junction of the Asi (a tributary of the Ganga) and the Ganga. Still farther north are the thick forests that clothe the sides of the mountains. These are some of my favourite haunts while I stay at Uttarkasi. In them I practise undisturbed *Samadhi*. Since the lowest parts of Uttarkasi are 5,000 feet above sea-level, dwellers here do not experience the extreme heat of the summer in Hindustan. Nor is the place pestered by malaria during the rainy season. In that season rain-bearing clouds come floating down the valley filling all people with joy and new vigour. The winter here is still more charming. The mountains which look pure white after snowing and the solemn stillness that pervades the atmosphere when the extreme cold prevents birds and beasts from stirring out and even silences the feathery warblers among the trees, strike the heart of man with an overwhelming sense of wonder and joy.

The *puranas* say that climbing one step up the Varanavatha mountain is in merit equal to the performance of a *Yajna* (sacrifice). If you climb four miles from the village called Varahat in the valley, you can reach the top of the Varanavathagiri. The village Varahat is within the Soumyakaseekshetra. It is a beautiful village, with the temple of Viswanath in it. To climb the peak of the mountain was, with me, a difficult but delightful diversion during my sojourn in the valley. It took me sometimes an hour and sometimes an hour and a half to reach the top. The beautiful sights from the mountain more than compensated for the labour and the fatigue of the climb. The great mountain ranges extending to the south as

far as the plains of Hindustan, the dark rocky mountains to the north and the spotlessly white snow caps covering them, present an enthralling sight. Here you feel the austere grandeur of the mountain of mountains. Below, you see the blue-watered Ganga following a zigzag course along the foot of the mountain. To put it briefly, the penance of climbing the Varanavatha mountain brings one not merely the unseen blessings of Viswanatha but also the palpable charms of natural beauty.

During my first stay at Uttarkasi, at the behest of a great Malayali sanyasin who was then residing at Gopalasram and who was a devotee of Sri Guruvayurappan and Sri Ramana Maharshi, I composed a few stanzas and called them "Sree Gurupavana Puradheesa Panchakam".

गोपीगोकुलमालपत्सुमुरलीसप्तस्वरैर्हृषयन्
 गोपीमण्डलमध्यगः स्मितमुखो माधुर्यवीक्षाङ्कुरः ।
 गोपालश्रिकुरोल्लसच्छिखिशिखण्डाखण्डदीप्तिश्रिरं
 गोपालाश्रमविश्रमी विजयतां विश्वैकमुग्धाकृतिः ॥

काशी कुञ्जवती परञ्च भवतो भूपद्विषो भूरियं
 यत्रास्ते खलु शङ्करस्तव पदांभोजैकभक्तः स्वयम् ।
 त्वत्पादांबुजसंभवा पुलिनवत्येषा हि सा जाह्नवी
 वृन्दायामिव राधिकेश ! रमतामत्रैव गोपीयुतः ॥

शुद्धं बुद्धमबुद्धिगम्यमचलं यद्वस्तु वेदान्तिनां
 तत्त्वं कृष्ण ! किशोरविग्रह ! विभो तत्त्वं न किञ्चित् परम् ।
 राधावल्लभ ! रामराष्ट्रविलसद्वातेशमूर्तिर्भवा-
 न्नेहेऽन्यं पुरुषार्थमात्मनि सदा संश्रीडमानोऽस्त्वलम् ॥

बिभ्राणोऽनरुणं शरीरमरुणे स्थित्वापि तं भासयं—
 लोकानां गुरुरप्यगौरवतरैः क्रीडंश्च बालक्रमैः ।
 सच्च त्यच्च हि यस्य रूपमपि च प्रच्छेदि दुश्चेतसां
 श्रीलः श्रीरमणः श्रितामरतरुः कृष्णस्स पुष्पातु नः ॥

भट्टश्रीरथ विल्वमंगलयतिः प्रख्यातभक्ताग्रौ
 दृष्ट्वा यादृशरूपमक्षिजनुषोः साफल्यमासेदतुः ।
 तद्रूपं तव दिव्यदिव्यमनिलाधीश ! प्रभो ! कृष्ण ! मे
 साक्षादक्षिपथं गमिष्यति कदा चित्तं च वर्धिष्यते ॥

UTTARKASI—III

It is from Hrishikesh that I generally proceed to Uttarkasi. If my readers want to enjoy the holy and beautiful sights along the Himalayan route from Hrishikesh to Uttarkasi, get ready to follow me. I am sure every one of you will do so with alacrity for the route is far more delightful and elevating than the streets of Bombay, Paris or London—streets ornamented with skyscrapers, loaded with luxuries, resounding with music and splendidly lit up by electric lights. There are three routes leading from Hrishikesh to Uttarkasi. Today we shall follow the easiest of those routes and the most familiar one to me. If you walk a little distance along the broad path that goes north-west from Hrishikesh, you reach a thick forest, noisy with the shrill sound of cicadas. For a mile or a mile and half it is all plain ground. Then the ascent begins. To the very top of the mountain it is all dense forest. What a lovely forest ! Artificial charms are harmful and ephemeral. Natural beauty

alone is beneficent and lasting. Only in these woods do you find perfect beauty which owes nothing to human ingenuity or dexterity. It is all God-made. Here one experiences not merely the outward loveliness of nature, but also the wonder and mystery of God's own handiwork. All worldly activities are distinctly portrayed here. A wise man stands in no need of newspapers here to understand what is going on around him. Look at the captain of the monkey band, who enjoys sensual pleasures with so many female monkeys. Now observe how another stout monkey makes overtures to those same young ladies and how it leads up to a fierce quarrel between the rivals in love. Elsewhere you see another fierce struggle going on for the possession of some food. This is exactly what is happening in the world. Woman and gold are the bones of contention everywhere. Of the two species of monkeys found in these forests, the red-faced fellows are the more mischievous. The black-faced ones are gentle and pious. They sit quietly on the tops of tall trees as if immersed in meditation. They have no feuds or distractions.

Now look in another direction. You see there wild birds and peacocks slowly pacing up and down, picking up the seeds of bamboos and swallowing them. These must be really blessed, for they are not worried about the morrow. They are never in want. They are always cheerful. At the same time you see another flock of birds migrating to distant lands in search of food. Yet another group are delving into the dirt and filth to get at worms and ants. Alas, these creatures that seek to fatten themselves upon weaker ones do not imagine for a moment that they themselves will soon be prey to stronger ones in their

turn. What is the secret of that Divine dispensation where the weaker are preyed upon by the stronger ?

“ अहस्तानि सहस्तानामपदानि चतुष्पदाम्
फल्गूनि तत्र महतां जीवो जीवस्य जीवनम् ”

Again you find another group of birds, with no thought of food or sport, perching on the branches of trees and singing sweetly. But where are the rulers of the forest ? Perhaps the mighty tigers are hiding themselves in their lairs knowing by their shrewdness that it is not the time for the exercise of absolute power. Thus in the middle of the forest you find the same lust and greed and quarrel, the same affluence and indigence, death and birth, domination and subjection as in the world outside. And the thoughtful and observant man cannot miss their significance in relation to himself. As Shakespeare puts it, such a man finds “ sermons in stones, books in the running brooks and wisdom in everything ” : for fellows with lack-lustre eyes who see nothing and learn nothing everything is new and puzzling. But he, who understands the secrets of nature, in other words, who understands the nature of the Divine sport, finds no novelty or surprise. So much by the way.

If we thus go up from Hrishikesh six or seven miles through thick forests, we reach a lovely spot called “ Narendranagar ”. This is the health resort of the Raja of Tehri. Our path proceeds zigzag by mountain peaks in a north-westerly direction. Twelve miles from Narendranagar on this route is “ Pooockode ”, a notoriously dangerous place frequented by leopards. I have passed along this route now and then, all alone, but I have never come across one.

Was it because I was too full of sin to have a *darshan* of the sacred Himalayan leopards? Or was it that the godly Himalayas, knowing of my simple life, kept them out of my way?

The path still winds forward along the foot of the mountain. When you have crossed more woody peaks and passed several small villages on the way, covering another twenty-five miles, you come in sight of the Holy Bhageerathi (Ganga) once again. No one can fully understand the secret of the ardour and the zest with which great *rishis* like Vyasa have sung the glories of the Ganga, unless one has personally contacted the holy mother and learnt to admire her.

On the opposite bank of the Ganga is situated Tehri, the capital town of Tehri State. When I call it a town, let not people misunderstand me. It is by no means a populous and civilized city. It is but a small town, with a small population, a few buildings and a little trade. Even though it is a small and unostentatious place, it is still beautiful. Situated 2,275 ft. above sea-level, between the Bhagirathi and her tributary, Villamgana, this mountain town is peaceful and attractive. Pilgrims who are on their way to Uttarkasi need not cross the Ganga and enter Tehri town; but out of sheer curiosity I have done so and even stayed there for a while.

It was in this town that Swami Ramatheertha of American fame spent his last days. He used to stay in a hermitage on the bank of the Villamgana and finally cast his body into the river. Whenever I pass this way my mind involuntarily reverts to the story of the Swami and the end of his holy career in tragic circumstances. Even before I left Kerala I was conversant with his story through an English

biography but it was only after reaching here that I gathered several factual details about his life as a *sanyasin*. It must be remembered that the published biographies of great men often materially alter and sometimes even distort facts.

In Tehri there is a magnificent temple dedicated to Badrinath, for Badrinath is the tutelary deity of the Rajahs of Tehri Garwal. Tradition says that the Deity used to respond directly to the appeals of Tehri Kings in ancient times.

From Tehri there is a path that proceeds west-north along the bank of the Ganga. Uttarkasi is situated forty-five miles from here. In perfect health I cover the distance in two days. Sometimes I thank the Lord of Mercy who, perhaps, has given me a wiry body and long legs, knowing I shall have to tread among these mountains as a *sanyasin*. There is no limit to God's mercy. God's mercy alone is worth the name. It is an ocean of absolute kindness. Only those who care nothing for His mercy suffer. Why should the faithful grieve? In any state, under any conditions, the faithful have cause only to rejoice. According to ancient aphorisms, God's mercy is at the root of all good fortune; man's effort is only secondary.

From Tehri the path goes forward through a vast plain. As it is May, wheat has been harvested and other seeds have been sown. The famed peaks that rise into the air on all sides, the hamlets that cluster together in the valleys, and the fields that spread by them cannot fail to engage the affectionate attention of the lovers of nature. If you cross this extensive plain you will find a village called Magdoon, four miles to the west of Tehri. This was the abode of

Swami Ramatheertha for some time. Continue your journey from the village which is within sight of the Ganga, along the sides of the mountain. Crossing mountains and villages on the way you reach Dharasu, twenty-seven miles from Magdoon. Two routes diverge from Dharasu, one going to Jamnotri and the other to Gangotri, *via* Uttarkasi. Nine miles along the second route will take you to Doonda. There is now no means of ascertaining the Puranic name of this holy place but it is beyond doubt that the spot was once a favourite abode of *rishis*. There is enough evidence to warrant this conclusion. For example, at a distance of two miles from here there is the *ashram* of Uddalaka. Uddalaka, as is well known, was the father of Swetaketu. He figures in the *Chhandogya* Upanishad as a teacher of Divinity. When I reach this locality rendered holy by its association with the great sage and his disciples, my mind often gets immersed in high thoughts and fancies. Sometimes I have remained here spell-bound and motionless, looking at the sacred grounds of the *ashram* in love and veneration.

Leaving the place behind, you proceed four miles and then you see a little way out, the fine site of the *ashram* where the great Rishi Jamadagni lived with his wife, Renukadevi. The hermitage had been built on a mountain peak equidistant from the Jumna and the Ganga. A mile farther on, is the place where the hermitage of Kapila once stood. There are two other well-known places, one in Haridwar and the other in Gangasagar associated with the name of Kapila, the great author of Sankhya Sastra. The presence of more than one place claiming to have been the residence of some great *rishi* has led to the

cheap suggestion that these local associations are merely the fanciful fabrication of devotees. Of course, in certain cases there may be some truth in such suggestions, but there is nothing illogical in inferring that one and the same *rishi* spent some time here and some time there in the Himalayas or elsewhere.

If you cover another mile along the route, you reach the Varuna, a sacred river which comes down in a cascade and flows north to south, forming the western boundary of Uttarkasi. Now your way lies along peaks covered with trees and creepers and bowers and fields where rice and wheat are grown. Proceed three more miles along this pleasant route and you find groups of islets and boulders of granite between which the holy Bhageerathi flows on. Lo ! at the centre of the plain in the valley of Varanavatha, surrounded by deodar trees, rises the ancient temple of Viswanath, the sight of which fills the eyes of the faithful with tears of joy. Close to it stands the temple of Parasu Rama, the Lord of Uttarkasi.

UTTARKASI—IV

About thirty miles to the north of Uttarkasi, between Gangotri and Jamnotri, at a height of over 10,000 ft. above sea-level, there lies a lake called Dhumdhithal, surrounded by snow-clad mountains on all sides. It is not only a natural beauty spot but also a sacred place of pilgrimage. Few pilgrims, however, know anything about it, much less travel to it. That there is no beaten track leading to the place is the chief reason for this ignorance and neglect. Once in two or three years the mountain folk, fifty

or a hundred strong, visit the lake to immerse the idol of their goddess in the lake. Apart from them, nobody makes use of the route. Although the path is beset with difficulties and it is all but impassable for common men, I set out for the lake in October 1928, from Uttarkasi. Four of five sadhus also offered to go with me. On the day we started we covered ten miles and rested at a temple in a village called Gajoli. Our venture was partly the result of the prayer and pressure of some devotees in that village. It was from there I learnt all about the lake. It was only natural that some of the headmen of the village should accompany us for guidance and help. But some of the women and the old people in the village objected to our attempt. They said that the lake was the abode of gods, that it was hidden from impious eyes and men could not reach it. If somebody arrived there in a spirit of adventure, the place was sure to be desecrated by excretions and by cooking, sleeping and such unholy acts. And to remove the stains the gods would send down heavy hailstorms, destroying all the crops in the villages. It was under such a belief that they advised us to retreat. But as against these conservatives, there was in the village also a small band of men with progressive views who took our side and argued that it was a company of *mahatmas* that was proceeding to the lake, that the gods could not have any objection to such visits, and that the village could only gain by the goodwill and blessings of such holy men. However, it was only after convincing the conservatives about our holiness and miraculous powers and getting their consent that our guides ventured to accompany us. Before we started, however, all of us prayed

fervently to the village god, that our journey might prove prosperous and our return be safe. After all, in serious difficulties, it is to God that we turn for help and comfort. If man prays in prosperity as fervently and whole-heartedly as he does in adversity, how easily would he realize Brahman !

The devotion of the mountain folk to their village gods is firm, extraordinarily firm. But their devotion is not selfless. These uneducated people do not in the least understand the nature of *Nishkama Bhakthi*. It is not uncommon to see them praying to their gods, with tears in their eyes for help to amass wealth or to avert calamities. Devotion to the guardian god of the village is not, of course, peculiar to the Himalayan regions. It is a widespread phenomenon all over India. But in recent times, as a result of the onset of modern civilization, such devotion seems to have received a setback in the low lands. In the Himalayan villages it still retains its hold. Devotion, even if it be the outcome of traditional faith and not the result of thought and reasoning, is still laudable, because the object of our devotion is the Controller of everything and Giver of everything and without His help we cannot even eat or sleep. It is at His will that clouds come down as rain, rivers flow, vegetables grow, man enjoys or suffers. If it is so, we cannot blame the mountain folk for ascribing omnipotence to their village god, whom they identify with God Himself.

Leaving the village, we travelled three or four miles along a beaten track and rested in the forest at night fall. It is from here that difficulties and dangers begin. Only one of two types of people would embark upon such an adventure ; either, knowers

of Brahman who are altogether indifferent to life or death and great heroes on one side or brute-like men who care nothing for the past or the future. Whether we belonged to the one group or the other, we got up early in the morning and set out cheerfully. From here, for six or seven miles, it is all steep ascent, altogether trackless. Trees and plants and creepers grow thick, making it dark and impassable. One of our guides, who was exceptionally bold and who had travelled that way several times before led the van. With some instrument in his hand, he cleared a path cutting and hewing right and left, above and below. We followed with eyes glued to the ground and all the senses on the alert. Slowly we moved forward, sometimes clinging to the trees, sometimes diving among the branches, sometimes crawling over stone and thorn. By 11 a.m. we somehow reached the top of the peak. But our feet were all swollen as a result of coming into contact with poisonous plants. They were lacerated with thorn, and blood was flowing. Our clothes were full of thorny leaves and fruits. By the time we reached the top of the peak one of our company was giddy on account of breathing poisonous air. We were thus compelled to spend some time nursing our invalid friend. At noon we prepared and ate our meal and then continued our trip. On the top of the mountain there is an open space, a small plateau devoid of trees. The spot is beautiful because of the flowers of all colours and sizes that grow plentifully upon very small plants. From there one can see to the north-east two mighty peaks of the Himalayas, over 20,000 ft. in height and covered with perpetual snow. They are called *Vanarapuchcha* and *Sreekantam*—It is impossible to describe

the beauty of the landscape that spreads out before you here. On one side you see the mighty peaks covered with dazzling snow, on another side you find the sides of the mountain reddish after the melting of the snow ; on yet another side, you see ranges of mountains covered with thick dark green forests shining like emerald.

Now, what is this beauty of nature ? It is the same as the Divine Beauty. Apart from *Brahman* nature has no beauty. Even as *Purusha* and *Sakti* are inseparable, *Brahman* and *Prakriti* are indivisible. He who has realized God, finds Him everywhere and in everything. Nothing is, except *Brahman*. *Brahman* appears under different names and in different forms and nothing else.

Well, we proceeded on our journey to the lake along that terrible route which looked like the gateway to the World of Death. On account of recent rains there was such a thick growth in the forest all round that if an elephant stood at a man's elbow, he would not have noticed its presence. However we reached the lake by 5 o'clock. On our arrival, a peculiar kind of bird known as "monal", very much like a cock in shape but red in colour, rose into the air from the clefts in the rocks which are their natural home, and offered us a hearty welcome. These birds are not very common even in the Himalayas. They are found only in cool forests at high altitudes. The peacock and the monal are the two birds in the Himalayas, most remarkable for their bright plumage. Historians say that Alexander of Macedonia, charmed by the beauty of the peacock, took away a few of them to Greece. If the emperor had seen the monal, he would have been charmed by them perhaps still

more. The peacock belongs to the lower altitudes and the monal to the higher. In the Himalayas, you cannot meet with the peacock above 1,500 ft. nor can you see the monal below 7,000 ft. It is said that hunters shoot down the monal for its flesh and feathers. We came across these lovely birds at different stages of our journey. My heart was specially gladdened when these friends came out of their nests with their mates to welcome us to the lake. Now a curious thought strikes me. Why was it, that the musk deer, the tiger, the wolf and other wild animals, which are found in large numbers in these forests, so scrupulously avoided us? We did not get a glimpse of them throughout our journey. Why? Perhaps the deer failed to offer us her welcome, being too shy to do so. The tiger and other ferocious animals perhaps remained aloof on account of their pride and egotism. However, we were very much satisfied on finding the great lake spreading hospitably before us. After our arduous journey we now sat down beside it.

It was now evening. The sun's rays had already turned red. The waters of the lake reflected the sun and shone red. As night closed upon us, our guides lighted a fire which helped to keep off the extreme cold of the night. In the course of the night we could hear all kinds of weird noises from the heart of the forest. At last it was dawn. We then started with one of the guides to go round the lake. In the course of our circumambulation the mountaineer pointed out to me several plants the smell of whose flowers would stupefy people. Various medicinal plants also were pointed out to me. Over and above all that, he narrated to me a number of stories illustrating the divine nature of the lake. As I listened to him my

heart was filled with more and more wonder and reverence for the lake. In 45 minutes we completed the circuit of Dhumdhithal which is only four or five furlongs in circumference. It is out of this lake that the Asi, a tributary of the Ganga, which forms the northern boundary of Uttarkasi, issues forth as a slender rill. Now, with our guide (who belonged to the Brahmin caste among the mountain folk) as our priest, we bathed in the lake and conducted our worship. It seemed to me that what the mountain folk had told us about the holiness of the place was very much true. I felt that I was at the time in a divine world which had nothing to do with the world of man. Who knows what secrets, remote from the channels of man's thought, lie concealed in that place !

After a light breakfast we started on our return journey at 9 o'clock, the next day. I had been baulked of my desire to stay one or two days more at the lake, as it was unbearably cold and snowfall seemed imminent. It was past one ; we had arrived back at the top of the mountain. The sky that was clear till then was suddenly overcast. Thunder began to rattle, almost quaking the mountains. It seemed that the god of rain was determined to test the courage of the sadhus who had relinquished every connection with the world, and the god of wind, as if angered by our audacity, began rushing about with irresistible violence. Gradually, hailstones began to fall. I was wonderstruck when I saw that everything fell out as the village folk had predicted. It was high time that we prayed for our physical safety as well as for the safety of the villagers' crops. Generally, in October it is hail that falls down on mountain tops and not rain. It is only from November that snowfall begins.

But the hailstorms here are very much different from hailstorms elsewhere. In these regions hail falls so thick that in a short time the land is covered with it a foot deep. With the beginning of the storm the courage of our mountain guides melted away and they were evidently in a state of consternation.

In time, hail began to fall heavily. The entire landscape was covered with snow, gleaming pure white on every side. Some of us had neither umbrellas nor sandals and we were in great trouble. We were still above 10,000 feet and we were walking over snow in hailstorm. Our limbs were cramped and our body began to shake and shiver. But as all of us had self-confidence and faith in God, our optimism did not give way. We hurried forward without waiting gloomily for tragedy to overtake us. The hail was still falling, the layer of snow was getting thicker and we were still walking over it. At last the descent began. When we had made our way four or five furlongs downward, we discovered that the intensity of the hail-fall had decreased. A few furlongs lower down we found that there was only rain, and no hail. It is no exaggeration to say that we were as much pleased with the fact that we were physically unhurt, as with the discovery that the poor villagers' crops had suffered no harm. When we returned to the village the simple villagers flocked round us and expressed their conviction that they had narrowly escaped the calamity of a hailstorm owing to the greatness and miraculous powers which we the *mahatmas* possessed. They now vied with one another in exhibiting their devotion to us. However, I must acknowledge here that we owed our safety and the happy termination of our excursion into the world

of the gods, mainly to our chief guide, the mountain Brahmin, or more correctly to the guide of the Universe Himself, and the Brahmin's skill in leadership as guide, I must say, was based upon his firm faith in God. Faith works wonders. It transforms the weak into the strong, the unskilled into the skilful, and cowards into heroes.

JAMNOTRI

The source of the Jamna is known as Jamnotri. It is 120 miles to the North-West of Hrishikesh. Every year several pilgrims make their way to this *Theertha* consisting of a number of hot springs at the foot of the famous Himalayan peak, Vanarapuchha. The Jamna, rising from Mt. Kalinda, flows on like a small stream of deep blue waters.

Once I travelled to Jamnotri from Uttarkasi. The distance between them is 45 miles, which can be traversed in three or four days. The way to Jamnotri is delightfully lovely like any other Himalayan route. If there is a road through the Nandana Gardens it must be like this.

GANGOTRI—I

तत्र वर्षसहस्रैश्च समाराध्य पुनः पुनः

ब्रह्माणं शङ्करं जह्नुं भुवि गङ्गामयोजयत् [वासिष्ठम्]

“ Bhageeratha brought Ganga to the Earth after performing penance for thousands of years, concentrating his mind on Brahma, Sankara and Jahnu in turn.”

The Purana gives a well-known story about the origin of the Ganga. They say that Bhageeratha, Emperor of Bharata Varsha, performed penance for thousands of years in order to bring the sacred river from the World of Gods to the world of men. Many take this story merely as an allegory ; there are others who take it for literal truth. If worldly wise men, skilled in the art of reasoning, refuse to accept it as literal truth we can hardly blame them. It is certainly too much to expect every one to swallow Puranic stories as they are, especially when they do not agree with experience and reason. None of our great teachers of the past have enjoined on us such blind obedience. Many modern scholars say that such stories are intended chiefly to enhance our faith in the holiness of the Ganga. Men of the old way of thinking refute this view with all their might. In spite of these differences between them, they agree to the extent that Bhageeratha had something to do with the Ganga and that he had performed a long penance in relation to her. It is when the scholars leave this common ground and descend to a consideration of details, that the gap between them becomes unbridgeable. I do not intend to tread upon those dangerous grounds. Indeed, criticism is like a boundless sea. Once you get into it, you can hardly get out of it. O Mother Ganga, I am your worshipper and not your critic. I respect you as my supreme goddess, I love and worship you as my mother. To me it is all the same whether you were created by Brahma at the time of creation or by Bhageeratha later on. It matters little whether you originated at the foot of Vishnu and flow through the matted hair of Sankara or gush up at the foot of some Himalayan

peak and make your way through glaciers. Can a son, loyal to his mother, criticise her? May my devotion to Mother Ganga go on ever increasing! May the holy Ganga, continue her mission of mercy, reclaiming the sinful and the wicked!

Gangotri is the holy place where Bhageeratha performed his penance. The forest where he lived and the rock on which he remained in meditation are still pointed out as Gangavanam and Bhageeratha Sila. But the true source of the Ganga is Gomukham, 18 miles to the north of Gangotri. Gomukham is a long and lovely heap of perpetual snow among the silvery peaks of the Himalayas. The melting snow forms small rills seen and unseen, which join together into a single stream. This is the origin of the Ganga. As there is no route, leading beyond Gangotri, travellers seldom reach the real source of the river. Yet in certain seasons, people with great powers of endurance and spirit of adventure, do reach Gomukham, defying all the physical discomforts on the way. If there be one among them, who does not know that the peaks of the Himalayas are ever capped with bright shining snow, on looking towards the east, he is bound to exclaim "Lo! the Bhageerathi originates among these silver mountains".

From November to April, Gangotri is covered with snow on all sides. During that period it is almost inaccessible. Even savage brutes like the bear, natives of these regions, find it impossible to stir out of their dens to hunt their prey. But from June, devotees trickle into Gangotri. I believe that, if a person is able, for once, to immerse in the holy waters of the Ganga at Gangotri and meditate upon the holy Mother on her banks, even if it be only for five or ten minutes,

he must be deemed to have fulfilled his life's purpose. Only the blessed ones come by such good fortune.

तदेतत् परमं ब्रह्म द्रवरूपं महेश्वरि !
गङ्गाख्यं यत् पुण्यतमं पृथिव्यामागतं शिवे !

[स्कन्दपुराणम्]

The Ganga is not mere water, like lakes or seas. It is Brahma Itself in liquid form. It has incarnated Itself as the holiest water to wash away the sins of the wicked. But what is the proof? Faith, faith—nothing else. In spiritual matters (all great religions and all great teachers of religion agree on this point) it is faith that matters, not intelligence. With mere intelligence no man has ever attained the highest spiritual experience. Instances are only too common of intellectual giants leading unchaste, wicked and miserable lives, and of the faithful dwarfs leading chaste, virtuous and happy ones. Apart from faith, what is there to prove that Rama and Rameswar are divine? That is why great scholars, skilled in reasoning, have given up their logical methods and resorted to faith whenever they are prompted by spiritual aspirations.

जो रामेश्वर दर्शन करिहै
सौ ननु ताजि मम धाम सिधारहि ।
जो गंगाजल आनि चढाइहि
सो सायूज्य मुक्ति नर पाइहि ॥

“Whoever goes to Rameswar and obtains *darshan* reaches *Vaikunta* at his death; whoever brings the Ganga water and washes the Lord at Rameswar with it, attains *Sayujya mukti*.”

When the great Thulasi Dasa sings thus intoxicated with Divine Love, he does so out of his practical experience in the world of faith, not out of his learning. The importance of faith is clearly demonstrated by the fact that even erudite logicians have made statements and produced books which depend for their existence solely upon the faith of the speaker or writer as well as that of the listeners or readers : Without faith it is impossible for man to reach his spiritual goal.

Whenever I was staying at Gangotri, it was my favourite pastime to go up the difficult and trackless regions beyond. I can never forget those excursions which brought me new vigour and cheerfulness, great peace of mind and noble fancies. Once, in a cave above the Gangotri Temple, I asked a very aged and very learned *Mahatma* whom I knew, "Sire, why should you, in this old age, pass your days in this cave in such solitude?" The reply that he gave me with a heroic look, in flawless Sanskrit, is still ringing in my ears. "The Puranas say," he said, "many Brahmarshis and Rajarshis passed their last days in *samadhi* in these caves by the Ganga and left their mortal remains here. I, too, in my old age am spending my days here in *Yoga*. I too wish to abandon my body here. I have no desires. I spend my days here in meditation. I have no difficulties or sorrows. I experience nothing but bliss, shadowless bliss." I fully appreciated these words which bear out the worth and greatness of true sadhus. Even in these days of *Kali* (of extreme worldliness and wickedness) you may come across such *mahatmas* in the neighbourhood of Gangotri.

O Himalaya, Mountain Divine, yours is luck unparalleled ! This Bhageerathi, one drop of whose

water washes away all the sins of man, is your daughter. You have been nursing your lovely child in your lap from time immemorial. Which Mountains will not be jealous of you ! On other mountains, in the dark caves, one finds only jackals and tigers ; in you alone dwell enlightened hermits in peace and bliss ! O Motherland, you are blessed, for this noble mountain is your head ! O Indian, you are thrice blessed, because you are the child of this great Bharat !

GANGOTRI—II

It was past 2 p.m. As it was August-September the sun was quite warm at that level, below 8,000 ft. The bear and other wild animals were perhaps resting in their lairs. Domesticated animals, too, were nowhere to be seen, since there were no villages in the neighbourhood. The mountain crows were flitting about but no other birds were visible. Perhaps they also were enjoying their siesta. Nothing broke the desolation and silence of the landscape, except a few girls of the mountain tribes who were, after lunch, proceeding merrily, sickle in hand, singing snatches of songs, in the direction of their fields where vegetables grew luxuriantly. I was filled with wonder as I thought how kindly God managed to feed all these creatures from the highest to the lowest, and keep them all cheerful. Indeed, it was not for the first time or the second that I was wondering at the efficiency of His Government and His Universal affection.

Once I was wending my solitary way to Gangotri. Eighteen or twenty miles still lay before me. I had no food that day. I had sought for alms in a village

but in vain. As the day wore on, I began to feel hungry. But I was not worried. While I rested under a tree, I only wondered how God was going to feed me in that desolate place. In fact, I was watching with childlike curiosity to see how it was going to be done. Time passed. I still sat there immersed in the beauty of the surroundings. The mighty Himalayas seemed to symbolise the Almighty Himself and the Ganga looked as if she were over-flowing with milk. Just then I saw a *parvatheeya* Brahmin (*i.e.*, a Brahmin among the mountain folk) labouring up the mountain-side with a heavy load on his shoulders. He was tired and sweating all over and evidently hungry. At a distance from me he unloaded himself and then sitting near the stream took out a small packet which contained his food. He had already seen me. With the open packet in his hand he now approached me respectfully and begged me to take as much out of it as I liked. On seeing such liberality and love, I was very much moved. The man seemed to me an incarnation of God, manifesting Himself to appease my hunger. All that he could offer me was some potato, boiled clean, without even salt. I accepted just a little portion of it as God's own gift and was satisfied. Here was a true instance of charity. The rich man overfeeds himself on dainty fare and then proudly gives away some morsels to the poor. His act involves no sacrifice and it can hardly be regarded as charity. The hungry beggar who shares with another the little food he has obtained by begging is truly charitable and his deed is really far more meritorious.

Having appeased my hunger and quenched my thirst at the stream, I proceeded on my way.

“ त्वमेव माताच पिता त्वमेव
 त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव ।
 त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव
 त्वमेव सर्वं मम देवदेव ॥ ”

God does not exist if He fails to help His devotee who has thrown himself completely upon His protection. So long as God IS, His devotee cannot suffer starvation or sorrow or come to ruin.

Gangotri is situated fifty-six miles from Uttarkasi. The route leading to it runs north-east, along the banks of the Ganga, skirting the mountains on the way. The path remains closed to the sinful even today. Until a few years ago, the paths to Gangotri and Jamnotri were difficult and dangerous to traverse ; today they have become comparatively easier and more safe. Twenty-seven miles from Uttarkasi is the famous Parasarasrama. Tradition holds that it is the site of the hermitage where Parasara, son of Sakti, and father of Vyasa, passed his days in religious observances. During my journeys to and from Gangotri I usually spend some time here on the bank of the Ganga, charmed by the dense forests and the hot springs which are found here as at Jamnotri. Beyond Parasarasrama are high mountains capped with snow. Fourteen or fifteen miles farther up is a plateau called Harsil. The village Makhwa, where the priests of Gangotri reside, is situated within three miles of the plateau. Makhwa is supposed to stand on the site of the ancient hermitages of Mathanga Maharshi and Maharshi Markandeya. The story of Mathanga is well-known among Hindus. He was born of low caste parents, but he rose high in the esteem of the

world because of his extraordinary devotion and great knowledge. Sri Buddha in one of his speeches, refers to him thus :

“ By birth man does not become an out-caste nor does he become a high-caste man. He becomes high or low according to his deeds. For example, there was once a *chandala* called Mathanga. He was born of parents who subsisted on the carcass of hounds. Yet, by his goodness, he became famous as a saint. Many Kshatriyas and Brahmins became his disciples and they served him with devotion.”*

Close to the village associated with the name of Mathanga, is a hamlet named Dharali. Here too, I have spent some time, now and then. Situated 8,000 ft. above sea level, at the foot of mountains whose tops are ever lost in snow, the place is charming in its beauty and tranquillity. Not far from here is the site of the hermitage which once belonged to the great Rishi, Jahnu. From this spot starts an easy route to Mount Kailas in Western Tibet. If you proceed a few miles more, along the foot of the mountains, under the shade of the deodar trees, along the valley of the Ganga, which comes down with a deafening roar through narrow clefts among the rocks, you at last come in sight of Gangotri.

Gangotri is where the Ganga emerges between two rows of high rocks which are bordered by the deodar and other Himalayan trees. Compared with Badri and Kedar, Gangotri is not extensive in area, but in point of natural beauty, it can hold its own against any other spot in the Himalayas. Added to that natural loveliness is its traditional sacredness.

* According to the Puranas, Goddess Lakshmi once honoured Mathanga by permitting herself to be born as his daughter.

Those who acknowledge the holiness of the Ganga, cannot but recognise the holiness of Gangotri. The Puranas and the Epics are never tired of paying glowing tributes to the Ganga. Of course it is difficult for reflective people to accept the Puranic stories and episodes as literal truths ; yet nobody can deny that they contain many valuable truths or at least portions of truth. To teach the common people bare truths without the aid of fables, stories, allegories and the like, is almost an impossibility. As a western philosopher has put it, the attempt to convey abstract truths without any external aid, is as ridiculous as the effort of the man who destroys the pitcher in order to carry the water by itself. The words of the philosopher only reflect one of the very common ideas of the writers of the Puranas. Those ancient *rishis* had recourse to fiction and allegory and exaggeration so that they might bring home to the minds of people at all stages of mental culture, those eternal truths which they wanted to impress upon them. There is no doubt they have used various literary devices to disseminate among the people ideas about the sacredness of the Ganga and to persuade them to worship her. Even after making due allowance for the propagandist element, we cannot but feel and recognise the super-mundane greatness of the sacred Ganga.

From Gangotri where Bhageerata performed his penance in days of yore, there is hardly any path going up into the mountains. But, for the faithful, it is yet possible to proceed. The journey along the wild banks of the Ganga is certainly difficult and terrifying but at the same time full of surprises and delightful experiences. Ten or twelve miles up there is a forest called Bhoorjavanam (Boorja = birch). It is a favourite

resort of saints and rishis. Five or six miles farther up is the sacred spot, Gomukhi. Because of the precipitous peaks and the perpetual snow cap, it is impossible for ordinary mortals to proceed further. During my first stay at Gangotri, weather conditions did not permit me to venture into the regions beyond ; so I had to be content with the account given by the saintly men who had visited the place for themselves.*

Except for the saintly souls who have detached themselves completely from the world, a life among the Himalayan peaks is almost an impossibility. Even if it be possible, it cannot be to the taste of common men. Only people with a certain degree of *samskara* (mental refinement) can enjoy the solitary grandeur of those heights so far away from worldly pleasures. For them pleasures of the senses are so many tortures. A life of poverty affords them heavenly bliss. “ My son, are you not bringing disgrace upon your royal dynasty by wandering about the streets of your Capital, like a common mendicant, a begging bowl in your hand ? If you want to learn philosophy, why don't you do so as a Prince, still living in your

* Since this was written (that is, after 1932) for ten years now I have been passing five or atleast four months every year at Gangotri. During the first three years I stayed in a fine, rocky cave, fitted up with a door. When it was destroyed in a landslide, I shifted to a safer place and took up my abode in a hut built of deodar wood. The natural beauty, solitude and peace and the atmosphere of spirituality that envelopes the place attract me to these quarters every year.

During such sojourns, I pay my visits to Gomukhi once a year. There I spend some time in the enjoyment of supernatural beauty and peace. Sometimes I pass even beyond. On such occasions the sight of the Himalayan peaks like ‘Sivalingom’ and ‘Sumeru’, which shine like burnished gold, just above Gomukhi and at no great distance, fill my heart with ineffable joy. Kedarnath and some other peaks also are in the neighbourhood.

If you leave Gomukhi, travel over the snow and ascend a 19,000 ft. pass, you reach Badrinath at a short distance on the other side. This passage is a short cut, but it is impossible for the common man to negotiate it.

palace ? ” enquired Sri Buddha’s father. “ Revered Sire, my begging cannot disgrace your family for I have always been a *bhikshu*. I know I belong to the dynasty of *Bhikshus*. If I were of the princely race, I should have preferred a princely life,” answered his son. Though Gautama Buddha was born of a royal family, his *samskara* was that of a mendicant and no wonder he abandoned the sceptre for the begging bowl. Thus a man’s *samskara*—the sum-total of his inborn tendencies inherited from previous lives—turns him into a worldling or a *sanyasin*. The saying that saints are born and not made, is literally true and highly significant.

KEDARNATH

An extensive plain without a trace of trees or plants—masses of dazzling snow to the north, east and west—mountains looking black or red after the melting of the snow—a small stream issuing from the snowy peaks in the north and flowing between rocks through the middle of the plain—heaps of snow not yet thawed by the heat of the sun, looking like boulders of silver, resting here and there on the plain—pilgrims, both sadhus and householders, moving slowly along the level land, their hands held across their breasts and their teeth chattering like castanets on account of the extreme cold—a few of the pilgrims plunging into the ice-cold water which could freeze the blood in a minute or two, as if to overcome cold with cold—a few stray birds on the wing—the youthful rays of the sun reflected back from the bright snow with redoubled brilliance, but with little warmth—a grandeur and an other-worldliness matching with the extreme

cold—an all-pervading Divineness and Spirituality which declares the relationship between the place and the rishis and the gods—one or two small, stone-built temples on the northern boundary of the plain, infusing into pilgrims a new love and ardour—in short, a landscape full of beauty, peace, and holiness—such was my first impression when I visited Kedarnath years ago.

It was at about 10 o'clock, on a cloudless June morning, that I first set my foot on the plain of Kedarnath. I was then rambling in the Himalayas for the first time and my heart was at once filled with wonder and joy. In spite of cold and hunger and thirst, my mind was immediately lifted up into a kind of *Bhava samadhi* (a state of ecstasy with objective reference). It is my experience that among the Himalayas my love of natural beauty often raises my mind to a higher plane. Here, at a height of 12,000 ft. above sea-level, it was the sight, at close quarters of a snow-white line of mountains that lifted up my mind. I remained entranced for a long time, enjoying the unbounded glory and power of God.

Tradition says that it was the Pandavas who installed the idol of Kedarnath and built the temple. The same source informs us that, in course of time, Sri Sankara renovated the temple and appointed *Saivas* from the South to officiate as priests. Some learned men hold that Sri Sankara who was an *Avatar* of Siva, renounced his earthly existence at this place, on his way back to Kailas. However that be, Kedarnath is held in the highest esteem by Hindus. The idol here is a *swayambhu* (Selfborn), a big round rock that seems to have grown up naturally from inside the earth. Of course, there is nothing absurd in worshipping God in many forms, from the highest to the

lowest, as the Omnipresent Existence-knowledge-Bliss or as stock, or stone or earth, because everything is Divine. Nothing exists outside God. If a devotee whole-heartedly worships a stock or stone as God, and another worships Vishnu or Rudra, the former is bound to derive as much benefit as the latter from the Almighty. The man who takes this broad view that everything is God, never looks down upon any faith or religion with contempt as useless or false. Those who criticise Hinduism for propagating faith in a multiplicity of Gods, are ignorant of the great doctrine of *Sanathana Dharma* that the entire Universe is but the body of God.

Lord Kedarnath wins the heart of His worshippers and leads their minds into serene contemplation. At this holy place, all the griefs of the grief-stricken melt away and worldly tendencies of worldlings are suppressed. Unholy things cannot enter here. The natural beauty of the place may be enjoyed by atheists as well as theists, but only people of deep faith will have the courage to dip themselves in the ice-cold Ganga here. In fact, it is in itself a difficult penance to bathe in the streams at such high altitudes. But faith makes the difficult easy. When the fire of faith burns within, one cannot feel even the benumbing cold. Such faith, however, can be the result only of great virtue. Sin impedes faith. Everyone who is born must die ; yet who remembers the inevitable end ? Daily, people see hundreds of creatures falling victims to Death. Still they fancy themselves immortal. Smaller fishes with their young ones play about in the mouth of the whale ; similarly, man with his wife and children, name and fame, sports with Death.

“ किं ते धनेन किमु बन्धुभिरेव वा ते
किं ते दारैर्ब्राह्मिण ! यो मरिष्यति ”

O ! Brahmin, of what use are riches and relations to the dying man ? Of what use even his wife is to him ?

So sing the rishis. But man turns a deaf ear to all such wise words. Why ? It is his sinfulness that drags him down, by tightening the hold of gold and wordly pleasures on his heart and by wheedling him away from other-worldly thoughts and spiritual practices. The sinful not only discountenance but even positively hate good deeds and acts of penance. Personally, I have had both the good fortune and the misfortune of seeing Europeans immersing themselves in the Ganga water and well-born, educated Hindus sporting in the Gangotri Valley without touching the holy water or visiting a single temple on the banks of the Ganga. This paradox is due to the presence of faith in the white-skinned European and the absence of it in the Indian. Faith itself depends upon virtue.

From Gangotri to Kedarnath it is about 115 miles, and from Hrishikesh to Kedarnath it is 130. The way from Gangotri to Kedarnath is difficult but beautiful. On the way travellers have to negotiate a Pass called 'Pavvali', more than 10,000 ft. above sea-level. The mountain here is covered on all sides with lovely forests where one may come across fine birds and flowers rarely met with elsewhere even in the Himalayas. Enraptured by the beauty of the flowers and the songs of the birds I have often spent hours here forgetting all the toil and the fatigue of the climb. The view that one gets from the top of the Pass is uncommonly beautiful. During my first ramble

I enjoyed the wonderful sight with all the zest of a school-boy. To the north there is the unending line of silver mountains ; to the south, down to the borders of Hindustan, are rows of hills black-green with vegetation and above the Ghat rise peaks that stand massive and serene as if in quiet contemplation.

Once you cross this not-very-long Pass, you reach a well-known holy place called "Thriyuginarayana". There are pieces of evidence still extant to show that this spot also was once a favourite resort of rishis. The *Mahabharata* states that Yudhistira and his companions, on the way to Badrikashram, journeyed over this region. The sight of such holy places associated with ancient rishis cannot fail to evoke sublime thoughts in the mind of any Hindu. Here also, there is a temple where regular worship is conducted by priests. Descending some distance and ascending again along the bank of the Ganga, the path proceeds in the direction of Kedarnath. The forests and the streams and the heaps of rocks at this place seem to join in a harmony, a constant hymn of praise to the Creator, whose greatness the common man realizes not.

God shines everywhere, in stone and earth and water, but men who have not overcome their ego fail to find the Resplendent One anywhere. Conceit of Self in one's intelligence, senses and body is egotism. "I" leads to "Mine" and for the sinner who is immersed in this "I" and "Mine" the realization of God's Omnipresence is verily impossible.

Gourikunda, a place on the bank of the Ganga *en route* to Kedarnath deserves special mention here. It derives its name from a number of pools which are always full of hot water. The sulphur springs are a

blessing to the pilgrims in this very cold climate. There is a story which seeks to explain the presence of the hot springs in the locality. It is said that Sri Sankara was once proceeding towards Kedarnath with his disciples. The disciples found it extremely difficult to bathe in the very cold water of the Ganga and perform their ablutions. Taking pity upon them, the Master willed that hot springs should appear and immediately hot water began to gush forth and form itself into a number of pools. In Vidyaranyaswami's biographical work on Sankara, called "*Sankara Digvijaya*", there is a reference to this incident.

The way continues to rise along stretches of rock until it reaches Kedarnath. As the devotees draw near their destination, cries of "Kedarnathji Ki Jai," rise from their throats in unison. The whole place reverberates with those shouts. Even those people whose main object is sight-seeing feel supremely happy. As for the devotees, they are in a state of ecstasy. No longer mindful of physical discomforts they plunge into the cold water and then filling their water-pots with water and gathering a few flowers on the way they enter the temple shouting, "Hara Hara Mahadeva!". Forgetting all the world outside, they press forward into the presence of Kedarnath for a *darshan* for which they have dared all the dangers and discomforts of the pilgrimage. At the door of the temple all distinctions between man and woman, the rich and the poor, disappear. All are here equal. Miraculous indeed is love. Its sweetness and power are alike great. Great poets like Valmiki, Vyasa, and Kalidasa with their powerful imagination, have portrayed in their immortal works a few aspects of love. Love and devotion (Bhakti) are not two different

things. Love for those above us, is called Bhakti—love for the gods or God is of this type. Love for one's equals is called friendship. When stainless devotion to God gets deep-rooted in the mind of man, we consider the object of his existence already attained.

BADRINATH—I

It was in 1924 that I travelled from Kedarnath to Badrinath for the first time. On this occasion I could not, however, stay for long at Badri. Fortunately for me, since then I have had opportunities of visiting the place again and again. In 1930 and 1931 I travelled to Badrinath from Hrishikesh and on both occasions I spent some time there in devotion.

Even while I was passing my days in Badrikashram and other holy places in the Himalayas, I came to feel, every now and then, that the wonderful power of *Maya* (Illusion) was at work everywhere. It was not inactive even in the peaceful solitudes of these remote regions. Grasses and plants and trees flourish on water, blossom and bear fruits ; streams and rivers flow on, winds blow, the sun shines. If the inanimate things themselves are so active what about the animate ones ? Birds fly and sing ; cows graze on the meadows, roam about and rest. Men too, whether ignorant or enlightened, eat and play and sleep. Thus everywhere you find ceaseless activity. And no wonder. Action is the natural order of the world. The life-force continues to stir all living bodies at all times. There is no state of inaction. A desireless, peaceful state of existence where the distinction between the Knower and the Known disappears, is difficult to

attain, wherever man may be. That distinction fades away only when man has crossed the stream of action which shows itself in the activities of the physical senses and which produces pleasure and pain. But crossing the stream means the complete conquest of Illusion and Illusion is certainly very difficult to overcome. “मम माया दुरत्यया” Even in holy places like Badrikashram it is not easy to reach that stage of Supreme Bliss, where all distinctions disappear, where all activity ceases. There may be a few great souls who enjoy the state of *Samadhi* but even their minds and senses are not beyond the reach of the mighty Illusion. One may ascend to the highest peak of the Himalayas ; but unless one is exceptionally fortunate and possesses tireless industry, deep faith, true knowledge and the highest degree of detachment, one cannot overcome Illusion completely and reach that final blissful state of merger with the Supreme.

Badrikashram was the sacred place where Nara and Narayana performed their penance. It is situated in the valley of the Alakananda, between two mountains named after them. The *asram* is described in the *Puranas* as the home of *rishis* and as covered with the smoke of *yajnas*. But today it appears in a totally altered form. There are some temples and rows of houses where priests and pilgrims lodge or foodstuffs are offered for sale. The whole place is noisy with the conversation of travellers and the altercations of priests who demand gifts and rewards from them. A hot pool called Thaptha Kunda and another the Brahama-Kapali, a short distance away, are the two chief *theerthas* in modern Badri. The famous temple of Badri Narayana is situated on a rising ground above the Thaptha Kunda. In the temple by the

side of the image of Sri Narayana, are installed the figures of Nara and Narayana, the original dwellers of the place. Outside is a small temple dedicated to Sri Sankaracharya. But it is remarkable that there are no shrines here dedicated to Vyasa, Suka ; or Gaudapada who once lived at this spot.

The temple of Badrinath is situated on the left bank of the Alakananda. As soon as a devotee's eye falls on the lovely Lord of Badrinath his or her heart sheds all sinful tendencies and feels great devotion and happiness. Decked with various jewels and multicoloured garlands of flowers, the lustrous Lord of Badri wins the heart of everyone at first sight. The fact that it is a *Nambudiri* Brahmin of Kerala who conducts the *Pooja* at Badri as at Guruvayoor and other temples of Kerala, cannot but be a source of pride and pleasure to the sons and daughters of Malabar. The head-priest of Badri is generally known by his title "Ravalji". It has been my pleasure to discuss with him, at times, the history of Badrinath Temple and the connection between the worship at Badri and the *Nambudiris* of Malabar. On such occasions, I have been filled with wonder and pride at the supreme greatness of Sri Sankara. It is a matter of common knowledge that it was the great Acharya who installed the image of Narayana on the side of Narayana Parvata. But, exactly when a member of Sri Sankara's own community began to conduct the worship at the shrine, is not known.

How wonderful were the life and achievements of Sri Sankara ! In thought or in action he had no rival. It is only very rarely—very, very rarely—that such wise philosophers or heroic men of action make their appearance in the world. When we see the

volume of work he accomplished and the number of books he wrote, against the brief span of his life and the age and circumstances in which he lived, we are not at all surprised at the view several scholars have taken that Sri Sankaracharya was an incarnation of Lord Sankara. Yet many people in India today do not know the real greatness of the world-teacher, who raised the Sanatana Dharma once again to its pristine glory and honour. Such ignorance is the result of a very defective system of education. Truly, education is not worth its name if it does not teach people the noble lives of their own great countrymen and induce them to follow in the wake of those national heroes.

The temple of Badrinath owes its very existence to Kerala. Its priesthood and modes of worship are other ties which bind it fast to Malabar. One may even say that Badri Narayan is the tutelary deity of Kerala, as much as Guruvayoor Appan Himself. Yet, only a small number of Malayalees visit Badrinath from year to year and the reason is clear. From Malabar to the Himalayas it is a far cry. With all the modern conveniences of travel, it is not yet easy for the common man to reach the northernmost part of India from the southernmost. The few who accomplish the long journey gain not only merit and purity of mind which will save them hereafter ; but also much valuable training and sense of discipline for success and happiness here itself. A visit to these northern regions helps to clear away the atheistic doubts and tendencies that at times assail even the faithful. The grand, beautiful, peaceful Himalayas which remain motionless in deep meditation help to purify any sinful mind and elevate it to a higher plane.

The Himalayan region is the land of *Jnana* (true knowledge), the South is the land of *Karma* (action). In the north there is a greater sense of equality and fraternity because of the tradition inherited from the great *rishis* who had realized for themselves that there is nothing other than Brahman. Here, therefore, there is nothing like the ugly custom of unapproachability. But when I speak of the greater sense of equality prevailing in North India, I do not mean that the rules of *Varnasrama dharma* are totally inoperative in the north. I only mean that they do not function so harshly and abominably as in Malabar. A thoughtful pilgrim from Malabar, on his way to Badri, gets splendid opportunities of learning much about the cities of India, about the differences in religion, customs, manners, races and languages even among the Hindus themselves. In the midst of all this diversity, one is struck by a sense of Aryan unity. For example, the names of Siva and Rama are loved and honoured everywhere. In the early morning every one bows to the Sun. *Sanyasins*, Brahmins and guests are honoured at all places from Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin) to Badrinath. It may be, the language of welcome is different, the food served is different, the manners practised are different. Yet, they are honoured and welcomed everywhere. It is a matter of pride and satisfaction for Hindus that in spite of the revolutions and counter-revolutions of Ages, the eternal principles of their *Dharma* have survived. Another advantage of such pilgrimages is that they give the pilgrims opportunities of visiting several holy places from Rameswaram to Badrinath, of meeting many holy men and learning from them the subtle secrets of the spirit.

A mile to the north of the Badri Temple there is a famous rock called 'Gaudapadasila'. This rather small, smooth and beautiful rock, on the left bank of the Alakananda, is said to have been the favourite seat of Rishi Gaudapada, disciple of Suka. It is well-known that Vyasa and Sankara wrote their important books at Badrikashram. Similarly Gaudapada composed his *Karikas* on *Mandukyopanishad*, it is said, sitting on this rock. There is a tradition that Sri Sankara actually met Gaudapada here and Gaudapada then entrusted his Mandukya *Karikas* to Sankara in order that Sankara might write a commentary explaining Gaudapada's views.

BADRINATH—II

Fifteen or sixteen miles beyond Badrinath is the holy place called Swargarohini. It was from here that the great Yudhishtira, while he was moving forward on his last journey without ever retracing a step or even looking back as his wife and brothers dropped down dead behind him one by one, was taken away to heaven by Indra's charioteer, Mathali. Once, towards the beginning of July, when I was staying at Badrinath, I followed this route up into the mountains. Partly my love of Nature's beauty, and partly my faith in and devotion to great souls induced me to go out on this adventure. The way to Swargarohini goes up along the valley to the west of Narayana Parvata. Starting from the Badri Temple and travelling three miles to the north along the bank of the Alakananda, over an extensive plain, one reaches a yillage called Mana. The village is now

the home of uneducated agriculturists, and merchants ; but there is enough evidence to prove that it was once inhabited by holy rishis. The cave of Vyasa, where Maharshi Badarayana, who was an incarnation of Vishnu, resided and the cave of Ganesa where he invoked God Ganesa for the composition of his works like the *Mahabharata* and the Cave of Muchukunda, where King Muchukunda passed his last days in accordance with Sri Krishna's advice, are in the neighbourhood. From April to October several *Mahatmas* make these caves their abode and practise penance in them. The Alakananda that comes down from a snow-ridge in the north-west and the Saraswati that flows down from the Lake of the Gods in the north, meet here and this holy place of junction is described in the *Puranas* as Kesava Prayag. From there a path proceeds in the direction of Tibet, over the Mana Pass, 18,000 ft. high. Leave aside that path and go straight west along the bank of the Alakananda and then you reach a waterfall called Vasudhara. In fact, there are two falls which come down from the snow-clad peaks with a deafening noise. Vasudhara is regarded as a holy *theertha*.

If you cross the Alakananda here using the boulders of snow that stretch across the river just like a dam, and go westward, you reach a beautiful place called Lakshmivanam. Birch trees with their dark green foliage and slightly reddish bark and various kinds of plants, both big and small, covered over with flowers of different colours, flourish here making it fit to be Lakshmi Devi's own garden. The beauty of the forest filled my heart with joy. I plucked a number of these fragrant flowers, smelt them, and decked my head with them in reverence. It is a well-known fact

that during summer months when the snow melts on the Himalayas, many rare kinds of plants and flowers, hardly met with elsewhere, make their appearance there. These flowers are capable of fascinating not only human beings, but even cows and other animals. In the eyes of the ignorant they appear to be quite ordinary plants, but the wise know them to be plants of great medicinal virtue.

Along the foot of Narayana Parvata you wend your way to the west and then turn south. From here it is all trackless. To move forward you have now to tackle clusters of rocks and masses of snow. From the high top of Narayana Parvata, you may see many waterfalls every one of which is regarded as a *theertha* by Hindus. On reaching the difficult and dangerous place your mind cannot but revert to Yudhishtira and his perfect indifference to worldly comforts. Just think of a mighty emperor who could be rolling in worldly pleasures leaving his court and Kingdom and walking along these terrible gorges all alone. Great indeed is the power of *Vairagya* (indifference to worldly things). When *Vairagya* dawns, tenderness changes into hardness, weakness into strength and grief into joy. It makes the impossible easily possible. But true *Vairagya* is difficult to attain, because desire and attachment spring from multifarious sources. Desire is a Hydra-headed monster. Cut off one head and you find several taking its place. Overcome sexual desire and it is soon replaced by the desire for wealth. Overcome that too, then the attachment to the body shows itself with unprecedented strength. Get over that attachment also and then the desire for immortal fame calls aloud like a lioness from the caverns of the heart. Even the wisest

and the most learned of mankind are ensnared by the desire for fame. Verily, desire for fame is the last infirmity of noble minds. It can be overcome by only wise and heroic efforts. Very often, common people are misled into taking this hankering after fame as the love of one's community, of one's country or religion. He who engages himself in national or religious work to perpetuate his name is no true patriot or saint. People may pretend that the prosperity of their country or religion is the sole objective but their real aim may be self-aggrandizement. In English there is a familiar saying, "Even the Devil knoweth not the mind of man". The Omniscient alone knows the real motives of one's conduct. Desire is something subtle and beyond the comprehension of the senses. Our surmises based on externals are therefore liable to go wrong, and they do often go wrong. But let us return to our subject.

True *Vairagya* is the result of thought. The other kinds of *Vairagya*, resulting from various other causes, can, at best, be only weak, temporary and halting. Yudhishtira's *vairagya* was of the true type. Stricken with remorse at the death of so many kinsmen and at the thought that he himself had been the cause of such massacre and misery, his mind turned inward. He now pondered over the vanity of worldly things—state, riches, and relationships like father and son—over the heartless crimes committed for the sake of such vain things and over the great sorrows man has to suffer in this world and the next, as a result of such thoughtless conduct. His mind thus turned away from wealth and pleasure and learnt to despise kingship and its paraphernalia. His mind rose to the most intense state of *vairagya* and he resolved to renounce

everything and become a *sanyasin*. In an assembly where his brothers like Bhima, comrades like Krishna and teachers like Vyasa were present, he announced his intention to retire to the forest and there give up his body in penance. Bhima and the other brothers objected. They argued :

“ यदि संन्यासतः सिद्धिं राजा कश्चिदवाप्नुयात् ।
पर्वताश्च द्रुमाश्चैव क्षिप्रं सिद्धिमवाप्नुयुः ॥ ”

“ If, by sheer renunciation, a king could reach his goal then even the mountains and trees which have no desires of their own must reach the goal still more easily.” Yudhishtira answered them logically quoting the *Vedas* ; yet, as he could not reject the affectionate advice of Krishna and Vyasa, he had to defer the fulfilment of his wish to a later time. So he continued to rule his kingdom, but in a spirit of perfect detachment. The news of the extermination of the Yadavas as a result of internal strife, and of the passing away of Lord Krishna, inflamed the old desire that lay smouldering in his breast. He decided to give up all wordly activities and soon set out on the final journey. His brothers and Draupadi followed him. They moved farther north through the heart of the Himalayas. They had left Badrikashrama behind, when Bhima cried out, “ Alas ! Draupadi has dropped down on the way ”. Yudhishtira neither stopped nor turned ; he just said, “ That is because of her partiality for Arjuna ” and passed on. A little later Bhima reported the fall of Sahadeva. “ That is because of his pride in his wisdom,” said Yudhishtira quietly and moved on. Thus, one by one, all the brothers fell and Yudhishtira, in intense loneliness,

made his way forward, over rock and snow, without once turning back. Just think of his *Vairagya*, his courage, and heroism ! Let us now follow the route he pursued on the great journey.

When we have travelled four or five miles up along the difficult route from Lakshmivanam, we reach a small, pretty lake Chakratheertha, named so perhaps because of its shape. A mile or two hence is another lake called Sathyapathha. We then reach two pools called Suryakunda and Chandrakunda. The lakes are on a plain covered with rocks and snow and surrounded by mountains over 23,000 feet in height. Now a short trip over the snow brings us to the famous Swargarohini. The heroic Yudhishtira, who no longer thought of his body and who had vowed not to look back or turn back, might have climbed up into that terrible expanse of snow in benumbing cold, but it remains inaccessible to all ordinary mortals. It is said that, in ancient days, people, determined to enter heaven, used to ascend into these regions and relinquish their bodies there.

Our educated moderns may laugh at these queer notions like heaven, ascent into heaven—use of Swargarohini as a ladder to heaven—a visit to the holy place as an act of merit and death at the spot as a passport to the realm of the gods. They may deride all that is said about such things as the ravings of fools. Yet even they cannot deny the natural attractions of the surrounding landscape. Neither skill in argumentation nor lack of faith can contradict the experience of our senses. The snow-clad peaks shining like silver or gold in the sunshine, and the noise of the avalanches that resembles the bursts of cannon, convert the region into a wonderland, and fill

the hearts of theists and atheists alike with astonishment and admiration. As for me, my heart was dancing with joy at the divine splendour all around me. My mind was intoxicated with the glory of God. Lo ! God Himself shines here as this mass of spotless snow, as lakes and springs, as these tall peaks and these powerful cold blasts and these crystalline streams. All I see is God. The Himalayas are God. The entire earth is God. Everything exists in Him. Everything shines because of His brightness. All beauty is His. I enjoyed the natural beauty of that divine region, realizing His presence everywhere, whether in the snow or the snow-mountain, in lakes or rivers, in stone or soil, in sun-shine or wind, in pleasure or sorrow. But I could not prolong my pleasant stay there and so I returned to Badrinath with a sense of disappointment. The best season for a journey to Swargarohini is from the middle of July to the middle of September. But my journey was in June and I had no guide. In the circumstances, I had to return satisfied with a distant vision of Swargarohini. Glory to thee, O Swargarohini ! May the epic story of Yudhishtira continue to inspire man to the end of the world !

From Hrishikesh to Badrinath it is 169 miles ; from Kedarnath to Badri it is only 115. But in fact, Kedarnath and Badrinath are situated much nearer on the same mountain range and a direct line of communication, if there was one, would have been much shorter. As it is, to cross the snow-clad ridges between the two holy places, is an impossibility for human beings and so pilgrims follow a circuitous route along the foot of the mountain, Gupta Kasi, the seat of Viswanath ; Ukhimadhom, the court of

Banasura ; Thunganatham, the site of Ravana's penance—these are but a few of the holy places on the way. Ukhimadhom, where the priests of Kedarnath reside, is believed to have been founded by Sri Sankara. The Thunganatha mountain, 12,000 ft. high, is specially remarkable for the presence of the musk-deer and the bird, monal.

From Hrishikesh the route lies along the bank of the Ganga and passes through fine forests. There are five famous centres of pilgrimage along the route and they are collectively known as Panchaprayag. Devaprayag, Rudraprayag, Karnaprayag, Nandaprayag and Vishnuprayag make up the five. The first of these is situated forty miles from Hrishikesh. It is at the confluence of the Bhageerathi Ganga (coming down from Gangotri) and the Alakananda (flowing down from Badri). There is a temple here dedicated to Sri Ramachandra as a memorial to his penance performed in his old age at this holy place. It is also said that the famous *ashram* of Kanva stood here. The meeting of the two rivers which come down roaring from the mountain ranges as if clearing a way through them by sheer force, affords an attractive sight to all lovers of nature. If a visit to such holy places brings to the visitor the invisible favour of God, it also brings to him immediately another reward still more tangible, namely, enjoyment of natural beauty.

At Devaprayag, paths diverge. One goes to Gangotri along the bank of the Alakananda. Twenty miles from Devaprayag is a small town called Srinagar. Twenty miles further on, in the east-north is Rudraprayag where the Mandakini (starting from Kedarnath) joins the Alakananda. Karnaprayag is 18 miles farther on, at the confluence of the Pindara and the Alakananda.

If you travel a few miles more, up the Alakananda, you reach Nandaprayag. It takes still two or three days' journey to reach Vishnuprayag. The famous Jyothirmadham is situated near Vishnuprayag. According to tradition it was Sri Sankara who founded the madham and one of his disciples, Throtaka, was its first head. Jyothirmadham is now the residence of the head priest of Badrinath for six months of the year. From here starts a route that leads to Tibet over the Neethi Pass, 17,000 feet high. Near the Pass stands Dronagiri which is described in the *Ramayana* as the home of medicinal plants with divine virtues, such as *mrityasanjeevini*. Badrinath is 18 miles from Jyothirmadham. Beyond it are high rocky mountains that stretch uninterrupted, mile after mile. How the Alakananda found an opening to let herself down through these imposing rock formations, is really a problem. But there are several such rivers which emerge in this fashion from the mountain ranges through small, almost imperceptible clefts.

Pilgrims, who proceed from Hrishikesh to Gangotri, Kedar or Badri, thus enjoy charming and wonderful sights in the Himalayan regions. This part of India, known as Kedarkhanda in the Puranas, is unique in the world for its tranquil atmosphere and natural beauty. The ancient scholars have paid glowing tributes to the region in words such as these :

“ गङ्गाद्वारोत्तरं विप्र ! स्वर्गभूमिः स्मृता बुधैः
अन्यत्र पृथिवी प्रोक्ता गङ्गाद्वारोत्तरं विना ”

The learned call the land to the north as Swargabhoomi, (Paradise) All other regions are called Prithivi (Earth).

BADRINATH—III

It is my custom to visit the high peaks of the Himalayas now and then and spend some time on them. On such occasions my mind immerses itself in the contemplation of God to the exclusion of all other thoughts. But at Badrikasram it turns involuntarily to Kerala. Ripples of thought about the place of my birth rise gently in my heart. I fully believe that modern Badri owes its greatness to Kerala. It was our Sankara who had renounced action, but was, nevertheless, a hero of action, that removed the image of Buddha at Badrinath and installed that of Sri Narayana in its stead. It was again he who drew up strict rules for the performance of *poojas* and the proper maintenance of the temple in the future. But for his services Badrinath would have been lost to the Hindus once and for all. If the people of Kerala today do not realize more fully the greatness of Sri Sankara, it is *their* misfortune ; it is not for want of greatness on his part. *Jnanis* like Pakkanar and *bhaktas* like Vilvamangalam and *acharyas* like Sri Sankara were born and brought up in Kerala. How can I describe the glory of that land ? If the names of Pakkanar and Vilvamangalam are still confined to the four boundaries of their homeland, Sri Sankara's fame has travelled to the remotest corners of the globe. O, dear, dear motherland, even on this far off peak of the Himalayas my mind turns irresistibly towards you. As if in the pride of your glory you occupy the vacant, tranquil seat in the heart of this sadhu.

As I sit in the Badri temple, in the presence of Sri Narayana, talking to the head-priest in our common mother tongue, Malayalam, I am inevitably reminded

of our Vilvadrinath and Guruvayur Appan. That a Brahmin from the distant Malabar should hold the office of head priest in this Himalayan temple redounds to the glory of Sankara. And Sankara's glory is the glory of Kerala. I doubt whether many of her children know that an enduring pillar of her fame was erected on a Himalayan peak, at a height of 11,000 feet, several centuries ago. O ! children of Kerala, remember the great sons of your motherland once a day and learn to respect her great spiritual heritage. Remember that you were born in a country of high spiritual attainments. Today, indeed, the children of Kerala have lost all their spiritual vigour. Many of them do lack piety and love of contemplation. But remember, life in human form fails of its purpose if it ends without the supreme realization. Without that realization one cannot have peace or real happiness. Until man realizes God, he is a puppet of desires and therefore poor and sorrowful. So, try to realize God. You cannot have soul-force except through the knowledge of the soul and unless you have enough of the soul-force you cannot overcome the weakness common to all living creatures. Soul force ! Everywhere you hear the expression repeated in these days, but alas ! few try to find out how that force is generated. Soul-force can never be acquired except through the knowledge of the soul. Such knowledge is, by no means, a monopoly of *Sanyasins* like me who pass their days in solitude in out-of-the way places like Badrikasrama. Anyone can attain it, no matter to what *asrama* or profession he belongs. Knowledge of the soul simply means the realization that soul alone is true, all else is untrue. Anyone can have it, whether he is a *Brahmachari* or householder or agriculturist

or judge. There is nothing incompatible between the realization of the soul and the maintenance of wife and children or the cultivation of one's lands. You may be a politician, social reformer, or religious leader. Whatever you be, do your work with the knowledge of the soul. The work of the man who does it with the knowledge of the soul, will certainly be more efficient and more conducive to the welfare of the world than that of the man who works without that knowledge. You, therefore, remain in homes and attend to your duties ; at the same time, distinguish the real from the unreal and lead a fully spiritual, heroic and contented life. My brief message to the brethren of Kerala is just this : Know fully that you are the soul which cannot be cut to pieces, or burnt to ashes and knowing this attain invincible soul force ; use that force for the welfare of the world, performing *nishkama karma* and thus make yours a rishi's life and be happy.

BADRINATH—IV

The Vasudhara is a waterfall six miles beyond Badrinath. It is formed by the perennial streams that come down from Renukuta mountain. The name of the waterfall is now extended to the whole locality. The waterfall has been called Vasudhara because according to the *Puranas*, the Ashtavasus performed their penance near it. The famous Swargarohini from where Yudhishthira ascended to Heaven, also, is in the neighbourhood. The beauty and the holiness of the plain that lies surrounded by the three mountains, Narayana, Renukuta and Kubera can hardly be conveyed through words.

Today is *Karkataka Sankranthi*. An unusual sight reminded me of it. A friendly shepherd who lives near the cave in which I reside at Vasudhara was seen bathing in the waterfall and wearing caste marks. You see, *Sankranthi* is observed as scrupulously in the Himalayas in the far north as in Kerala in the far south. That reveals how the distant parts of India are knit together by social ties such as ceremonies and observances. On the *Sankranthi* day, whether it is at Badri or at Kanyakumari, people bathe early in the morning, wear clean clothes, offer sweetmeats to their gods and then feast upon the remnants of these offerings. Such practices have been going on from immemorial times, indicating the long-standing cultural unity of the whole of India. May the people of India continue to enjoy it for ever !

But, how am I, a son of Kerala living in a solitary rocky cave among the far-off Himalayas, to celebrate this holy day ? If, knowing that it is *Sankranthi*, I do not observe it, I shall be guilty of neglecting a national and religious day. The man who is not proud of his motherland and who is not true to his customary duties must be regarded as a base, ungrateful fellow. For a son of Kerala, the ideal is to become a good Keraleeya ; for an Indian, to become a good Indian. For them it is the height of folly to ape the customs and manners of the Englishman or the American.

Observe, what these snow-white peaks dazzling in the sun are doing in this lovely place, inaccessible to man and animal. They are sweetly, perpetually singing hymns to God ; they do nothing else. When I say so you may be inclined to laugh at the idea. " What ! Are we to imagine that this inanimate

mountain, a mere heap of earth and stone, sings like a skilled musician? Who can believe it? How absurd!" But take it more seriously. The silent grandeur, the enormous extent, and the unshakable firmness of the mountain, and the divine beauty and fragrance of the flowers that fascinate even birds and beasts.....these are, in themselves, hymns to God. The music, of course, is not vocal. But the vocal music is harsh and grating, compared with the silent music of those sights around me here. Heard melodies are sweet, those unheard are sweeter! The perennial stream, Alakananda, and this waterfall, Vasudhara,.....what are they doing here? They too are loudly and ceaselessly singing the glory of God.

अस्मात् स्यन्दन्ते सिन्धवः सर्वरूपाः

It is from this that all forms of streams flow.

These streams are gratefully singing the praise of the Creator who makes them flow. These fine birds sweeping along the skies are proclaiming the matchless glory of the Lord. Look at those charming flowers, bright with many colours, blooming here on the meadow. They too proclaim nothing else. In this holy land everything seems to join in that universal harmony.

As usual I had my bath in the Vasudhara and then sat down on the plain which shone bright with fresh green grass and lovely flowers, to enjoy the gentle warmth of the sun. Gradually my ears were filled with the Divine music issuing from all sides. That lifted me to the thought of the glory of God and slowly I attained a state of meditation in which I became unconscious of the material world around me.

My body grew bright and lustrous, without the formal rites of *Sankranthi*, such as the anointing of the body with sandalwood paste, or the wearing of clean linen. Without eating aught I was filled ; without friends and things to gladden, my heart was filled with bliss. Intoxicated with the Divine Joy, I forgot all distinction between me and the world around me. All sense of duality disappeared. I was now one with the Vasudhara, the Himalayas, the World itself. In that union I felt the fullness of Divine joy. That Oneness is the Truth, the Blissful Truth. O ! Himalaya ! I find no end to your spiritual greatness. May you grant me many *Sankranthis* like today ! As a dweller among the Himalayas I have indeed listened with rapture to your divine song from day to day, but really, very rarely have I experienced that ecstasy which I attained today.

BADRINATH—V

Modern historians hold that the *Badarayana Sutra*, popularly known as *Brahma Sutra*, was composed in the second century B.C. It is said that during the period there was an awakening of thought all over India. Not only India, but also some countries in the West, were wide awake at the time. It was during the fifth and the fourth centuries B.C. that philosophers like Socrates and Plato lived and taught in Greece. The dates of their birth and death have been fixed with certainty but it has not been possible to fix the dates of our great men like Vyasa. We have to be content with the little information derived from the *Puranas* and traditions regarding them. Following

such accounts, we shall take it that Krishna Dwai-payana, otherwise known as Veda Vyasa, was an inmate of Badrikasrama. The very appellation "Badarayana" suggests that he belonged to Badari.

Here, on the banks of the Saraswathi there is a cave called Vyasa Guha. It is said that Vyasa passed his days here. To me the greatness of Vyasa and the greatness of Badrikasrama appear as inseparable. Whatever greatness Vyasa had, he imparted to Badri-vanam. The Puranic story that Nara and Narayana performed their penance at this place, or that it is the holy abode of Sri Narayana may not be accepted by historians as historical facts. Yet, the story is enough to invest this spot with supreme sacredness. There is no evidence to disprove the tradition that Badarayana composed his *Mahabharata* and *Vedanta Sutra* here. It has been my custom to spend some time, whenever possible, in the cave of Vyasa, breathing its sacred air.

Not only Vyasa but also many other ancient rishis like Sanaka, Bhrigu and Narada and Sukra are associated with this cave. Here, on the bank of the Alakananda is the famous Gaudapada Sila the rock on which, according to tradition, the great rishi Gaudapada used to sit in meditation. Modern historians are of opinion that Gaudapada belonged to the 8th century A.D. It was Gaudapada who, for the first time, introduced to the world in a scientific, logical, incontrovertible manner, the theory of *Advaita* with its accompanying conception of *Maya*, contained in the Upanishads. The familiar examples and arguments he had adopted from earlier Buddhist teachers like Aswaghosha and Nagarjuna, as well as the peculiarities of his style have led some scholars to the surmise that he himself must have been a Buddhist. These

scholars argue that Gaudapada's *Mandukyakarika* is nothing more than an admixture of Nagarjuna's *Sunya Vada* and the *Vijnana Vada* set forth in the *Lankavathara* and in support of their contention they point out that the "firebrand" and other examples of Gaudapada have been borrowed from Buddhist literature, where they were quite familiar. When we consider how Sri Sankara himself has been dubbed a "*Prachhanna Baudha*" (a Buddhist in disguise) because he regards the world as an illusion, we cannot be surprised if some take Gaudapada to be a Buddhist, as he teaches the *Ajathavada*, the highest conception of the Illusion Theory. However, the inference that a particular person should belong to this religion or that, because he has adopted a certain line of argument, or a certain idea, helpful to the establishment of his own theory, must be regarded as rather hasty. But we need not go deep into the matter now. All that is relevant to the context is that Gaudapada, a disciple of Sri Suka Brahma rishi and a teacher of teachers, was once an inmate of Badarikasrama : Sri Sankara was his disciple. There is of course, no evidence to prove that Sankara wrote his *Sutra* and other commentaries while he was staying at Badari ; but there is nothing illogical in the popular tradition that he did so. No one who knows how Badarikasrama was a favourite resort of holy Rishis in the ancient times can enter it even today without being thrilled by old recollections.

Apart from such associations with the memories of great Rishis, Badarikasrama has other attractions. It is richly endowed with natural beauty. During the rainy season the place is deep green with various kinds of rare plants which produce flowers of many colours. The masses of bright snow in the background

add to the splendour of the scenery. For three days towards the middle of May, 1931, there was snowing in Badari. The whole place looked dazzling white as if covered with a sheet of silver. Never before had I such a splendid experience during my residence at that place.

Nature is Brahman. There is nothing other than Brahman called Nature. Nature's beauty is, therefore, the beauty of Brahman. Brahman shines best where there is no impurity and artificiality. He really sees who sees Brahman in universal nature, whether polluted or pure. He finds the beauty of Brahman in Nature's charms. Always he sees Brahman ; always he enjoys bliss. For him *Samadhi* is of no use, for, he has become the embodiment of *Samadhi* !

Holy land of Badari, may you maintain your glory of nature and your glory of spirit to the end of the universe !

THE TEMPLE OF SARADA—I

The heart of Kashmir is a beautiful valley, 84 miles long, 25 miles broad and 5,300 feet above sea level. It lies within the Himalayan ranges and extends eastward from the western extremity of the Himalayas. Few countries in the world can rival Kashmir in natural beauty. According to the Puranas, Maharshi Kasyapa performed his penance here. Full of lakes and rivers and mountains, it was once almost inaccessible. But gradually it developed into a populous state, full of densely inhabited villages and rich fields. Poets of yore described the country as Heaven on earth ; poets of today speak of it as "the Switzerland of India." History tells us that, of all the constituent

states of their vast empire, the Moghul Emperors loved it best.

Through the centre of the wide plain surrounded by snow-clad mountains flows the Jhelum (pronounced Jheelum) known in the Puranas as Vitasta. Srinagar, capital of Kashmir, is situated on her bank, in the very centre of the plain. The city and the surroundings are famous for the ravishing beauty of the lakes where the red lotus and other lovely flowers bloom and the gardens where rare types of trees and flowers grow in plenty. In ancient times Srinagar was almost inaccessible, but now on account of constant vehicular traffic, communication has become easy. The City is 196 miles from Rawalpindi and 206 miles from Jambu (Jammu). Jambu is the capital of a small state ruled by the Maharajas of Kashmir. It is said that the place derived its name from Jambavan who performed his penance here. What separates Kashmir from Hindustan is the Himalayan range called Pir Panchal. In summer, hundreds of sadhus from India make their way to Kashmir. In fact, no part of India, distant or near, is inaccessible to sadhus. While men and wealthy people travel to Kashmir for pleasure sadhus go there on pilgrimage. In April-May, 1927, I too travelled to Kashmir, to visit the holy places and spend some time there in penance. On reaching Srinagar my heart was filled with joy at the sight of the natural beauty all around me ; but I did not very much like the worldliness of city life. So without wasting much time in Srinagar, I proceeded to Mount Sankara in the neighbourhood of the City. On the top of this 6,000 feet high mountain is a *Sivalinga* installed by Sri Sankara himself. The mountain commands an enchanting view. I liked it very much but I left

Srinagar and its neighbourhood before long and resumed my journey in the direction of the famous Sarada Temple where, it is said, Sri Sankara ascended the *Sarvajna Peeta* (the Throne of Omniscience). The country side on the way struck me as more truly representative of Kashmir. In the villages of Kashmir there are only two classes of people—Brahmins and Musalmans. Lower caste Hindus are conspicuous by their absence. The servants of Brahmins are all Muslims and they have free access to every part of their masters' homes. Once while I was seeking alms in a village, an old Brahmin lady received me respectfully and served me food in a place of honour. Just then another majestic lady came into the apartment and seated herself near me. This threw the mistress of the house into a flutter and she told her visitor in their native dialect, "Swamiji is having his meal. Please get up and keep yourself at a distance." Only then did I understand that the visitor was a Muslim ; till that moment I was under the impression that she too was a Brahmin. Even in dress, there is little to distinguish a Brahmin from a Moslem in Kashmir. As soon as I grasped the situation, I said "*Mathaji*, don't bother her for my sake. I have absolutely no objection to her presence in the room, while I am having my meal."

Another thing that struck me in Kashmir was the universal use of meat. Kashmiri Brahmins sacrifice sheep and eat mutton. This information might shock many good Brahmins in Kerala. The prevalence of such irreconcilable practices within the borders of our country cannot but be a source of surprise to the thoughtful. Another curious thing is that there are still among us old fashioned people who would justify

every practice, however immoral or illogical, as part of the divine dispensation. Whatever their arguments be, the core of good practice is this ; whatever leads man to God is acceptable ; whatever stands in the way of realizing God, should be rejected totally and unceremoniously.

Kashmiri Brahmins are an intelligent and industrious race. In personal beauty few can rival them. When we remember that Mandana Misra, Mammata Bhatta and Abhinava Gupta were all Kashmiri Brahmins, our respect for the people of Kashmir cannot but increase. Kashmiri Muslims are mostly Brahmin converts and it is no wonder if they resemble the Brahmins physically as well as intellectually.

THE TEMPLE OF SARADA—II

To reach the famous Sarada Temple a pilgrim has to pass through extensive paddy fields, small villages and rich orchards. He has also to cross several streams, big and small. In this way he has to cover 60 or 70 miles before reaching his destination. The road is quite even for miles as it stretches over a big plain, so that the traveller tends to forget that he is journeying in the Himalayas. To create an extensive plain with plentiful supplies of water and thick with green vegetation in the heart of a mountainous country full of ups and downs, is but a joke for the Almighty. When we come across fine, wide plains and beautiful lakes at the top of mighty masses of rock, we cannot but wonder at the power of God and the greatness of His creation. On seeing a nice building, it is only natural that we should remember its

architect and 'admire his skill. Similarly, when we notice the marvellous variety of innumerable things untouched by human hands among the Himalayas, we involuntarily turn to the Supreme Architect and His dexterity. If artificial beauty attests the æsthetic sense of man, natural beauty proclaims the power and skill of the Supreme Being.

After crossing many lovely plains which demonstrate the power and skill of God, the pilgrim reaches a very high range of mountains which it is extremely difficult to cross. From the valley called Rudravanam at the foot of the mountains, he has to journey 30 miles more, northwards, along a very difficult route. When I reached the place it was May-June and I knew the snow could not have melted away leaving the path open; yet, the joy of adventure led me on. I began to climb. A *Brahmachari* in my company brought up the rear. Before noon we reached the top of the mountain. From there we got a glimpse of the landscape all around. It was indeed a beautiful sight. The whole place was covered with thick snow. We were now in a fix. The eager desire to reach the holy presence of the Mother pulled me forward; at the same time, a natural tendency to avoid rashness urged me to beat a wise retreat. Really we were bold and yet timorous. Timidity in the face of overwhelming odds is not a bad quality and we were not, therefore, ashamed of our lack of reckless courage. We began to vacillate. Not knowing what exactly we should do next, we sat down on the top of the mountain, wondering how the Mother of the Universe would come to our rescue. For, wherever adorers go, they are attended by the Adored who saves them from perils. Just then we caught sight of 10 or 12

travellers coming up after us. Having reached us they seated themselves down. They too had been bewildered by the sight of one endless stretch of snow, but our presence seemed to revive their spirits. They were no pilgrims, but Muslim sawyers who were proceeding to the interior of the region in search of employment. Being new to the route, none of them could tell us how far the snow extended. We, however, decided to go forward. I got up and trusting to the mercy of the holy Mother, led the way. The others followed. It was extremely difficult to make our way down the slippery slopes. Sometimes we slipped and fell, but by the grace of God, we crossed the stretch of snow which was only a mile long, in a short time, though with considerable difficulty. Then we crossed seemingly impassable ridges and tablelands and forced our way through frightful forests until sunset and at last arrived at the banks of the Krishna Ganga, a tributary of the Jhelum. We rested there during the night and resumed our journey in the morning along the bank of the river. Having walked seven or eight miles and crossed over to the other bank along a shaky, dangerous, rope-bridge, we arrived at the Sarada Temple by 5 o'clock.

The Temple is situated at a height of 11,000 ft. in a remote corner of Kashmir. Surrounded by snow-capped mountains and fearful forests inhabited by dangerous wild beasts, the Temple naturally inspires travellers with a feeling of strangeness and awe. The cottage of the priest and a few scattered huts of Musalmans are the only human dwellings in the vicinity. Generally, Kashmiris alone pass through this locality and even that only in certain seasons of the year. Pilgrims from the other parts of India seldom visit

this place ; so, a visitor's chances of meeting other visitors from outside the state, are very poor. " Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife " the spot appeared to me peculiarly divine. In that holy place, we established our camp in an outhouse that surrounded the main shrine. The weather was bitterly cold but we found some relief by maintaining a steady fire, for there was here no dearth of firewood.

Supreme bliss is supreme peace. It is the form of the Supreme Soul and the goal of man. All will admit that joy is to be found in peace, and not in the agitations of the mind. But some look upon that goal of human life as the cessation of all sorrow, some take it as the realization of Self through the distinction between the Real and the Unreal, some others consider it as sheer non-existence (*Soonya*), yet others conceive of it as the height of happiness reached in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. The unique state of serene peace can be attained only in a non-dual state. So long as man recognises an entity outside himself, in other words, so long as a world and a God exist apart from him, he cannot have complete detachment or absolute peace. Nothingness (*Soonya*) because it is nothing, cannot be Peace, for the existent and the non-existent cannot be placed on the same footing. By mistake people find in comparative peace unlimited peace and liberation, fulfilment of life's purpose. Absolute Peace can exist in nothing except Brahman which is the complete negation of duality. Sankara's chief mission in life was to propagate against all opposition the *Vedic* idea that liberation which is absolute peace in its character, is *Advaita Brahman*, i.e., one without a second and that alone being *the Truth*, everything else is apparent and

illusory. To fulfil this object of his life, Sri Sankara travelled all over India, including Kashmir. In the course of these peregrinations he visited the Sarada Temple where he met and vanquished many learned disputants and seated himself triumphantly on the Throne of Omniscience. Today that far-famed temple lies more or less deserted, haunted by wild beasts, and surrounded only by the cottages of poor, uneducated Moslem peasants. When I paid my visit to the temple, I spent a few days there. During this stay, I sometimes used to go out for diversion and I discovered ancient tiles of a huge size, sticking out of the earth near the temple. They reminded me of the glory that the temple was centuries ago. It is really astonishing how populous towns have been transformed into forests and forests into towns in course of time, both in the highlands and in the low.

“ संभ्रावयन्नध्वनि देशिकेन्द्रः

श्रीदक्षिणद्वारभुवं प्रपेदे

कबाटमुद्घाट्य निवेष्टुकामं

स संभ्रमं वादिगणो न्यरौत्सीत् ”—(शंकरदिग्विजयः)

“ Lo ! Here comes Sankaracharya—the lion who tears all disputant-elephants into tatters.” Spreading such report the great Acharya arrived at the southern door of the Sarada temple. As he opened the door and entered to seat himself on the Throne of Omniscience, the learned men, in a state of consternation, stopped him. But Sankara overcame them all in a short time, though all of them were extremely learned in different departments of knowledge, and thus fulfilled his desire ; that is, he boldly seated himself

on the throne which only men of omniscience were entitled to occupy.”

In spite of the stanza, I found, however, that the present temple has no door on the southern side. The temple itself is a small one and its entrance is from the west. Perhaps, the old structure of Sankara's time was destroyed and a modern building has taken its place. All that one can now see within the temple are a seat, round and smooth, hewn out of rock, a *Sri Chakra*, and a few other figures. The seat is smeared from time to time with saffron mixed with ghee, and so it shines deep red, attracting and astonishing the visitor and also evoking in him reverence. It is this Seat, the *Sri Chakra*, etc., that are worshipped at the shrine.

While my friends go through these accounts let them not deride me saying, “Lo ! here is a man who believes in *Advaita Brahman*, and whose mind finds peace and joy in It. Why should he waste his precious time, describing the inanimate stone and earth and temple ?” Remember, man cannot reach Brahman without attributes except through attributes. Worshipping stone or earth, or other materialistic objects as Brahman, cleanses the mind and helps to concentrate it. A mind cannot qualify itself for the realization of Truth except through the worship of both the gross and the subtle. Beginners in spiritual practice sometimes try to grapple with the Abstract straightaway and they invariably fail. To concentrate the mind upon Brahman, one must begin with worship. So, for people who are only imperfectly qualified to enter into meditation, pious description of the objects of worship like stone or earth or idol, are not without use. If *Bhaktas* advise their disciples to meditate upon

Salagram or *Sivalingam* or some such stone, as if it were God, *Yogis* advise their followers to concentrate their minds upon *nabhi chakra* (the navel wheel), *Hridayapundarikam* (the lotus of the heart), *Nasikagram* (tip of the nose), *Jihwagram* (tip of the tongue), *Bhroomadhyam* (centre of the brows), etc., and followers of the Upanishads direct their pupils to worship “*anna*” (physical body), *Prana* (air) and various other materialistic things. Why do they do so? They do so because all of them agree that without first gaining a certain degree of concentration by fixing the mind upon physical objects, it is difficult for people to focus their minds upon the abstract *Brahman*. Constant supposition by itself cannot make a thing real. There is nothing absurd in worshipping something unreal for the improvement of the mind. When a man has realized the eternal Truth by distinguishing between the true and the untrue with the help of concrete objects, he may no longer require that mode of worship, but until such realization, the substitution of the unreal for the Real, is not undesirable or purposeless. If that is so, the detailed description of some image, holy place or beautiful thing, which is suitable for the worship of gross-minded people and which will help towards the purification and concentration of their minds, cannot be open to censure, though, from one point of view, the description may appear to be that of a purely imaginary thing, as unreal as the child of a barren woman. If it serves seekers after Truth to some extent in their quest, my effort in writing these pieces of description shall not be in vain. I know Truth is that endless luminous Knowledge transcending the three *gunas* and action. I know I am That and am supremely happy in that

Knowledge. I believe whatever I do, whether I read or write, eat or breathe, play or ramble, or remain in a state of mental concentration (*samadhi*) is for the good of my brethren.

THE TEMPLE OF SARADA—III

There is no doubt, careful observers can learn not only through scriptures but also through daily experience, something about the wonderful power of God. The impossible becomes possible for no apparent reason, and untrained observers do not understand its secret. God's power enters everywhere, whether into the hearts of cities or of unexplored mountains. Man's powers are circumscribed, but God's power has no limits, that is, there is no power above God's to limit it by Time, Space, etc.

In a solitary corner of the out-house of the temple, I passed six or seven days in peace. I spent part of my time instructing the *Brahmachari* who had accompanied me, in *Vedanta*, and part in *darshan* and meditation. The Brahmin priest looked after us, and supplied us with food. This was done for two reasons. For one thing, the temple had made provision for services to sadhus ; for another, I had brought with me a letter of recommendation from a noble soul in Srinagar. But more than all these, the priest was of a pious and liberal disposition. He and his family, therefore, did their best to entertain us as hospitably as they could. We were thus spared all external discomforts, but I was not quite happy. I felt we had no right to live upon that poor family, even though its members had not given any hint of inconvenience and their attitude

had been uniformly respectful. Were we not a burden upon them? At the end of the week I, therefore, decided to quit the place. I made that decision against my own desire. I felt I had no alternative. If we had money or provisions we could have prolonged our stay without taxing our host, but we had none. I never travelled in the Himalayas with money. Another possibility was living upon alms. But in the locality there were few Hindus and consequently that source of subsistence also was closed to us. It was after exploring all the possibilities and convincing myself that in our case human efforts could be of little avail, that I made the resolve to return. One early morning I took leave of the holy Mother and got out of the temple most unwillingly. But my host would not let me go. I had to stay on. In the course of a few days I made three more attempts to leave the temple, but on all occasions, the priest and other people obstinately refused to let us go. I was in a fix. I said to myself: "O, Divine Mother, this is all your sport. It is wonderful. It seems you do not want to send us away. Even at the time our strength fails, your power triumphs".

It was past 3 P.M. I was sitting on the first floor of the out-house, explaining a passage in a book of *Vedanta* to the *Brahmachari*. Just then, a bright, handsome young man, clothed in immaculate western style, hat and spectacles all complete, came up to where we sat and prostrated himself before us, with great reverence. I asked him to sit down. Without a moment's hesitation he seated himself on the floor. For half-an-hour he sat there listening to the discourse with rapt attention. At the end of the disquisition, the young man and I had a conversation which lasted

another thirty minutes. I found him to be a gentleman highly educated in English and other languages, with a great regard for the *Vedanta* Philosophy. Evidently he had also a sincere respect for *sadhus*. From the conversation I gathered that he was a very wealthy, Punjabi merchant who enjoyed certain contract rights over the deodar and other valuable trees in the Kashmir forests. He had come to Kashmir to supervise the work of his officers. At the end of our conversation which centred upon devotion to God, when he was about to take leave of us, he said with great humility, "Swamiji, it is but rarely that great souls like you visit this out-of-the-way place. We are extremely glad that the great Goddess has drawn you to this place and given us an opportunity of meeting you. All of us request you insistently to stay here for some days more". Then I replied, "It was of course due to the mercy of Sarada that I reached this place. So long as She desires me to stay on, shall stay on". He rejoined, "As long as you reside here, you shall have no inconvenience. So I make a special request that you will continue to be here for sometime more. I shall be proceeding to another spot tomorrow morning, but I shall soon return to see you here. Swamiji, pray don't disappoint me".

With these words he left me. The very next day the priest came to us and after prostrating himself on the ground, said, "Swamiji, the gentleman who visited you yesterday has sent to my house rice and a lot of other things. Since he wishes you to stay on here for some weeks more, he has sent all things in plenty. He has also desired us to prepare meals for you and look after you as best as we can. At least now, we hope, you will have no scruples in prolonging

your residence ”.

As I sat listening to the words of the priest my heart was filled more with wonder at the greatness of Sarada, than with joy at our own good luck. See how the holy Mother of the World works unnoticed by man. That she looks after her sons unremittingly even on the pathless peaks, was a truth I had learnt by experience several times before. It was now repeated once more ; and my heart was filled with devotion once again. God’s ways are irresistible. Who can check His power ? We quietly submitted to his will and stayed on without any more hesitation. Before the unlooked-for supplies arrived we had sometimes to be satisfied with a kind of coarse bread made of maize-flour. Now all that changed. Rice was in plenty. The sudden turn in our fortune inevitably brought to my mind a few lines of Malayalam poetry which mean : “ O’ God, it is you who change a beggar into a Lord, in two days or four, and cause him to be carried about in a palanquin ; it is again you who convert a King into a beggar and make him leave his palace to roam about the streets with a begging bowl in his hand and all his worldly possessions at his back ”.

Our life at Sarada was peaceful and happy. We saw nothing to upset our minds. But an ancient Kashmir custom did disturb our equanimity slightly. We learnt that Kashmiri travellers would come to Sarada now and then and sacrifice sheep or goats to propitiate Her. This information set us thinking. The Kashmiris, like the Bengalis, are worshippers of *Sakti*. Their temple rituals are similar. In most of the temples of Kashmir, we were told, animal sacrifices were quite common. The old and pious priest told

me many stories to convince me that nothing else could satisfy the Goddess. Really, Kali is only a terrible form of Sarada. According to modern historians Hindu gods and goddesses are merely creatures of ancient Hindu imagination. But to the faithful, even today, they are perfectly real, and capable of personal and direct contact. In the past many devotees have realized them. Even in our age there are some who have found peace and joy through such realization. Let the logicians argue how they will, the faithful are not going to be perturbed by their arguments, and there is no reason why they should be.

The forests around the temple of Sarada, where there is a dense growth of deodar and other holy trees, look deep blue and beautiful and rambles in them were a source of entertainment to me. In how many shapes and forms does the *Paramatman* show Himself! These deadly poisonous plants and these that can bring the dead back to life, these trees bending under the heavy load of fruits, and those that never bear fruit,—they are all the manifestations of God. Wonderful is His conception! When we consider the variety in external appearance and internal nature conceived by the Creator in the production of the movable and immovable things, there seems to be no end to His fancy. Just as an artist conceives the picture in his mind before actually drawing it, the Supreme Artist must have conceived the shape and nature of things before He created them. There can be no creation without imagination. Nothing can be created without a design. The extent and scope of His imagination is simply marvellous. What is creation? It is but the manifestation of God in some particular form. As there is nothing independent of

God, as there is no existence apart from Him, what is called world is nothing other than God. But it may be argued : how can this world which changes from moment to moment, which undergoes gradual evolution and sudden revolution, and above all, is open to destruction, be God ? If this world is God, God also must be subject to mutation and destruction. But God is the Reality. It is never destroyed ; It never changes. Everyone knows that everything in the world is evolving from moment to moment. A thing appears in one form today, in another form tomorrow and in yet another form the day after. But within all these changing things, there is something unchanging, eternal. That is God. Without a thread there is no garland of flowers ; similarly, without God there is no universe. How many billions of worlds are joined to It and exist of It ? Who can count or calculate ? That *It* is the source, as Soul or Brahman. It is the One Reality that sustains and supports all that is unreal. There cannot be two Realities or two Independent things. It is illogical. If there are two Realities the one must necessarily limit the other. The limited cannot be independent ; It cannot control all else.

The Truth of truths is contained in the *Vedantic* theory that only the One thing which is unlimited and which is the basis of everything else, is the Reality. Modern Science supports this theory with its deduction that all universe originates from an unlimited and indestructible force. Whether others accept it or not, Truth is always Truth. That Truth is One can never be denied. As a result of modern scientific developments and formulation of new systems of philosophy, old beliefs and theories may undergo modification

but the theory, that Reality is One, that it is the basis of everything, that it is the final cause, that the life force that pervades all objects and shines perpetually, can never be called in question. The great teacher, Sri Buddha, also holds that this world which changes from moment to moment is not real, it is only a reflection and the Thing of which it is the reflection alone is real. Sri Buddha was not an atheist. He never denied the Reality. There is nothing in his words or teachings to show that he considered Truth to be non-existent like the horns of a hare. He could not have held the foolish view that something came out of nothing. It is true, some of his disciples misunderstood him, and misinterpreted him. His idea was that Truth which cannot be designated by a name, or described in words and of which one cannot even say whether it is existent or non-existent, is *like* Non-existence. This idea is quite in agreement with the view of the *Upanishads*. An object which cannot even be talked about, is, for all practical purposes, as good as non-existent. But it is not non-existent in the sense that the son of a barren woman is non-existent. This subtle idea, Sri Buddha's contemporaries and even his disciples failed to catch. In one passage Sri Buddha says clearly : "Sramana Gautama was an atheist. It is the annihilation or non-existence of Truth that he teaches. So will the people attribute to me atheism, which is not mine. So will they ascribe to me the theory of non-existence, which again, is not mine".

From these and similar statements of Buddha it is clear he was not an atheist. All philosophers, old and new, arrive at the same point, *Advaita* (Monism). That is inevitable ; the people of thoughtful temperament

cannot find peace and quietude until they do so. *Moksha* (liberation) is in the realization of one's oneness with God. We speak of gods and goddesses, devotion and devotee, only in an inaccurate way, only from the stand point of a *dvaiti*. After the realization of oneness with God, there is no distinction between God and devotee and the word "devotion" has no meaning. Hanuman's words to Sri Ramachandra express a splendid truth :

“ देहदृष्ट्या तु दासोऽहं जीवदृष्ट्या त्वदंशकः
वस्तुतस्तु त्वमेवाहं इति मे निश्चिता मतिः ”

“ Regarded as a body, I am your slave ; as a life, I am your part, but in truth, you and I are one—there is no distinction.” To the thinker there is only One Living Thing and It undergoes no change. Now let us return to the subject.

The variety, beauty and solitary grandeur of the forests of Sarada lifted my mind to a region of sublime thoughts. I spent many peaceful, calm and blissful days there. A month and a half passed by. By the grace of Sarada here was no dearth of food and no lack of loving service. Even though our life was thus comfortable, without fears and distractions, we resolved to cut short our stay, as we did not wish to cancel our programme to visit another well-known holy place in the State, Amarnath. When our intention was made known to other people they were filled with grief, for association fosters love, while separation reduces it. Indeed, as sadhus we could be of little service to them. They were not a reflective type of people ; nor were they distracted by worldly affairs. It is only such people that generally turn to

sadhus and profit by their association with them. Yet, it must be said to the credit of the inhabitants of Sarada that they treated us with the highest respect and consideration and took delight in our company. One day, at the end of May, we bathed, breakfasted and after prostrating ourselves with great devotion before the holy Mother, set out on our return journey to Srinagar. All the members of the priest's family accompanied us for some distance and the mistress of the house took leave of us with tears in her eyes.

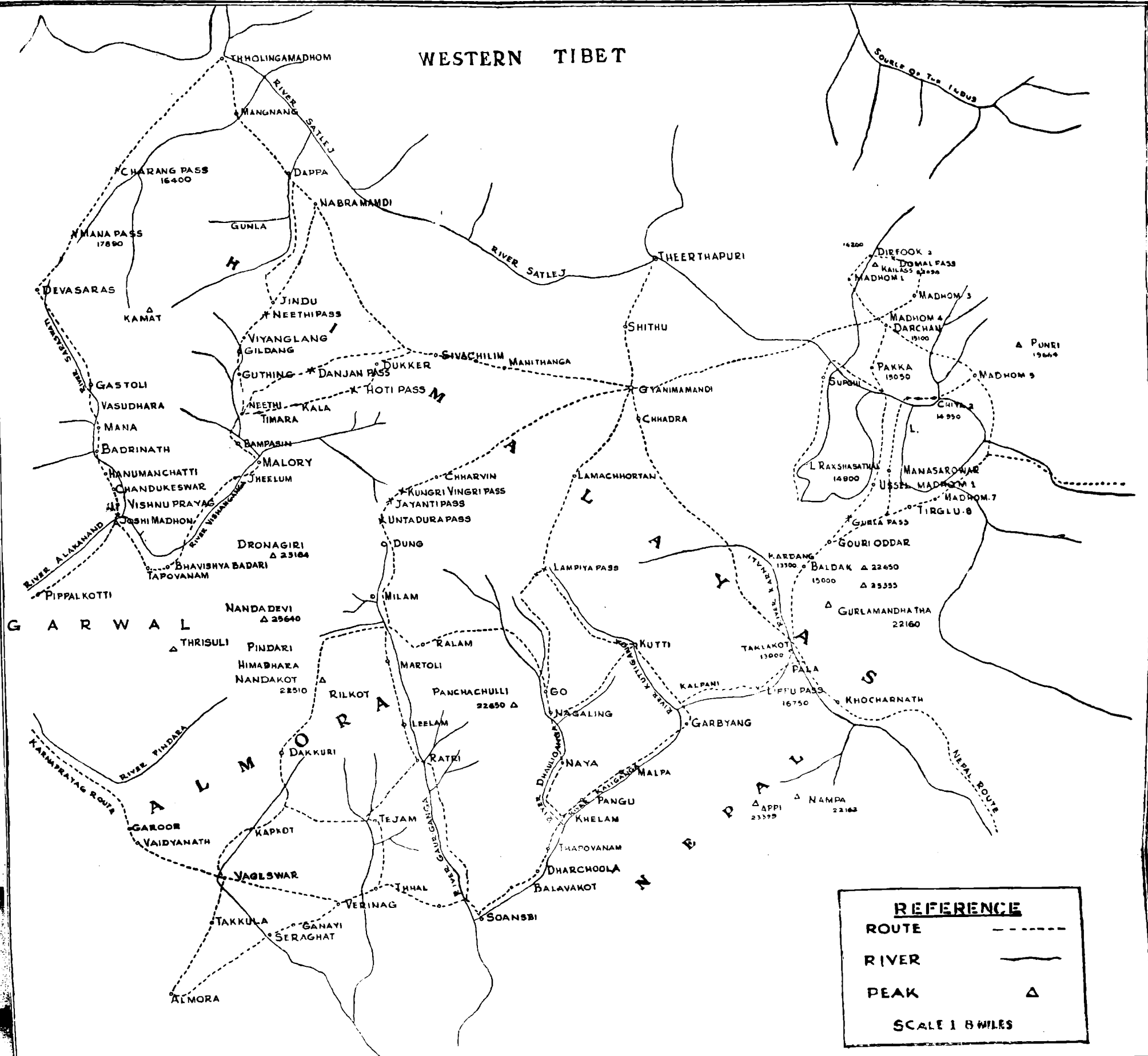
In three or four days we crossed the rugged mountain region and entered upon the plains of Kashmir. We now chose a route different from that we had followed in our outward journey. Staying here and there on the way, in villages and near *theerthas*, we moved leisurely towards our destination. A pious Kashmiri *Brahmachari*, fond of the company of sadhus, was with us during this part of our journey. He was of great help to us in guiding us through charming places, arranging our lodging and securing alms in wayside villages. His presence was particularly valuable because we were not quite conversant with the Kashmiri language and could not freely speak it. Travelling three or four days slowly and pleasantly along the bank of the Jhelum, across extensive and well-irrigated rice fields, we atlast reached Ksheera Bhavani. Ksheera Bhavani is an important Devi temple in Kashmir. The principal sight here is a curious pool, full of slightly reddish water, through which bubbles float up perpetually. People consider it as a sign of the Goddess's superhuman power or as her sporting ground. Only the wise know why the ancient *Rishis* used the strange and wonderful objects of nature as helps to the worship of God. A sight of some marvel

quickly evokes faith in the power and greatness of the Creator. There is no doubt that the conception of wonderful things as images of God and of strange places as spots suited to the practice of devotion, is intended to rouse and strengthen feelings of piety. It was with the full knowledge of human nature that the ancient *Rishis* instituted every religious convention and ritual, to lift man up to the Kingdom of God. Without understanding the inner significance of these institutions people find fault with their originators and their followers as ignorant and superstitious. That is by the way. Now let us go back to the subject of our discussion. The pool and the surrounding area, called Ksheera Bhavani, because of their wonderful nature, help to turn the minds of common people to God.

From Ksheera Bhavani, we travelled two or three miles across the land. The rest of the journey, of ten or twelve miles, was performed by boat. Over extensive lakes and long artificial rivers, our boat sped forward, sometimes cutting across rising waves and sometimes passing other boats plying to and fro. That merry journey in the company of other travellers very much resembled a boat-journey in the backwaters of Kerala. If the shores of the backwaters are covered with coconut palms, the lakes of Kashmir are bordered by paddy fields and beautiful mountains, overspread with rare trees and plants. Besides, the lakes themselves are decked with red lotus and other fine flowers. Here among the highest mountains of the world are reservoirs of water as extensive as any by the seashore. What is it that God cannot do ?

In a few hours our journey came to a close ; we stepped into Srinagar once again.

WESTERN TIBET



REFERENCE	
ROUTE	-----
RIVER	—————
PEAK	△
SCALE 1 INCHES	

PART TWO

HIMAGIRI VIHAR

OR

WANDERINGS IN THE HIMALAYAS

PART II

AMARNATH

Sri Harshamisra, the author of the epic *Naishadheeyacharitam*, was a distinguished poet of the twelfth century A.D. But he was not merely a poet ; he was also a skilled logician. He was equally at home in sweet poetry and hard logic. Although he has dealt with sexual love in his poem, he was by no means a worldling. His mind was ever concentrated upon *Brahman*. He has been rightly called an “ Emperor among Poets and Logicians.” His book, *Khandana Khanda Khadyam*, is among the very best treatises dealing with Vedanta. In the whole range of Vedantic literature there is not, up-to-date, another book to excel it in the sublimity of thought, or in the mode of logical argument or in controversial skill. In *Khandana Khanda Khadyam* the author has torn to shreds the dualistic theories of the *Naiyayikas* and *Meemamsakas* and established that the world is indefinable and that *Brahman* alone is real. A passage may here be given to indicate the manner in which Sri Harshamisra refutes the arguments of dualists.

“ *Invalid is the awareness of the non-dual reality born of the non-dualistic texts of the Upanishads like one only without a second ; because every one can perceptually grasp differences among objects like pots,*

clothes, etc. The cognition of pots, clothes, etc., must sublate the cognition of the non-dual reality yielded by the Upanishads. In other words, what is both powerful and valid is the perceptual cognition of difference and not the cognition of the non-dual reality : thus argue the dualists. But let us critically examine the real nature of this difference, of which they make so much fuss.

A critical examination will show that right means of cognition like Perception fail to establish an entity called 'difference'. Thinkers like the followers of Prabhakara have defined difference in four ways (i) as the own nature (of objects) ; (ii) as reciprocal negation ; (iii) as dissimilarity and (iv) a distinction. None of these definitions is tenable. If difference is the own nature of things, 'difference from a pot' must be the essence of the cloth ; for, difference without reference to its correlate cannot be cognized at all. Thus, then, the pot must enter into the very nature of the cloth. And so, perception alleged to cognize difference, in truth, objectifies the identity of the pot and the cloth.

Next, consider the view that difference is reciprocal negation. Here also remains the contingency that one thing may penetrate into the essence of another. The absence of the pot in the cloth and that of the cloth in the pot exemplify reciprocal negation. Thus, in the cloth must reside together with the absence of the pot, pot also ; because without the pot how can the pot's absence dwell in the cloth ? Due therefore, to the penetration of one thing by another, their difference vanishes and they become one and the same.

Also defective is the third alternative which equates difference with dissimilarity. This view main-

tains that difference between the pot and the cloth is the dissimilarity between the pot owning potness and the cloth owning clothness. Now has this dissimilarity yet another dissimilarity within it or not? If there is no second dissimilarity in the first, there is nothing to distinguish potness from clothness and they become identical. But if a second dissimilarity is admitted as existent in the first to exclude the determinant of the one from that of the other (*i.e.*, potness from clothness) there must follow an infinite regress of dissimilarities. Therefore, the third alternative also is untenable.

The fourth alternative, *viz.*, difference is distinction, also is not free from defects. Is the substance in which attribute, *i.e.*, distinction dwells the same as or other than this attribute? If the substance is the same as the attribute, the container and the contained become one. If, on the other hand, distinction is held to be distinct from the substratum, either it must dwell in itself (and, then, self-dependence ensues) or a second distinction must be admitted to distinguish it from its substratum (and that way lies infinite regress once more).

Thus in all these four alternatives perception fails to establish the reality of difference. Therefore, to argue that the non-dualistic texts and the non-dual knowledge born of them are sublated by the perceptual knowledge of difference is fallacious."

To refute difference and establish the Advaitic truth, Sri Harsha has employed the dialectics of *Vitanda*. Logical discussion may take three forms; *viz.*, *Vada*, *Jalpa* and *Vitanda*. The fruit of the *Vada* dialectic is the determination of truth, while that of the next two is victory. Nevertheless, with a view to safeguard

the valid means of cognition, when menaced by the poisoned shafts of fallacious arguments, philosophers do employ the merely offensive dialectic of *Vitanda* which only serves to vanquish opposition. To tame and discipline hardened sophists the only available weapon seems to have been the whip of offensive dialectics. Anyway, the established doctrine is that differences are not real, and that non-difference alone is real. Empirically, of course, differences among pots, clothes, etc., are recognised, but metaphysically, no apprehension of difference can take place. The point is that non-difference is the eternal verity, while differences are entirely imaginary.

Whether the arguments thus advanced by logicians to refute the theory of difference be tenable or not, all wise men will admit that God alone is real and the multiform world is unreal. Even as the waters of the ocean appear as waves, bubbles, etc., the Divine Light manifests itself in different shapes, as mountains, cities, men, animals, birds, etc. Viewed thus, the holy waters and the unholy, the righteous men and the unrighteous, merit and sin are all forms of God and the same Divine Light shines through them all. If that is so, Time, Space and Matter cannot give rise to any difficulty.

When I thought of going to Amarnath I had, indeed, no idea of seeing there some special Deity or earning some special merit. The highland of Amarnath is exactly like the low lands of Kashmir : from the point of view of Truth, both are *Brahman* ; from the worldly point of view both are composed of the five elements. Yet, I was ever fond of rambling among the Himalayan peaks which excel all other landscapes in the beauty of Nature, in the purity of

the atmosphere as well as in the grandeur of Peace. The enjoyment of *Brahman* is the main objective of such rambles. If Nature is a great mirror reflecting the power, and beauty and greatness of *Brahman*, there cannot be any doubt that Nature in all its nobility will be a help in the realization of His Being. That is the reason why I have rambled and am still rambling among the peaks of the Himalayas. That is by the way. Now let us start on our pilgrimage to Amarnath.

We had hardly ten or twelve days' rest after our return from Sarada, when we started for Amarnath. It is generally on the Full Moon day of *Sravan* that pilgrims visit Amarnath. During this holy, annual festival thousands of people from the Punjab and other provinces assemble at Srinagar and then proceed, more or less, in a procession to the heights of Amarnath. During the season, the Kashmir Government usually comes to the help of the pilgrims by providing tents, etc., for their use on the way. Eight or ten days before the Full Moon day I too started with a *Brahmachari* and joined the company of pilgrims. The distance from Srinagar to Amarnath is only 92 miles. Of this, up to Fialgam (61 miles), it is level land. But from Fialgam it is all a rugged ascent. Up to Fialgam there is a fine, broad road and there is busy motor traffic during the season ; for most of the pilgrims cover the first stage of their journey by car or bus. I too travelled by bus up to Anantanag—a distance of 30 miles. The rest of the journey I accomplished on foot. It was a delightful trip : the road passed through rich paddy fields, thick with ripe ears of corn. Trees of equal height stood on either side of the road, making it cool and shady. Anantanag is a small town with a considerable population. The famous river Jhelum

has her source about sixteen miles away, at Verinag. Fialgam is situated to the north-west of Anantanag. Ordinarily a traveller who proceeds on foot from Anantanag takes two or three days to reach Fialgam. The latter place is on the bank of the Dugdthaganga. It is covered with dense deodar forests. On arriving at Fialgam I found a large number of tents pitched by Europeans who were camping there for pleasure or for recouping health. I rested at the place for two or three days. By God's grace we were spared all worries regarding food or clothing or other necessaries of life. After meals I used to leave the crowded place and enter the deep forest where I could enjoy perfect solitude. One day, at noon, a few Muslims, natives of the neighbourhood, whom I met in the heart of the forest, gave me a warning. "*Babaji*", they said, "at this season of the year, bears roam about these woods even in day time." Of course, bears are terrible creatures when our paramount consideration is the preservation of the body ; but from the spiritual point of view, even the bear is an object of love and joy.

Generally, the pilgrims who start from Fialgam, stop to rest at Chandanavati, six or seven miles along the route. At Fialgam, the landscape begins to change. It is all level ground up to Fialgam ; beyond it are mountains rising tier on tier. Naturally from here pilgrims begin to feel the strain of the ascent. The route leads up along the banks of Dugdthaganga. The wooded mountains with their lovely grandeur reduce the strain of the journey to some extent. For those who leave Chandanavati, the next station is Seshanag. "Seshanag" is really the name of a beautiful lake about a mile in circumference. It is situated 12,000 ft. above sea-level. Its milk-white

waters make the lake remarkable. The Dugdha-ganga, referred to earlier, is a stream starting from this lake. Above the level of the lake, at a distance of about one mile, is a vast plain. It is here that the pilgrims *en route* to Amarnath pitch their tents for rest and refreshment. Both on the inward and the outward journeys I made my way to Seshanag in the company of some *sadhus* to enjoy the charming beauty of the lake. We spent some time on its lovely shores and bathed in the ice-cold water with great devotion.

It is a wonderfully holy place. On all sides we can see nothing but high rocks covered with snow, glittering white in the sun-shine. One can appreciate such supermundane beauty only by experience. Words cannot describe it and I shall not render myself ridiculous by attempting the impossible. Perhaps a description may help to deceive people who have not seen such sights ; but it cannot but evoke the ridicule of people who have seen them. We passed one night on the Seshanag plain with the greatest difficulty in the benumbing cold. All through the night it was raining. I need not repeat here that in these regions, prolonged rains terminate in snow-fall. On this journey, as usual, I had taken with me only the minimum quantity of clothing and naturally I had to bear the brunt of the inclement weather.

Next day, after four or five hours' exertion, we reached the famous spot called Panchatharangini. During this part of the journey, pilgrims have to endure the rigours of cold as well as the strain of steep ascent. It was an interesting sight to see aged men and old women, ascetics as well as householders, all marching, side by side, up the mountain, panting like exhausted horses and finding some relief by shout-

ing, with or without devotion, "Amarnath Ki Jai!". Some were actually shedding tears, being unable to endure the strain; some were laughing merrily enraptured by the beauty of the surroundings. Yet others were moving forward silently, insensible to pain or pleasure. As for me, my dominating feeling was one of joy. The strain of the ascent had left me almost untouched for my body always has had a knack of withstanding such strain. But the *Brahmachari* who attended on me, was lagging a mile or two behind and I was, therefore, frequently constrained to wait until he came up with me. Since he was my care, I had often to restrain the free course of my mind as I was moving along. We spent three dismal nights at Panchatharangini in the benumbing cold, with piercing winds and biting cold water.

Panchatharangini is a beautiful, sacred spot where five broad streams meet. Here too, pilgrims have their bath and offer gifts to holy men. Like Seshanag, Panchatharangini also overwhelmed me with an intoxicating sense of joy. The bareness of the landscape, the slightly red colour of the earth, the solemn solitude of the atmosphere disturbed only now and then by some strange flocks of birds, the frequent showers and the insufferable cold—all these reminded me of my residence either in the valleys near Kailas in Tibet or near Mt. Mandhata. Whatever physical discomforts one has to put up with in these regions, they are all immersed in the ocean of joyful experience. The famous Cave of Amarnath is situated at a distance of four miles from here. As there is no level land along the route, pilgrims seldom carry their tents beyond this point and hardly ever spend a night near the cave. But, of course, many *sadhus* do live within the cave

for long periods, worshipping Amarnathji. The usual practice with pilgrims is to start early on the morning of the Full Moon day, have their *darshan* and return to the low-lands immediately afterwards. There are two routes leading from Panchatharangini to Amarnath. The older route is more rugged, full of steep ascents and still more dangerous descents. The new route is comparatively less difficult ; it goes up spirally to the mouth of the cave, whereas the old path leads directly to the top of the mountain and then descends as abruptly on the other side. Since the old route is dangerous, it has been closed to pilgrim traffic. But, on our return journey, in our eagerness to enjoy the divine beauty of the landscape all around, some of us proceeded along the ancient route, climbing to the top of the peak on the way.

We started for the cave from Panchatharangini at 10 o'clock, after our meal. Following the narrow route along which there was heavy traffic to and fro, we moved on slowly towards the cave which we reached by 1 p.m. After taking a dip in the extremely cold stream, *Amaraganga*, which washes the foot of the cave and which is covered with ice here and there in its course, we entered the holy cave wrought by the hand of the gods. The whole place was reverberating with the cries of "Amarnathji Ki Jai !" and our hearts were filled with wonder and devotion. People forgetting everything else in the frenzy of devotion, were pressing forward to the presence of the Deity. The cave is 150 ft. high, as many feet long and broad. It is situated 13,000 ft. above sea-level, on the side of a rock 18,000 ft. high. Within the cave may be seen ice-formations resembling the figures of gods, in four or five places. The biggest of those figures

is regarded as the idol of Mahadev (*i.e.*, Amarnath). Among other idols, that I remember, are those of Parvathi, Ganesha, etc. Modern critics are of opinion that all these figures are formed by the freezing of the water drops trickling down through the cracks and crevices in the rock, in winter time. Basing their surmises on external observation they say that between the middle of May and the middle of July these ice-formations appear bigger and from the middle of September to the middle of November they disappear completely. But people of the older generation and people of faith, do not accept this materialistic and atheistic view. Relying on ancient tradition, they hold that the idols of Amarnath and other deities are not the result of water freezing afresh every year ; that there are no cracks in the rock to let in water ; that the idols are ice-formations independent of seasonal changes ; that like the moon, they wane in the fortnight after the Full Moon and wax in the fortnight after the New Moon, reaching their full size on the Full Moon day. What force on Earth can alter a principle established by faith ? There is a limit to the extent theories and theorists can go. They have to stop at the gate of the faithful ; they cannot even enter and hold their heads erect before them. Victory to Thee, O Goddess of Faith ! But for your triumph in the world, how can there be a religion or a spiritual life for man ?

In the company of numerous pilgrims we too paid our respects to the idols in the cave. Our devotion was indeed great. We also saw to our great joy, three or four holy doves which make their home among the clefts in the rocks. The faithful ones believe that these doves are really great rishis and their *darshan*

is permitted only to virtuous souls. Whether the doves that so kindly flew about and offered us *darshan* as we stood in prayerful mood within the cave, were rishis or mere birds, I must admit, they were enough to fill my heart with joy and devotion. Besides, we were struck by their wonderful fondness for solitude. Within the cave there is a smaller cavity that yields a kind of white earth which very much resembles the holy ashes. Visitors to the cave accept it as *prasada*, smear their bodies with it and even take it home. It is rather odd that the right to distribute this *prasada* and receive the *dakshina* belongs to a Musalman. Here the holiness of the Brahmin goes down on its knees before a Moslem. It serves only to prove that God's *prasada* or grace, held by whomsoever, is precious. Considerations of the superiority of the Brahmin caste, and the inferiority of Moslems are, by no means, strong enough to cancel the Divine rule, that God's grace is everything, that it transcends everything else.

After the successful completion of the pilgrimage I returned to the low lands where I passed nearly a month in a serene, solitary garden in the suburbs of Srinagar. Then I crossed the Banehal Pass (9,200 ft. above sea-level) and reached the city of Jammu. There too I rested for a few days before returning to Hrishikesh by train.

JWALAMUKHI

Jwalamukhi is a famous temple in the western Himalayas. All over India people worship innumerable gods and goddesses. The *Puranas* are full of praise of these deities. Yet none can say definitely

when and where these gods and goddesses originated. The accounts given by historians are inadequate and incomplete. According to immortal tradition, Jwalamukhi is just one of the numerous forms of the Divine Mother. The neighbourhood of Her temple also has come to be known as Jwalamukhi.

The temple is situated 2,000 ft. above sea-level, in a valley of the Himalayas. The road to it starts from Hoshiarpur in the Punjab. If one proceeds northward along the route for fifty miles, climbing over hillocks and passing through a district of whitish soil and treeless copsewood, one at last arrives at the famous temple.

When I got down from the train I was persuaded to get into a motor vehicle. But the mode of travelling proved very uncomfortable and before long I gave it up to cover the remaining part of the journey alone on foot. It is not seldom that an apparent curse turns out to be a blessing and that was so in my case. As soon as I left the vehicle, I found myself a free man. I began to enjoy the beauty of the surroundings with renewed relish. If I had clung to the conveyance, I could not have experienced a thousandth part of the pleasure that now fell to my share. This is true not only of worldly things but also of the things of the spirit. When a man is undergoing spiritual discipline it may so happen that he slips down at times. That is, the devotee's mind and senses may, sometimes, lapse from their high state of purity, but that should not dishearten him. On the contrary, he must cling to his ideal and cherish his hope. He who believes that fall is antecedent to rise will never give way to despair. If you have to retreat a few steps to add to the momentum of your forward leap, the withdrawal should

not be regarded as a setback. If, similarly, a temporary lapse of the mind leads ultimately to a still higher rise, it is more a matter for congratulation than for condolence. But the vulgar people, in their superficiality, fail to perceive this truth. If they experience a momentary retrogression they are over-whelmed by despair. They even curse God. Those who know the truth that blessing follows curse and pleasure follows pain will not give way to grief.

Alighting from the vehicle I proceeded cheerfully along the red-hot road passing through open forests. It was the month of May (1929). The heat of the sun was intense. For thirty or forty miles even drinking water was scarce. But I made my way forward as well as I could. Once I deviated from my course to visit a *Devi* temple called Chintamani. As some of the Brahmins there were educated men, they pressed me to stay with them at least for one night. I complied with their wish and passed the night outside the village. The stay refreshed me. The next morning I resumed my march. Reaching the river *Vyasa*, one of the tributaries of the *Sindhu*, I immersed myself in the cool waters of the broad, blue stream. For three days I had not enough water even to quench my thirst, not to speak of enjoying a bath. This is a paradox of the Himalayas. At one spot is plenty of water ; at another there is great scarcity. In places food is found in great profusion, in other places there is a dearth of it. Here the place is deserted ; there, it is overpopulated !

I passed the night in a village on the bank of the river. The next day I reached Jwalamukhi. The place appeared to me as an extensive village with a considerable population. I passed a few days, there,

as the guest of the local Post-master, a Punjabi Brahmin. Jwalamukhi is a lovely place ; it is surrounded by forests on all sides and adorned with groves of trees. But in the extreme heat of the season, its beauty seemed to have faded away. Yet there was something attractive about it. The noble temple, bright with burnished gold, stood glittering in the sunshine. Inside the temple, flames could be seen shooting up at different places. At the time of my visit, only seven or eight flames were visible ; but I was told that at times many more manifested themselves. Scientists explain these flames as issuing out of sulphur rocks but the devotees of Jwalamukhi hold that the *Devi* is manifesting Herself in these flames. To the latter, the scientific explanation is unpalatable ; nevertheless, it is the truth. Such flaming sulphur rocks are found in different parts of the Himalayas. In places like Badrinath and Jamnotri streams of water pass by sulphurous fires and are heated to boiling point before they emerge as springs and fountains. The rare phenomenon induces a sense of wonder and respect among common people who come to regard it as something supernatural. In recognising them as holy places of worship, the object of our ancient Acharyas was obviously to turn the mind of the ignorant masses away from low, worldly pleasures, to things higher and nobler and this is plain on an examination of the important temples built by them.

The inner walls of the Jwalamukhi temple are built of polished stones. It is from certain clefts in these walls that the flames leap up to the awe of the beholders. I worshipped these flames and the idols in the temple with deep devotion. The priests of the temple told me proudly how Akbar, the Great

Mugal and Ranjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab, had paid visits to the temple and made offerings at the shrine. As in other holy places here too I saw many beggars roaming about the temple. They live upon the charity of the local inhabitants and the pilgrims. It is the bounden duty of every householder to help the helpless, for there is no act of goodness in the world so great as helping the poor and the wretched. The bodies of the living are the temples of God. Kasi and Rameswar are but of secondary importance as the abode of the Supreme Being. So, helping the poor is an act of worship.

Let every householder remember the story of Rantideva. That wealthy king gave away all his riches to the poor. When his wealth was exhausted, he parted with his jewels and household utensils. Then he began to distribute rice, ghee, etc. In time, foodstuffs too were exhausted and the king began to starve. For full forty-eight days he went without food. He grew extremely feeble on account of starvation. Just then a guest arrived at his house. It was a poor, helpless Brahmin and Rantideva's duty as host was to feed him. So with the greatest difficulty he procured a handful of rice, prepared a simple meal and fed the guest as well as he could. He was then preparing to swallow a morsel of food that had been left over when another starving Brahmin made his appearance on the scene. Rantideva gave his new guest half the morsel. Just at that moment, a few huntsmen came begging for food. He handed over to them the little food that yet remained. Only a drop of water was left. Weakened by starvation and perishing with thirst, the king was eagerly raising the cup to his lips when he heard a piteous cry, "O king,

give me a drop of water to wet my parched lips.” It was a Chandala who was imploring the king’s mercy. At once the king poured out the water to him and himself sank back, fainting with hunger and thirst. It seemed he would perish in a few minutes. But the benevolent ones are never forsaken in their hour of need, for Lord Krishna has pledged His word :

नहि कल्याणकृत् कश्चिद्दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति

(*Bhagavad Gita*)

“ Dear son, never does a doer of good meet with an evil end.” The omniscient Sri Narayana was pleased with Rantideva and granted him salvation. If the people of India remember that they are the descendants of Rantideva, they will never allow *Satwik Dana* to die out.

“ दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे

देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् ”

(*Bhagavad Gita*)

Dana (charity or liberality to the poor) is its own end. Give for the sake of giving. Give it at the proper place, at the proper time and to the proper person who cannot make any return. Such liberality alone is *Satwik*. It is no charity to treat lords or one’s own kinsmen to a sumptuous feast, in the hope of winning fame or making a gain. He who offers a handful of rice to satisfy the raging hunger of a poor man, is a far more truly charitable person than the royal entertainer of lords and kings. He is the true *Agnihotri*, who makes offerings to the fire of hunger in the poor man’s stomach. Hail to thee, O true *Agnihotri* !

When I commend the virtue of liberality, let no one jump to the conclusion that I am encouraging beggary. Already, this once fabulously rich land of ours has sunk to the lowest depth of indigence. Year by year, the number of beggars is going up by leaps and bounds. It is high time we devised some practical plan to eradicate the evil of poverty. Who, indeed, will defend (much less commend) a way of life so degrading and so pitiable as beggary? Not even the birds and animals resort to it at the worst of times! All that I mean is that it is the duty of duties with men to help their starving fellowmen and comfort them in their misery. Beggary is contemptible but beggars are not. Until society stamps out unemployment and poverty, to refuse help to the needy is against the spirit of *Sanathana-dharma*.

Now to resume the subject. Once upon a time, it is said, Jwalamukhi was a centre of spiritual life. Historians say that at the time there were over three hundred, large monasteries, all fully occupied by ascetics and aspirants to spiritual freedom. But the place is now deserted. There is hardly a single *mutt* at present and there are no ascetics who reside permanently here. At the time of my visit I saw only a few *Sakti*-worshippers and a few gentlemen with matted hair and saffron robes. As it is a place of *Sakti*-worship, I was told, it was overflowing with intoxicating liquors. Meat could be had in plenty. There are indeed few places in India to which *Sakti*-worship has not spread. It is a pity many people in this country are misled by an overwhelming desire to follow the *Yoga* system, seek to see divine sights and hear divine sounds under the impression that it is the end and aim of human life, even though they hardly

possess even a rudimentary knowledge of the *yoga* system. While I was at Jwalamukhi I met one such young sadhu, who had given up the company of wise men and was wandering here and there in vain. Certainly *Yoga* is one of the higher methods of realizing God. It is far superior to *Sakti*-worship. It is also true that, in certain cases, men are able to know truth only through cultivating *yoga*, even though they might have previously spent years in study and meditation. But the *yoga* must be of the correct type emanating from the Upanishads and handed down by the great rishis. It must be learnt from true teachers. The world should know how dangerous it is to experiment with *Rechaka*, *Pooraka*, etc., without first studying carefully their basic principles, their nature and results from a real master of *yoga*. Some people are under the impression that *yoga* consists simply of the several steps of *Pranayama*, such as *Rechakam*, *Poorakam*, etc. Some other consider acts like *Neti* and *Dhouti* to be *yoga*. Yet others mistake it for the vision of stars or of the sun and the moon within. If a person succeeds in raising himself howsoever little from his seat he is deemed to have attained the very limit of *yoga*. None of these is *yoga*. Even if one is able to do all this, he may be no Yogi. Even if he fails to do any of these, he may still be a *yogi*. Then what is *yoga*? What is the true nature of the *yoga* dealt with in the *sastras* and regarded by the wise as helpful in the effort to realize God?

Yoga is defined as “चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः”. That is, it consists in attaining complete control over the vacillations of the restless mind. The process involves eight steps : यम, नियम, आसन, प्राणायाम, प्रत्याहार, धारण, ध्यान and समाधि. First, one should master यम, नियम and

आसन. Then proceed with प्राणायाम. Pranayama means the conquest of *prana* by practising *Rechakam*, *Poorakam* and *Kumbhakam* तस्मिन् सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोगतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः (*Yoga Sutra*). The *Sutra* describes the nature of *Pranayama* which one may attempt after attaining mastery over the *asanas*. Drawing in the air deeply (inhaling) is called *Pooraka* ; letting it out gradually (exhaling) is known as *Rechaka*. The complete stoppage of breathing (neither inhaling nor exhaling) is designated as *Kumbhakam* and that is the most important part of *Pranayama*. Not only the *Hatha Yogis* but the *Rajayogis* also accept *Pranayama* as an essential element of *yoga*.

हकारः कीर्तितस्सूर्यंठकारश्चन्द्र उच्यते ।

सूर्यचन्द्रमसोर्योगाद्धटयोगो निगद्यते ॥

The “ह” (ha) sound stands for the *Prana* known as *Surya* “ठ” (tha) signifies *Apana* which is called *chandra*. The union of the two is called *yoga*. From this description of *Hatha yoga* given by its principal exponent, Gorakshanatha, it is clear that the particular type of *yoga* stops with the attainment of health, lasting youthfulness, vitality and longevity. Physical health, however important, is only physical health. However long a tree might live, it is no more than a tree. *Rajayoga*, therefore, accepts *pranayama* merely as a means to an end, namely, control of the mind.

Pranayama should be practised slowly and with great care. *Prana* is like the lion : to tame him into a cat is a difficult task, indeed. If one succeeds in doing so, he of course reaps great benefits ; if he fails, he may have to face dangerous consequences. The man who conquers the individual *prana* by regular and

patient practice, simultaneously conquers the collective *prana*. All one's physical and mental powers proceed from one's individual *prana* ; similarly all the acts of the Universe originate with the collective *prana*. Thus by conquering the individual *prana* the yogis conquer the collective as well. In fact, collective *prana* and individual *prana* are not two different entities but one and the same. So the devotees of the *yoga* philosophy claim enthusiastically that a *yogi* who has effected the complete conquest of the individual *prana* will have the sun and the moon at his beck and call, because he has obtained control over the collective *prana*. However, we need not examine the validity of these claims here as they relate simply to the realm of possibilities.

After the conquest of *prana* one should practise *Pratyahara*. *Pratyahara* is the technical term for withdrawing the mind from the pursuit of the senses. Ordinarily, the mind is flowing out through the clefts in the surrounding rocks. A sound is produced somewhere near us ; we hear it, whether we like it or not. Somebody comes ; we notice the arrival whether we like to do so or not. Thus, irrespective of our likes and dislikes, we are being continually attracted by sights and sounds. And our mind, enslaved by the senses, is engaged in a relentless pursuit of them. If we do not check this lamentable vagrant tendency, our mind cannot turn inward and fix itself upon anything. It is a well-known fact that we become aware of external things only when the sense organs, the senses and the mind come into contact with them. If one's mind and one's senses do not come into touch with each other, no knowledge results. Until we are able to control the sense organs, the senses and the mind

which are all separate but which become one empirically and keep them in their proper places we shall have to remain slaves to our senses and it will be impossible for us to concentrate our mind upon any one object. And therefore it is plain, one cannot become a *yogi* until one is able to regulate the connection and the disconnection of the mind and the senses. As it is the *prana* that carries on the processes of connection and disconnection irrespective of one's will, one shall be able to withdraw the mind from the senses, on one's developing the control of *prana* by the practice of *pranayama*.

Once a man has developed his power of *Pratyahara*, he must proceed gradually to *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*, etc. These are the भावनाभूमिका: (Subject of imagination) of the mind. To begin with, one must try to concentrate upon physical objects. From the contemplation of the physical, one can pass on to the spiritual. There is great variety among the objects of contemplation according to the varying tastes of the practitioners. The lotuses of the *mooladhara* and the shining "lights" are some of the favourite concrete aids to contemplation. The *Bhaktas* generally prefer the divine forms of Vishnu, Siva, etc. In fact, every object helping to check the constant wave-like movements of the mind, and enabling the mind to flow out like a single stream, is good enough. This pinning down of the mind according to one's tastes, to spiritual or physical objects such as an imaginary bright light in the heart or between the eyebrows or on top of the head or on Vishnu, Siva or Devi, is called *dharana*. If this control of mental activity is continued for a long time it is called *dhyana*. The state in which the distinction between meditation and

meditator disappears, and the object of meditation alone shines, is called *samadhi*. *Samadhi* lasts longer than *dhyana*. When a man has succeeded in attaining *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi* with the help of corporeal means, his next effort must be to reach these states through incorporeal means. According to the *Yoga prakriya* (yoga dialectics) the *Panchatanmatras*, *Ahankaram*, *Mahattatvam* and *Pradhanam* are such incorporeal objects ; according to the *Vedantic* school of thought they are *Adhyatmika prana*, *Adhidaivika prana* and the mind. “ Only when the mind has passed through these various stages and got rid of the impurities of *Rajas* and *Tamas*, it can comprehend the Self which is the finest of the fine, with no form or attribute. Through the *dharana* and *dhyana* the mind gains strength and rises into the prolonged state of *Samadhi*. When mind has become one with the Self, as the camphor becomes one with the fire, or the salt becomes one with the water, all distinctions between the meditator, the meditation and the meditated disappear and the Self begins to shine by Itself. This last and highest state of mind is called by the Yogis as *Asamprajnata* ; it is called *Nirvikalpa* by the Vedantins. This state of *samadhi* raises a *sadhaka* (trainee) to a *siddha* and a layman to a *yogi*. He alone is the real *yogi* who has transcended the three mental states, *Thamasa*, *Rajasa* and *Satvika* and reached that supreme state of self-abidance. Nobody else deserves that name. Others in their ignorance, only confuse the ends and means. It is therefore the supreme duty of a student of *yoga* to understand the real nature of *yoga* and pursue it enthusiastically and whole-heartedly.

“योगो योगात् प्रवर्त्तते”—is a well-known principle of *yoga*. There are several stages in the practice of

yoga. One must proceed step by step from the lower to the higher stage. But if, by God's grace, one has already transcended some of these stages, one can, of course proceed directly to the next stage. If a man has attained *dharana* without practising *pranayama* and *pratyahara* in this life, he need not waste his time or energy practising those earlier exercises. Similarly, if his mind, in its innate purity, can readily concentrate upon the abstract, he need not court corporeal aid. So every one must examine *one's* mental equipment and proceed higher and higher as it may be possible in each individual case. The science of *Yoga* acknowledges *Asamprajnata* as its highest goal. It recognises him who has reached that state as the supreme *yogi*. It also admits that there is nothing illogical if qualified persons reach the goal at one leap, while persons less qualified have to reach it by the regular practice of *Pranayama, Pratyahara, etc.*

LAKE REEWAL

Brahman is the ultimate Truth. He who has accepted It has accepted everything ; who knows It knows everything ; who has gained It has gained everything. But nobody knows that *Brahman*, nor desires to know It. Nobody seems to possess that purity and fineness of mind which makes one desire to attain *Brahman*. People are engaged in the relentless pursuit of ephemeral and limited worldly pleasures. To get at those flimsy joys and to preserve them they waste the precious human life. They appear inordinately proud of such possessions. Alas ! even man is not his own. Then how can these external things become his possessions ? All these pleasures are

but the infinitesimal part of the bliss of *Brahman*. Few indeed are the people who aim at that supreme Bliss. If people fail to perceive their ultimate goal, it is all on account of *Maya*. Now and at all times, here and everywhere, the delusive power of *Maya* functions unchecked. There seems to be no limit to her powers.

I started from Jwalamukhi all alone and made my way up the mountain, passing through villages and forests. All the while my mind was wondering at the power of *Maya* still reigning in the Himalayan villages once occupied by the bands of Rishis who had conquered her. This part of the Himalayan region known as Kangda is somewhat civilized ; it has several big towns, extensive farm lands and beautiful tea gardens. The district lies 2,200 ft. above sea-level and a road passes through the capital town, Kangda. Not far from here is a place of pilgrimage called Vaidyanath. It is 3,200 ft. above sea-level and is famous for a historic temple of Siva. Snow-covered mountains to the north and extensive paddy fields to the south add to its attractions. I spent a few days at Vaidyanath as the guest of a saintly person permanently residing at the place. A few miles higher up is a town called Yogindranagar. From there extends the Himalayan state of Mandi, ruled by a Hindu King. The distance between Pathankote, at the foot of the Himalayas, and Yogindranagar is 101 miles. From Yogindranagar to Mandi, the capital of the state, it is only 36 miles. Up to Yogindranagar one can proceed by train ; beyond it there is only motor traffic. As for me, I decided to cover the thirty-six miles from Yogindranagar to Mandi on foot. The road was comparatively smooth and even and the journey was comfortable.

Having reached Mandi I took up my abode in the famous temple of Bhoothanath. I passed some days there on the bank of the River Vyasa and my needs were attended to by a number of devotees. There were not many scholars among them, but the number of people revering the learned was not small. Outside the town I came across several *sadhus* engaged in pilgrimage.

Lake Reewal is situated about 15 miles to the south-west of the town. On my way to the lake I was accompanied by a young *sadhu*. The path was full of ups and downs. It was no easy task to scale the steep mountains especially on empty stomach and with the scorching sun mercilessly blazing down upon one. But, ultimately, what matters is the strength of the mind. A strong will enables man to endure great hardships and accomplish difficult tasks. Along our route there was not even a tree under whose shade we could have rested for a while. Nevertheless we pushed forward as well as we could. By 10 o'clock we got our first glimpse of the lake. In half an hour we arrived on its shores. Absorbed in the beauty of the scenery we soon forgot all our hardships along the route. There stretched before us the holy lake of Reewal, circular in shape and a mile in circumference, surrounded on all sides by magnificent mountains, filled with clear, cold, deep blue waters, decked with the red lotus and other beautiful flowers, and re-sounding with the peculiar cries of a species of black birds. It was a sight to stir up even still hearts. A unique sight here is of two or three small islands floating on the surface of the lake and moving about in the breeze. Each of these islands is six or seven feet high. They are covered with thick grass and have

a small tree or two upon them. These small islands are looked upon as the manifestations of Siva and worshipped by pilgrims. The lake finds special mention in the Puranas because of the presence of the floating pieces of earth. In the *Skandapurana*, it is called Neela Hrida and the area surrounding it is referred to as Hridalaya. The story given in the Purana is briefly this :

Once, the great rishi Lomasa was engaged in the performance of penance on the southern side of the Himalayas. At that time

“ ब्रह्माद्रौ च समारुह्य हृदमेकं ददर्श ह ।
 कूजद्भिः सारसैर्हंसैश्चक्रवाकैश्च शोभितम् ॥
 क्रीडद्भिरप्सरोवृन्दैर्जलक्रीडाभिरन्ततः ।
 गायद्भिः किन्नरगणैश्चतुर्दिक्षु समावृतम् ॥
 घनच्छायैस्तरुवरैः परितो मण्डितं शुभम् ।
 स्फटिकस्वच्छसलिलं पद्मोत्पलविराजितम् ॥
 पद्मगन्धसमायुक्तं मन्दानिल सुवीजितम् ।
 परितः शिखरैश्छन्नं दक्षिणाप्लुतमद्भुतम् ॥
 धर्माबुप्लुतदेहोसौ दृष्ट्वा मुदमवाप ह ॥

The rishi who was steeped in perspiration, having ascended Mt. Brahma, caught sight of a lake and was filled with joy. The lake was charming with the songs of swans, *sarasas* and *chakravakas*, lively with the bands of *apsarases* sporting in water, resounding with the songs of *kinneras*, thickly shaded by encircling trees, sparkling with crystal clear water, decked with lovely lotuses and *ulpalas*, fragrant with the scent of the lotus, wafted by gentle breezes, and shut off on all sides by the overhanging branches of trees.

Later while the great Rishi was practising austerities on the western shore of the lake to propitiate

God Siva, Siva, pleased with his devotion, decided to give him *darshan*. He assumed the shape of a mountain peak, overspread with grass and trees, and floated on the waters of the lake. The great Rishi got up and looked into the lake.

“महाश्रयकरं लोके जले पर्वतसंभ्रमः ।
किमिदं देवचरितं किं वा दानवसंभवम् ॥
इत्थं चिन्ताकुलमनास्तत्र शंभुं ददर्श ह ।
चकितः सहसोत्थाय दत्वार्घ्योपायनादिकम् ॥

In extreme wonder he beheld the mountain spinning itself in water. He wondered whether it was the work of the gods or of the demons. As he stood there puzzled he saw *Sambhu*. In fear he started and greeted Him, offering him *arghya*, etc.

With great devotion Lomasa began to sing hymns of praise and Siva, pleased with his earnestness, granted him several boons.

Such is the Puranic story regarding the lake and its islets. However, the sight of floating islets is not a rare phenomenon in Kashmir. There, all kinds of vegetables are grown on masses of floating earth and drawn about from place to place over the waters of the lakes. Notwithstanding, the sight of the floating islets in the Reewal lake, inspires the people of North India with great devotion, so much so they look upon the lake as one of the principal places of pilgrimage.

We passed three or four joyful days in a lonely house on the shore of the lake. As in various other parts of the Himalayas, here too I came across families of *Sanyasins* who had fallen from their rigorous way of life. During my rambles among the mountains I had the good fortune or misfortune of accepting the

hospitality of such families. When I see an erstwhile *sanyasin* surrounded by women and children, I am irresistibly reminded of the extremely onerous nature of a *Sanyasin's* life and conduct. For common mortals it is indeed a difficult task to observe the rules of *sanyasa*. Historians tell us that after the lives of Sri Buddha and Sri Sankara, *sanyasa* spread all over India. As many became monks without the requisite qualifications, it was only natural that some should fall, tempted by woman or gold. My God ! Is it a joke to conquer lust and greed ? Merely by putting on the saffron robe one cannot shed his desires and inborn tendencies. Passions like lust and greed, lurking in the heart of man, are stirred up in the presence of congenial objects. To nip such passions in the bud requires years of patient effort. Even with earnest effort it is possible only for a few exceptionally blessed people to attain that goal. That was why our ancients regarded the duties of a *sanyasin* as highly difficult and held true *sanyasins* in the highest esteem. This brings us to the views expressed by several western and some eastern scholars regarding the impracticability of *Vairagya* (Dispassion). They say that *Vairagya* is merely a figment of the imagination, that it is an empty sound signifying nothing, that it is an ideal no one can attain, that it is all nonsense to shrink back from worldly pleasures because the natural function of the senses is to enjoy them, and that there cannot be a true state of *vairagya* since desires spring up now and then in the heart of every human being. Their criticism is not wrong. I may even admit that it is shrewd. But I feel it is carried too far. We cannot accept the view that it is a sheer impossibility to check the mind and the

senses from running after worldly pleasures. This view is against both logic and experience.

With constant practice one can conquer lust, greed, etc., in course of time. Only, a temporary lull in the passions should not be taken for total conquest or annihilation. It hardly requires to be stressed here that the acceptance of *sanyasa* before one has conquered his desires and acquired perfect control over mind and body, is sinful and will easily prove a passport to hell. It is necessary that the *sanyasins* of the present and the future should learn this lesson from the experience of their predecessors.

While I was staying at Hridalaya, I used to pay my homage to Lord Buddha in the Buddhist temple on the shore of the lake. Like the lake, the temple too invoked in me feelings of great devotion, great joy and elevated thoughts. The priest in the temple was a Tibetan householder. During my visits to the shrine, he used to welcome me with great friendliness and enquire about my stay. At the time of my first visit I met also a Lama from Lahsa (the Tibetan Capital). He had come to Reewal on pilgrimage. In the course of our conversations the Lama and the priest informed me that the lake was as holy in the eye of the Buddhists as in the eye of the Hindus. In Buddhist books it is called 'So-Paima'. Hundreds of pilgrims from Tibet and other countries visited the place every year and conducted the circumambulation of the lake. In their view, going round the lake was far more meritorious than any other form of worship. The Tibetans also narrated to me a story regarding the religious significance of the lake—a story altogether different from that found in the Hindu *puranas*. These allegorical narratives may not appeal

to us in their literal meaning ; yet they are not altogether without use if they help to create faith in the hearers.

A light that is never allowed to go out is kept burning before the image of Lord Buddha. The Lama from Tibet seemed to have nothing else to do except prostrating himself before the image or going round the lake. In fact, I found him doing nothing else. Rigorous indeed is the discipline of the Buddhist Lamas. While I was staying with them in Tibet, I had been very much impressed by their strictly disciplined life. Our Hindu *sanyasins* now-a-days seem to waste most of their time in lofty talk. One day I too joined the Lamas in circumambulating the lake with great devotion. On the first day of my visit to the temple, the priest's wife brought me some rice, etc., but I courteously declined the offering. I told her, "Revered mother, I have already made arrangements for my meal". Hearing my grateful words she entreated me again and again to accept her gift. Though I did not actually make use of the offer, I was surprised and pleased at her liberality. A Buddhist lady is as hospitable as the mistress of a Hindu home. Not only in the entertainment of guests, but also in the discharge of their several other duties, they are like twin sisters. It is true that the Buddhism of our day has suffered as much corruption as Hinduism, yet it is gratifying to find that several of its noble features have escaped such degeneration.

At last we bade good-bye to the happy life at Hridalaya and returned to Mandi. When I speak of the Hridalaya life as "happy," let me not be misunderstood. I do not in the least suggest that life at Mandi or at any other place was anything other than

happy. The fact is, a *sanyasin* experiences only bliss, at all places and at all times. Even in what others consider as sorrow, he finds joy. Pain as well as pleasure is Brahman and therefore the same. All this world of joy and sorrow is superimposed upon Brahman. If that is so, joy and sorrow, man and woman, mountain and serpent, sea and city are all forms of Bliss which is Brahman. If there are some so-called learned men, who, in the pride of their learning, pooh-pooh the idea of a world other than the ground thereof, they do so out of their ignorance and we need not mind them. The truth is, people whose studies and speculations are confined only to the four grosser elements have no right to speak of the shadowy things beyond the reach of the elements and the senses. It will be ridiculous if they begin to meddle with abstract matters which transcend the senses and baffle mechanical experimentation and verification. In the determination of abstract things what really counts is the fearless cogitation of the philosophers who have seen Truth face to face and who base their ideas upon their own direct experiences and inferences. Even in ancient times men were not wanting in this land who contradicted the theory that the world is essentially its ground. Was not the theory of *Panchakhyati* (the five theories of error) well-known to the Vedantic Scholars of India? Thoughtful people will never be prepared to recognise this amorphous world of ceaseless change as the ultimate reality.

MANIKARNIKA AND VASISHTA

After passing a few more pleasant days at Mandi we started in the direction of Manikarnika. The

route goes up along the valley of the River Vyasa. The ground is even and there are no forests on the way. So the physical strain of the journey was not felt. Yet the journey proved to be a penance because of the scorching heat of the sun and the lack of agreeable and nutritious food. In the daytime the heat was unbearable and so we travelled chiefly at night. Along the route we passed several houses and villages and I noticed everywhere life in full swing. The wheel of life goes on revolving, whether it be in the cities or among the mountains. The wheel revolves or rather God revolves it by the power of His *Maya*. His creatures eat and drink, work and rest, love and hate, enjoy and suffer—this goes on everywhere, unaffected by birth or death, by prosperity or adversity, of this man or the other.

How wonderful and amazing is the Divine, eternal sport ! How many parents, kings, scholars, patriots pass away ! yet, not for a moment does the wheel stand still. When one is removed another steps into the breach. That is Nature's law. How foolish then is to lament, " Who will look after my children when I am gone ? How will these poor ones live unless I feed them ? Who is there to work for the prosperity of this land when I am dead ? ". Work we must, but let not pride drag us down to perdition. The votaries of such pride are the kith and kin of the stupid old woman who said, " The sun will not rise tomorrow unless my cock crows ". Only think of the merciful Almighty who creates and maintains the entire universe. So long as He is there, why worry like this ? However great or powerful one might be, what right has he to think, " How can the world go on without me ? " Who, indeed, is indis-

pensable? What is man's power beside God's! The omnipotent Father of the universe carries on everything by Himself. Everything works because of His power. His greatness is manifest everywhere and in everything.

At the end of two days' journey we reached a village called Boonthar, 36 miles from Mandi. There we spent two or three days in the *ashram* of a *sadhu*. Our route from here proceeded along the bank of the Parvati Ganga. So, leaving the Vyasa Ganga we moved forward to Manikarnika, 20 miles away. The path which led to the valley proved to be extremely hot, even though the mountains in the neighbourhood were 6,000 or 7,000 feet high. Trudging along in unbearable heat we reached a plateau and then the temperature began to fall. Here and there in the small fields on the mountain side I saw a luxuriant growth of opium poppy. I had not seen the plant before and so the novelty of the sight filled me with wonder. Passing many villages on the way, we at last reached Manikarnika.

Manikarnika is really a small village, inhabited by a few, poor Parvatheeya-Brahmins, who officiate as priests at the *theertha*. Here in the valley, close to a high rocky cliff, on the bank of the Parvatheeya Ganga, are a stream and two pools of hot, sulphurous water. The water in them is so hot that rice and flour can be cooked in it without the use of fire. That is the only special feature of the place. But for this, the place did not impress me at all. Perhaps our ancestors recognised it as a place of pilgrimage because of the extraordinary springs which could induce faith in the common people. I found a few small temples also in the locality. One day a local Brahmin recited

to me certain lines from the *Brahmandapurana*, describing the spot as a centre of pilgrimage. We spent two or three days bathing in the holy waters and visiting the temples.

Sraddha (faith) is a wonderful thing indeed. It turns water into *theertha*, stone into God. All religions of the world are founded on faith. It leads the world forward as a marshal leads his men. If there is no faith there is no religion. It reclaims man from his brutish tendencies and guides him along the path of duty.

All the existing systems of philosophy are based on faith. One who lacks faith is bewildered by the variety of systems and is unable to follow any. The reason is, it is impossible to realize Truth by sheer logic alone. No system of philosophy has done it yet and none is likely to do so in the future. Philosophers arrive at their subtle conclusions with the aid of inference. But there are certain hidden, abstract truths which even inference cannot reach up to. One can reach them only through one's firm faith in the *mahatmas* and the *Sastras*. Without faith it is impossible to ascertain those great truths and without ascertaining them it is impossible to take practical steps to reach them. How can I define the greatness of the faith that is at the root of all prosperity here and hereafter? How can I describe the skill and the uniqueness of the faith that renders the most difficult penances most easy?

On our return journey we reached Bhoonthar in a couple of days. The next day we covered seven miles and arrived at the capital of Kullu. Like Mandi, Kullu also is a small Himalayan state lying to the north-west of Mandi. Its capital is a small town

bearing the name of the state. The Manikarnika *theertha* referred to before, is in the domains of this state. Situated only three or four thousand feet above sea level, on the bank of River Vyasa, Kullu town enjoys an equable climate and is inhabited by a considerable population. I passed a few pleasant days in a solitary place near the town. Some of the distinguished citizens of the place requested me to stay on at the Sanathana dharma Mandir for some months and offered to make all necessary arrangements for my stay. But somehow the place did not agree with me and I did not accede to their request. After a few days I set out with my companion in the direction of Vasishta.

Vasishta is a famous place of pilgrimage, 24 miles to the north of Kullu. It is situated at the foot of a chain of high mountains covered with snow. According to tradition, this was the place where the great rishi Vasishta passed most of his time in penance. As at Manikarnika, here too is a hot spring and near the pool in which hot water collects itself, is a temple dedicated to Sri Vasishta. We reached the locality at the end of three days' leisurely journey along the bank of the Vyasa Ganga. The toil and the tedium of the journey were lightened by the joyful enthusiasm induced by the broad solitudes along the route. Nowadays motor cars and buses can come within two miles of Vasishta and the place is therefore not difficult to reach.

There is no reason to disbelieve the traditions that Vasishta, son of Brahma, used to pass his days in austerities here. There is no doubt regarding the partiality of our ancient rishis for solitude. They never neglected their souls for the enjoyment of worldly

pleasures. They firmly believed that the gain of all the world was no compensation for the loss of one's soul. They were never satisfied with anything less than realization. Unlike the people of our generation they never stopped with words. They found contentment only in the enjoyment of long periods of Samadhi. They never considered the fall of the human body as a "condition precedent" to the enjoyment of perfect spiritual bliss. Such bliss could be enjoyed in the state of Samadhi even before the soul had freed itself from the body. "O my husband, my sister is already a mother ; why don't I become one ?" asks the wife reproachfully. " My dear, so long as I live, you won't have a child ; but when I am gone, you will certainly bear children " replies the eunuch. If a woman cannot bear children while her husband is alive, how can she have them after his death ? The reply merely indicates the pitiable impotency of the man.

Our ancients liken to the eunuch of the story the theoretical *jnanis* who fail to find spiritual peace and comfort in the present life and look forward to actual experience in another. There is nothing improbable about our peace-loving rishis resorting to the congenial heights of the Himalayas for the practice of *Samadhi*. It is true there are other places also in the Himalayas credited with the residence of Vasishta. Of all such places honoured by the name of the great rishi, this place, Vasishta, so close to the snow-covered mountains, so beautiful and so remote and yet so convenient because of the hot springs, was perhaps the best suited for the great rishi's residence.

We passed three or four days at Vasishta in great devotion—bathing, visiting the temple and worshipping at the shrine. People from the neighbouring village

supplied us with food. The mountain folk in this region are extremely poor and lead a hard life. Yet, like their ancestors, they are whole-heartedly devoted to the service of God and godly men. They are governed by a high sense of duty. Why people, so generous and so dutiful, should live in unrelieved poverty and unending misery, is a paradox that has puzzled all thinking men.

If God is omniscient, omnipotent, free and merciful, why did He create a world so full of sorrow and suffering? How did He create it? This is a problem over which the greatest philosophers of the world have racked their brains from the earliest times. Much discussion has centred on it and many ingenious explanations have been offered. A lot of space in works of philosophy has been devoted to the solution of this difficult problem. Many an atheist has availed himself of this seemingly unanswerable objection to disprove the existence of God. They say that it is no matter for consolation, much less for congratulation. They hold that all the arguments offered by theistic philosophers in this connexion are beside the point. They say that it is no matter for gratification if the Almighty God created a world so full of misery. If you concede that God has a free will and yet created this world of suffering, you have to admit, they argue, that God is merciless and partial and is governed by likes and dislikes. They, therefore, say that it is highly foolish to recognise a God so full of evil.

In the *Sareerika Bhashya* Sri Sankara has answered these objections in his own inimitable, logical and sweet way. See the passage beginning with, "ईश्वरस्तु पर्जन्यवत् द्रष्टव्यः" It means : In the matter of creation God may be compared to the cloud. In raising rice,

barley, etc., the cloud is the general cause. If the paddy seed produces paddy, and barley seed produces barley, the particular cause is within the seed itself. Similarly, God is the general cause in the creation of *devas* and men. Their individual form and conduct and experience are chiefly the result of their own conduct in their previous existence.

THRILOKEENATHAM—I

When I started from Rishikesh with the intention of rambling among the western Himalayas, I had thought of Thrilokeenath also, but I had no clear ideas regarding the route. When I got directions from Kullu about the route to be followed, I at once decided to include Thrilokeenatham also in my itinerary. My informants told me that the way lay over snow and was extremely cold and perilous. But, the more dangerous it appeared to be, the more eager I became to visit the holy place. The people of Vasishta tried their best to dissuade me from the foolhardy venture. They told me that on the way I should have to cross a pass called Lutang and that during May-June it would be covered with snow for miles. They, therefore, advised me to postpone my journey by about two months. I could not accept their advice as I did not want to pass many days at Vasishta, I decided to push forward, come what might. The prospect of inconvenience or danger could not shake my resolve.

At Vasishta there were seven or eight other *sadhus* who also desired to visit Thrilokee. But they were in a state of perplexity, because they had not the

courage to face the difficulties on the way. The distance was only 63 miles but the route was known to be particularly dangerous. When the *sadhus* heard of my decision they were overjoyed. They not only congratulated me but also requested me to take them with me. Thus, I, who had planned to proceed all alone, came to be accompanied by a group of pilgrims. One day, at about 2 o'clock, after our meal, we paid our respects to Rishi Vasishta and set out for Thrilokee. The June sun was blazing hot and we now began to experience the pangs of thirst. On the way, therefore, we drank buttermilk from one or two villages and continued our journey northward along the valley of the Vyasa. When we had covered five or six miles, the ascent began. After climbing about two miles we reached the foot of the snow-covered Lutang Pass by nightfall. We passed the night in the open air, near a *dharmasala* named Lal. All the night we lay shivering in the cold.

The morning came. Today we have to cross the Lutang pass 13,500 feet high. The way is steep, difficult, dangerous.

My companions were all dispirited at the thought of the perils we might have to face. They still sat thinking of the dangers ahead. As there was no time to lose, I resumed the journey exhorting my companions to follow without delay. It was a precipitous ascent that we had to negotiate that day. Setting our heart on Thrilokeenath, we began to climb again. In ten minutes' time all of us began to pant like exhausted horses. Having ascended a mile we sat down to rest on a broad piece of rock. Lo ! Here is the source of the *Vyasa Ganga*. People say that this spot was the site of Vedavyasa's *ashrama* and the river that takes

its source from here naturally came to be called Vyasa Ganga. Sri Vyasa's usual residence was, as is well-known, Badarikashrama. Perhaps he might have spent some time here also. However, some people hold that "Vyasa" used in relation to the river is only a corrupt form of "Vipasa", the name of a river celebrated in the Puranas. Why the particular river came to be called Vipasa, is explained there by means of a story.

We had not much time to rest there, for it was imperative that we must cross the Pass before 10 or 11 a.m. After 11 o'clock powerful winds would begin to sweep along the Pass, making all progress extremely difficult. So we got up and moved forward as fast as we could. As we climbed higher we found the plateau totally devoid of vegetation ; we had ascended hardly two miles, when one of the sadhus decided to retrace his steps. He was having a severe head-ache and his mind was terror-stricken at the prospect of scaling those very high mountains. The rest of us put our faith in God and resumed our upward march, resting a little every now and then on the way. By the time we had ascended four miles we were in a state of utter exhaustion. So we sat down to rest and ate a little of the food with which we had provided ourselves on the journey.

Now we were face to face with the dazzling peaks of snow. On seeing the white mass that stretched unendingly before us, the courage that the *sadhus* still had, seemed to desert them. There is no doubt it is a dangerous attempt to cross the Pass without a proper guide. He who enters the snow without knowing the route is irretrievably lost and naturally my mind also was in a state of flutter.

True indeed are the words of wisemen who say that prosperity is like wine which goes to the head and makes man forget his Creator ; adversity, on the contrary, sobers him and reminds him of God and His glory. People who preach atheism and who do not recall God's name to their minds even once a month, cry out in the hour of danger, " O God, my Lord, my good Lord, protect me." Something in the mind induces him to cry out like this. Even that is God's greatness and His mercy. Though at the back of every one's mind there is the conviction that there is God and that His greatness is unbounded, it lies like a precious gem in the dark depths of the mind hidden by the tides of worldliness. When this surging tide of worldly pleasures ebbs away and leaves the mind high and dry, the gem of faith appears sparkling with its own bright lustre. That generally happens only when a man has reached the rock bottom of despair. When he feels utterly helpless and hopeless, his heart at once flows out in prayer, " O God, Ocean of Mercy, help me, save me, O Lord ! " This is an everyday occurrence. At the Lutang Pass, we had the same experience. Reduced to total helplessness, my companions began to cry out with the sincerest feelings of devotion " Thri-lokeenath Ki Jai ". Though my companions were all *sadhus*, most of them had not the full reliance on God. When I found how their minds were immersed in faith, at least for the time being, I praised the mercy of God. God's grace can metamorphose in a moment an atheist into a saint.

Lo ! there comes up a group of merchants driving before them their horses and donkeys laden with their merchandise. As soon as we caught sight of

them, our hearts were filled with joy. We felt that they were guides sent by God to save us from annihilation. When they came up with us we welcomed them cordially and followed them with renewed courage. We found that our guides were Tibetan merchants who were returning home with their women, children and merchandise. Across the Pass there are routes leading to Ladakh, Yarkhand, Tibet and other distant provinces. From May-June to October-November merchants make use of these routes in their journeys to and fro between Central Asia and British India. Following our new companions we moved slowly over the snow.

It was past 9 a.m. The snow had begun to sparkle in the brilliant sunshine and gradually it began to melt as well. Consequently it became difficult to gain a firm foothold in the thawing snow and at times we began to slip and fall. Of course I had known previously that the crossing of the snow should be attempted before the snow begins to melt, but by chance it was late when we made the attempt this time. It is a matter of common experience that the knowledge of a subject by itself will not enable a person to act always according to it. The path we were now following was precipitous and narrow. In some places it was only a foot or two broad. One false step was enough to send a man tumbling down into the unfathomed recesses among the mountains. Nothing would obstruct his downward course. He would go rolling and rolling along the steep, slippery side of the mountain until he became one with the mass of snow and disappeared totally into it. No force on earth could save him. His companions could only stand gazing helplessly at the tragic spectacle.

When a man stands in the midst of a boundless snow field, his mind will be filled with fear, if he has been unaccustomed to such experiences before. But, for me, snow is an object of joy ; in spite of it, on this occasion, I too was feeling the strain, especially on account of the nature of the route. Nevertheless, we moved forward as well as we could. When we had covered a mile and half along this dangerous route, we reached an extensive plateau at the top of the mountain. There the snow lay everywhere two to eight feet deep. Now we forgot ourselves and ran about here and there like children playing on the snow. Some times we fell down on the snow which lay like fine soft sugar all around us and then quickly scrambling up again, we ran forward. Proceeding thus, we reached the centre of the snow-covered plateau by about 11 a.m. Here, on the crest of the plateau, was a mountain deity, covered with snow. Along with the merchants we worshipped him devoutly. The merchants immediately resumed their journey, as the whole place was covered with snow, and there was no place to rest on. Fortunately for me I discovered a little space near the deity from where the snow had melted away exposing the bare surface of the rock. There I sat for a little while resting my weary limbs, before I followed my companions down the mountains.

Lo ! what a wonderland was around me ! The endless expanse of snow lay dazzling white in the bright sunshine. As far as eye could reach there was nothing but snow, snow, snow and snow again. It seemed to me as though I was not resting on the earth, but, in a world of silver. The glassy white mass of snow reflected back the glowing light of the sun and no one could bear to look at it for any length of time,

on account of its blinding glare. I sat on the rock for over fifteen minutes enjoying the supermundane splendour of the landscape. The meeting of the glittering white expanse below and the spotless blue above, had raised the mountain top on that afternoon into a rare and wonderful world of joy and beauty. Generally the tops of the Himalayan peaks are lost in clouds. Only rarely, very rarely, do the silvery peaks appear below a canopy of bright, deep blue. Still more rarely do people capable of enjoying such sights pass this way. Between the mood into which a cultured mind enters on a sight so beautiful and the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* a Vedantin experiences, there is not much of a difference. If a world differentiated by name, form, etc., and characterised by love and hate, pleasure and pain, etc., and variegated by conceptions of friend and foe, wife and children, etc., and complicated by the differences of the learned and the ignorant, master and servant, man and woman, and so on, is absent in a state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, a world of such differences has no place in the beautiful realm of Nature either. That is why the wise ones regard the intuition of nature as the contents of *Samadhi*.

As I sat there for a time absorbed in the beauty of the sight around me I failed to take note of the progress my companions had already made without me. When I realized what had happened, I got up in a hurry and pushed forward. Now I was descending and the descent was as dangerous as the ascent itself. However, I began to climb down slowly and cautiously, supporting myself by my walking stick. None among us had any idea as to the extent of the snow field before us. Even the merchants could only hazard a guess.

Fortunately, the snow field did not extend beyond a mile. Once we had crossed the dangerous area with great care, we descended briskly along the broad and earthy side of the mountain. Even as the Vyasa Ganga has its source on this side of the Lutang mountain, the Bhaga originates on the other side. Another river called Chandra flowing down from another mountain joins the Bhaga, thereafter to be called Chandrabhaga (Chenab) which forms one of the tributaries of the Indus. Descending from the mountains we followed the course of the Bhaga and arrived at a *dharmasala*. Thus in a few hours we had traversed the ups and downs of snow for three miles and eight miles of bare ground. Crossing the Lutang Pass was like passing through the terrible gate of hell. We were all completely exhausted by the time we reached the *dharmasala* where we rested for the day.

Beyond the Pass the landscape presented a strange appearance. The high, barren, bare peaks capped with snow stood on all sides inspiring the beholders with wonder and awe. Here and there were villages inhabited by Buddhist people ; they appeared to be of a mixed race and their Buddhism could hardly be distinguished from Hinduism. Their Lamas lived at a distance from the villages. They were neither so devoted nor so righteous as the Lamas of Tibet. Most of them were householders, enjoying the company of women and leading quite a worldly life.

From that spot called Khoxer we resumed our journey next morning. The path led in a north-west direction. As our toes and fingers had gone stiff in the benumbing cold, we found it hard to walk in the morning. We had spent a sleepless night on account of the intensity of cold and the scarcity of

fuel. It was eight or nine in the morning when the sun rose above the line of the mountain tops. When his warm rays fell upon us, our hands and feet began to move more freely and before 10 o'clock we reached a place called Seesu, nine miles from Khoxer. We rested there for a while. Since there was no possibility of getting food in the locality we started again. At a way side village we cooked our meal and satisfied our hunger before we resumed our journey. Our next destination was a charming little town called Gondula, seven miles ahead. The place was remarkable for a palace. Next morning we covered ten miles and arrived at a village named Lotu. We passed the night in a *dharmasala* in the vicinity of the village. The inhabitants of the village are Buddhists. But they are fond of entertaining *sadhus* and my companions were remarkably skilful in gathering alms. I, therefore, had no worry about my meal. As the head of the band of *sadhus* I was treated with particular consideration. Since the *sadhus* did not like to accept cooked food from others they received rice, etc., and did the cooking themselves. All along the route we could have milk and butter-milk in plenty and so, in spite of all our exertions, we remained as strong and as energetic as ever.

At day-break we set out again. Five miles from Lotu, at a place called Thanthi, we came across the confluence of the Bhaga and the Chandra. It is from this point that the river is designated as Chandra-bhaga. The famous temple of Thrilokeenath is situated on her bank. Seven miles from Lotu is a large village called Jatuma. As our path gradually descended into the low lands in a north-westerly direction, the temperature rose steadily and the very nature of the

landscape changed. From Jatuma trees appeared along the route leading up to extensive and dense forests. Up to this spot I had been enjoying the sight of the high chain of mountains, bare, snow-capped and alluring with its purple hue. Beyond Jatuma the beauty of the mountain scenery underwent a change. On the way we reached another village called Throtu, seven miles from Jatuma. Seven miles farther on was Thrilokeenath, our destination. At about 11 a.m. next day we entered the holy place with deafening cries of “ Thrilokeenath Ki Jai ! ”

This chapter may be concluded with a few well-known lines from our famous *Harinamakeerthana* ; “ Arkanalathi Velivokke grahikkumoru kanninnu kannu manamakunna kannathinu Kannayirunna porul thanennurakkumalavanandamenthu harinarayanaya namah ”. It is the light of the sun and the moon that lights up all the beauty of Nature. That light is perceived by the eye. The eye itself receives the light because of the mind. The mind functions because of the inner spirit. But for the mind the eye cannot function ; but for the spirit the mind cannot work. Without the reflection of the spirit, the inner mind cannot make the eye, etc., take in the impression of any object.

Thus it is clear that it is the inner spirit that is at the root of all beauty. I am that spirit which ever shines unsurpassed. A man's highest state is the *Jnanasamadhi* in which he enjoys total identification with that spirit. Compared with that state, all action and in-action are petty and insignificant. Yet, forced by inherited tendencies, even enlightened ones are drawn by God into the vortex of worldly activity. When an enlightened one is awakened by God from

that high state of *Samadhi* in which there is absolutely no consciousness of the body and the senses, and when the body and the senses begin to function again, the person still continues to enjoy the state of *Atma samadhi*. In spite of such activity the enlightened one does not swerve from the state of *Atma samadhi*. Here I am setting forth the reason why this weak body has been frequently engaging itself in the difficult work of mountaineering. Even in the bitter experiences of the journeys, I have been finding the joy of Self.

THRILOKEENATHAM—II

For long, our ancestors, the *Arya rishis* were preoccupied with the worship of Indra, Surya, Agni, and other gods of Nature, singing hymns of praise to them, making them offerings of the *Soma* juice, etc., hankering after heaven as their reward. But at last, rising above all such perishable, though immediately pleasant, things, their thoughtful minds turned towards that One and only Object of perfect Bliss, which transcends all attributes and action, and which is limited by neither Time nor Space. Then they realized, by thought as well as direct experience, that there can be no two Truths and Truth is necessarily and always One. God, whose form is the Vedas, revealed that Truth to their uncontaminated minds. It is the deep, personal experience of such great rishis that finds utterance through the Vedic dicta such as

“ सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म ”

“ एकमेवाद्वितीयम् ”

“ अशब्दमस्पर्शमरूपमव्ययम् ”

That Truth proclaimed by the Arya *rishis*, became the haven of all subsequent thinkers. Realizing this supreme goal, seekers of *moksha* used to attain unsurpassed peace and supreme satisfaction. We cannot be committing a mistake if we include our historically famous Buddha among such great men who had directly realized the Principle of *Brahman* which is the subject of the Vedas and the refuge of peace for thinkers. Even if Sri Buddha, a Kshatriya by birth and by education a profound scholar in the Vedas and the Vedanta, has used the language of negation in referring to *Brahman*, it cannot be taken as a denial of the existence of *Brahman*. Several modern historians now hold the view that Lord Buddha fully believed in the *Brahman* of the Upanishads—the *Brahman*, who may be said to be existent or non-existent or as different from either or who may be described as altogether indescribable by words.

It is the image of that Buddha who knew *Brahman*, who taught of *Brahman*, who was himself *Brahman* and who was the benefactor of the Universe, that is worshipped at the temple of Thri-lokeenath. Sadhus had told me that Thri-lokeenath, like Badrinath, is a Vishnu Temple and that it is Lord Vishnu who is worshipped there. So I was a little surprised when I found the image of Buddha in the temple. Of course, there is nothing wrong or absurd, if Buddha, whom Hindus consider as an incarnation of Vishnu, is worshipped as Vishnu Himself. Be it as it may, we worshipped Thri-lokeenath with deep devotion. The priest of the temple was a Buddhist lama. He was a married man and householder. In his absence, it was his wife who took us round, and helped us to conduct the worship in the proper way. The form of

the beautiful image, the things used for the *puja* and the mode of worship were all exactly like those in the Tibetan temples. There was only one remarkable difference. In Tibet, along the route to Kailas, the images of Buddha were usually made of bronze ; here it was of marble. The lama and his wife conduct the worship and perform the circumambulation here without taking off their curious footwear made of leather and woollen cloth and reaching up to the knees. Such customs may appear to us rather odd, if not despicable, but they are universal in the Buddhist countries in the upper regions of the Himalayas. The temple of Thri-lokeenath is situated within a Himalayan State called Champa, ruled over by a raja, (then) subject to British Suzerainty.

I was lodging on the first-floor of the priest's house, in solitude, apart from the other sadhus. Sadhus were permitted to stop there for any number of days but householders were allowed to do so only for a day or two. Only a small number of Sadhus from Buddhist countries like China and Tibet, and a still smaller number of Hindu monks from India, visit this almost inaccessible temple. At the time of our arrival also, a few Buddhist lamas were camping on one side of the temple. The Buddhist lamas, conducting their *bhajan* on one side, to the accompaniment of the *damaru* and the drum, and the Hindu sadhus singing their hymns and blowing their conch shells on the other, inspired me with deep devotion, wonder and satisfaction.

Near the temple was situated a small village consisting of a few houses. It was the seat of a local potentate designated "Rakkur Sahib". The chief, I was told, enjoyed certain rights, not only

over the temple but also over the outlying areas. The local people therefore styled him as King. At the time of my visit to the temple, he was laid up with rheumatism. One evening I visited him in the company of a sadhu, as he indicated his eagerness to see me. He was resting in the upper storey of his palace. Being unable to raise himself from where he lay, he greeted us with folded hands and signed to us to sit near him. His servants were engaged at that time in manufacturing a sort of wine from rice. That was a popular drink among the local people. A pious man devoted to sadhus, the King spoke to me from his bed in idiomatic Hindi, for a long time. His talk was both informative and interesting. In the course of the conversation, he informed me that, he was, like his ancestors, a Hindu by faith and a Kshatriya by birth. His forefathers had immigrated into the region, about 150 or 200 years ago. Then the land was inhabited by a race of man-eating giants. It was his ancestors who cleared the country of them. The King then went on to express his satisfaction at meeting me. The grace of Thrilokeenath used to draw mahatmas to the spot and the inhabitants of that remote mountain region were thus blessed from time to time, by the visits of such holy men. It was clear that the local population was at one time Hindu. But, by long contact with Buddhists, they had come to adopt the Buddhist way of life.

We were supplied with all necessary provisions from the palace and other sources. The sadhus cooked their food and fed me too. So I passed three or four days there pleasantly in the contemplation of the Lord. My heart was charmed by the natural beauty of the Thrilokeenath plateau, surrounded by

bare or snow-covered peaks and deep blue deodar forests. All the sadhus, except two, now set out in the direction of Kashmir which could be reached from there in ten or twelve days. As for me, I decided to return to Kullu in the company of the other two sadhus. We followed the same path which we had pursued on our journey to Thrilokeenath. On our way back we passed a day at Jatuma, fourteen miles from Thrilokee. During these journeys we supported ourselves on *saktu* flour, milk and butter-milk, which we obtained at wayside villages. From Jatuma a path leads to the holy spot, Manmahesam. Manmahesam is situated in the Champa State. It is encircled by chains of snow-covered mountains and is hardly accessible to common people. It is far from all human habitation. The Iravathi, a tributary of the Sindhu, has her source near it. Though we had heard of the holy temple, we made no attempt to visit it for more reasons than one. For one thing, pilgrims from Jatuma have to cross a high pass called "Kapti Pass" to reach Manmahesam. For another, the season was not suitable for making the attempt; snow still lay deep for five or six miles along the route. Besides, we failed to secure the services of a reliable guide.

Leaving our direct route, we struck out along the bank of the Chandra and travelled five miles or more, simply for diversion, reaching a large village called Kelang. As there were certain British officials camping there, we passed a day with them as their guests. On that day there was heavy rainfall, followed by snowfall. However, we did not perish in the bitter cold, as by God's grace, we had been received as guests by the officials. From the village, capital of

the province called Lavel, a road leads up to Tibet and Turkistan. At Kelang on the tops of the mountain peaks we could see the beautiful hermitages of the lamas. Shivering with cold, but delighted with the sights around us, we proceeded on the very next day from Kelang (12,000 ft. above sea-level) and travelled across the mountains which were dazzling with fresh, bright snow. Rainfall started again and it became unbearably cold. To set our feet on the icy ground became almost impossible. True indeed is the *Sastric* view that even for those who have attained monistic knowledge, *advaita* is possible only in feeling and not action. Heat and cold, pleasure and pain, milk and poison, fire and water are all *Brahman*, one can feel them all as self, but even for the staunchest *advaiti* it is impossible to treat them as one and the same for practical purposes. Even the true knowers cannot lie on the bare cold ground during a snowfall, as they do in the gentle warmth of the Sun ; they cannot swallow poison as they drink milk ; they cannot plunge into fire as they do into water, even though they are convinced, beyond all doubt, that they are all *Brahman*. Worldly existence is on the physical plane. The body is the same in the case of the Knower and in the case of the Ignorant. So there is not much of a difference between them physically. On the attainment of True Knowledge, one develops powers like physical and mental control and endurance but even then one can not alter the innate nature of snow and fire, wind and rain. It being so, there is no reason why people should wonder if we, common mortals, suffered severely on account of the attack of cold, etc.

As it rained everyday we had to endure far greater

discomforts on our return trip. Fresh snow had fallen on the Lutang Pass but that did not make much of a difference in the volume and depth of the snow, since the old snow had melted away in the warmth of the Sun. However, the cold was still more intense and so we had to put up with serious discomforts on the way. But, Divine Grace, somehow, enabled us to overcome all such difficulties and reach Vasishta in safety.

The villagers of Vasishta rejoiced at our success and received us jubilantly with great devotion. We lost no time in resuming our journey. We started the very next day following another route, that is, along the left bank of the Vyasaganga, and reached Kullu on the second day, crossing beautiful mountains, valleys, and villages *en route*. I decided to reach Uttarkasi before the Ashadha Purnima, the first day of the rainy season comprising the four months, and travel along the mountain routes, without climbing down to the plains. Having arrived at such a decision, I left Kullu on 22nd June, after invoking the blessings of Kasi Viswanath. It was at the beginning of June that I started on the journey from Vasishta to Thrilokeenath. The circumstances were not favourable to a longer stay at Thrilokee. Moreover, I did not feel the need to stay on. It was for these reasons that I cut short my stay rather abruptly and started for Uttarkasi on the bank of the Divine Ganga, where sadhus congregate and from where spiritual light radiates in all directions. Having thus spent two months and four days, from 18th April (the day I left Hrishikesh) to 22nd June, on the bank of the sacred Vyasaganga and at Thrilokeenath temple, in great joy, I bade good-bye to the other sadhus and

started all alone in the direction of Soumya Kasi.

Sri Sankara has sung “कौपीनवन्तः खलु माग्यवन्तः” (He indeed is lucky whose sole worldly possession is his underwear). The fewer one’s possessions, the greater are one’s enjoyment and freedom—it is an incontrovertible truth learnt by experience. While I was surrounded by several sadhus, in spite of their readiness to serve me, I never felt so happy as when I was all alone. Unaffected by the dual forces, living on food got by begging, pleased with howsoever little obtained by chance, I moved forward slowly, untouched by sorrow. I had to travel some distance along the route from Kullu to Simla. Simla is 22 miles away from Kullu. The first lap of the journey terminated at a small town called ‘Ramapura’. Ramapura is a beautiful little town or an overgrown village. It is the seat of the Raja of Vishire, a small Himalayan State, as well as its capital. After travelling two or three days from Kullu, one has to cross a mountain covered with formidable forests for at least ten miles. In the chill of the early dawn I entered the forest at a leisurely pace. The tall trees that grew dense in the region were covered with a luxuriant growth of climbers and creepers. The whole place was dark and grand, ringing with the shrill sound of cicalas. The forest did not frighten me ; it filled me only with a sense of pleasant wonder. A well trained and controlled mind stands a man in good stead better than armies. It saves him from cowardice as well as perils. My mind was well disciplined and fortified by meditation on God, and by the exhilarating enjoyment of Nature. So it was free from all pranks and caprices. On reaching the top of the mountain I rested there for a while and entered into a state of

samadhi in the midst of such natural, Divine loveliness. Bears and such fierce wild beasts might have been prowling about the place, but I never met them. As I made my way down the mountain, I came across several villages. Travelling thus for five or six days I arrived at Ramapura safely. I spent two or three days there pleasantly, drinking the holy water of the Satadru (Satej) which flows out of Lake Manasa, bathing in the sacred river and worshipping at various shrines. A beautiful Buddhist temple in which a light was kept perpetually burning, attracted my attention. Attached to the temple was a Buddhist library. I visited the temple once or twice and worshipped Lord Buddha. A Buddhist lama who was the head of the library, accorded me a friendly welcome and showed me a number of rare books. We discussed many things about Buddhism. From Ramapuram a good road leads up to Tibet along the bank of the Satej and so traders with their merchandise, often travel this way from the plains of Hindustan.

My next objective was a place called Rodu, about forty miles from Ramapuram. It was a rugged road, full of ups and downs. By 2 o'clock I arrived at a wayside village. It was past dinner time and so, on seeing me, the village headman directed his wife to prepare a meal for me. In less than an hour it was ready and I had my dinner. Thus, accepting the hospitality of villagers on the way, and walking slowly, all alone, through the deep solitary forests, I at last reached Rodu on the third day. I rested one or two days at a big *ashram* established by the *Vaishnava* preceptor of the local Raja. From there I directed my steps to the valley of the Jumna. From the Jumna to the Bhageerathi (Ganga) it is only a short distance.

Leaving Rodu I followed the course of a small river and reached a lonely and beautiful place four miles away. There I met a holy man of the *Vaishnava* School, who lived in an open tent. As soon as he saw me he received me with the cordiality of a lifelong friend. He offered me a tiger-skin to sit on beside him.

“ द्रुतस्य भगवद्धर्माद्वारावहिकतां गता
सर्वेशे मनसो वृत्तिर्भक्तिरित्यभिधीयते ” ॥

(भक्तिरसायनम्)

When, on hearing the glories of the Lord recounted, the mind melts and flows uninterruptedly towards the Almighty, it is called *Bhakti*. It is this *bhakti* that is stressed most in the *Vaishnava* cult. Saints like Narada, Sandilya, Ramanuja, Madhva and Chaitanya, were all *bhaktas* and exponents of *Bhakti*. But, in course of time, the creed got corrupted. Now, the distinguishing features of the *Vaishnava* cult are an excessive insistence on untouchability, a preoccupation with what is correct to eat and what is not, and an intolerance of other faiths. Yet it was gratifying to find that there were broad-minded and pious people still within its fold. My new acquaintance was one of them. *Bhakti* and service are inextricably connected. Wherever there is *bhakti* there will, certainly, be the willingness to serve. They who worship God with love, love everything in the form of God. This love of service was conspicuous in my host's character. As he pressed me again and again to stay on, I spent four days with him in his cottage. He cooked the food with his own hands and fed me very lovingly. There was no dearth of provisions here since the

villagers living around the place revered him wholeheartedly and kept him supplied with all the necessaries of life. My host was an adept in *yogic* practices. It cannot be said that he was a great scholar, but he knew something of everything. He knew English too, a little. Extreme humility was characteristic of the man. So he declined to answer my questions directly. "How far have you advanced in the practice of *yoga*? Will *yogic* practices add to the intensity of *bhakti*?" For such questions he returned but an evasive answer. "I am not qualified to discuss such matters with a *paramahansa* like you." Great men say that self-conceit is the deadliest of sins. My heart was filled with respect for the great man when I found such humility in him, instead of legitimate pride. Really, I had never in the past come across such a *mahatma* during my rambles in the region.

In spite of the entreaties of my host and of the friendly villagers to stay on, I decided to push forward without further delay. I rested that night eight miles away at a place called Hattukota, famous for a *Devi* temple. Now my path lay through solitary forests along the sides of mountains for a distance of twenty-four miles. Thus travelling, I arrived at a village called Anoli. Here too is a temple on the bank of a river. I passed one night at the place. Next I had to pass through a terrible forest haunted by wolf and other fierce wild beasts. The forest spread for fifteen miles up a high mountain. I had been told that to enter the forest all alone was highly risky, but I had no alternative. Early next morning I therefore resumed the journey by myself. Who can be frequenting such remote regions every day? Naturally, without expecting assistance from any body I wended my solitary

way. Before I had proceeded far, I realized that I had missed my way and had gone two or three miles in the wrong direction. The landmarks which I had expected to find, were missing. The absence of such signs aroused my suspicion and I turned back. Who is there in the forest to save us from dangers? What is there to shield us from perils except our own discretion and God's mercy? I was soon absorbed in the grandeur of the forest and the beauty of the landscape. I forgot myself and proceeded all alone through the dense, dark forest. When I had covered a considerable distance I was joined by a body of sawyers. For some miles they accompanied me. By 2 o'clock we reached the valley on the other side of the mountain. I had tasted no food that day. Nor had I provided myself with food, as I had been expecting to reach some village or other in time for the next meal. Being hungry I was eager to push forward, but as my companions, the sawyers, had already started cooking, I had to give up my idea. Consequently, I whiled away time sitting under the shade of a tree. Just then one of those workmen came to me and said "Babaji, I belong to a low caste. It is not right that you should eat my bread. But I have placed wheat flour, fire, fuel, etc., there. As we have not much time to lose, please bake some bread quickly and eat it before we start again."

The man was of low caste, uneducated, and physically unclean but his mentality must have been rare even among the gods. The world is motivated by selfishness; selfless activities are hardly met with anywhere. If at all there are selfless acts, they must be rare indeed. "Everything for me; nothing for others." It is in this way most people think. Suppose

men are confronted with this choice, "save yourself and let the world perish or save the world and you perish," how many will opt for the second alternative? A man so cornered, without wasting a moment in thought and without any feeling of shame, will immediately exclaim, "Let the world go to rack and ruin; what do I care? I must save myself at all costs." Few indeed are the men, among God's creation, who have the courage to declare enthusiastically, "What a chance! How lucky I am! If all the world will live by my death, let me die! I am ready to lay aside this body now and here." If selfishness is so strong and universal, should we not honour the man who shows it only in a lesser degree? Should we not consider him an angel? I was a helpless stranger. There was no reason why the man should have helped me. His kind offer was, therefore, the outcome of spontaneous love, of the sincere desire to render loving service to others. Rejoicing at the innate goodness of the man, I baked two or three *rotis* and appeased my hunger. I slaked my thirst drinking the clean, clear water which tasted even sweeter than nectar. Then I continued my journey. In a short time I arrived at a village not far away. That part of the country was called Ramaserai. It differed from the regions I had so long passed through, in so far as it contained several villages scattered about here and there and extensive fields where paddy was cultivated. The Himalayan region to the east of Ramaserai is known as Tehri Garwal. The Jumna is only six miles away. On the way I sat down near a dwelling house to rest. Some one then came out of the house and on seeing me greeted me with the salutation, "Jai Narayana!" After a few

minutes he told me : “ Babaji, if you have no objection to taking a meal prepared by us, I shall have it immediately prepared.” It was not meal-time, but as the next village was rather distant and it was past ten, I replied, “ No, I have no objection.” Immediately another man began to busy himself with preparing my food, in a neat, vacant building at some distance. I had my bath and then my meal. While I was eating, the man who had cooked the food for me, entered into conversation with me and casually told me that he was a Kshatriya while his master, my host, was a Mussalman who had settled down there with his Hindu wife who belonged to some mountain tribe. My host’s regard for Hindu sadhus, in spite of his being a Moslem, filled me with agreeable surprise. Of course, there is no rule granting the monopoly of virtues like devoutness, humaneness and generosity to the followers of one particular religion or to one particular individual, while denying it to others. After my meal I started again. Lo ! there flows the sacred Jumna in front of me. I ran to her banks as eagerly as a child that runs to the lap of its mother from whom it had parted a long while ago. The July sun was blazing like fire. I threw myself down at the feet of mother Jumna, the spouse of Vasudeva. At places she appeared as a slender, deep blue, stream, just a foot deep and quite narrow, zigzagging her way between heaps of rocky boulders. As I stood watching her winding gently along in her course, my heart danced with joy and my mind filled with elevated ideas. The broad and beautiful sand banks formed in the river at Vrindavan, Mathura, Indra Prastha and Prayag, are world famous. But the Jumna is not always so gentle nor does she leave enough space

for one to sit on as she makes her way down the Himalayas, through narrow clefts in the rocks and through tunnels bored through hills of earth. At the very sight of the holy river my mind was raised to a higher plane. I make no attempt here to describe that state of mind, even briefly. First, I eagerly drank her water until my belly was full. Then I seated myself on a rock in the shade of a tree growing on her bank. At a short distance, the children of mountain cowherds were sporting in the waters of the river. Lost in my love for the beautiful Jumna I sat there entranced for a long time, unaware of my surroundings. Indeed, even the austere *sanyasins* are susceptible to the beauty of creation.

At 3 o'clock I resumed my solitary journey along the bank of the Jumna and reached a village called Vatukotta, six or seven miles away. There were at that time certain Government officials camping at the village. I too rested there during the night. Next day I walked to Gangani, a spot three miles up the river. I was, of course, familiar with the place and with other places on the way from there to Uttarkasi. It is from there that people bound for Jamnotri begin their climb. The source of the Jumna (Jamnotri) is only thirty miles away. From Vatukotta we could get a glimpse of the magnificent snow-mountains of Jamnotri. Gangani is the site of the famous sage, Jamadagni's hermitage. At Gangani I had my bath and a meal prepared by a Brahmin acquaintance. After a day's rest and the usual morning bath I set out for Uttarkasi, the very next day. Now my destination was only 18 miles away. But I passed one or two days at a hermitage on the bank of the Ganga in the company of a *mahatma*, who was a dear, old friend

of mine. I re-entered Uttarkasi, the tranquil abode of Sri Viswanath and the residence of many sadhus enjoying supreme peace, three or four days before the *Ashadha Purnima*. It had taken twenty-five days in all for me to cover a distance of only 195 miles, from Kullu to Uttarkasi. Having brought my rambles in the Western Himalayas to a happy conclusion, I started on the observance of *Chaturmasya*. It may be mentioned here that it was during this *Chaturmasya* that I composed the *Sree Soumya Kaseesa Stotram* and dedicated it to Sri Viswanath.

“ गिरिराजसुतापुण्यपरिपाकोऽस्तु मे गतिः
सुरवृक्षवृते यस्य मन्दिरे सुन्दरे स्थितिः ”

PASUPATHINADHAM*

उत्तिष्ठत ! जाग्रत ! प्राप्यवरान् निबोधत !

“ *Arise, Awake ; And understand the Supreme Goal* ”
(*Kathopanishad*)

“ O Men, lying immersed in the sleep of ignorance from time without beginning, arise, awake from this sleep of illusion. Seek and find noble teachers and learn directly from them the truth about the Soul.”

Like a loving mother, the *Sruti* admonishes us tenderly to wake up from the terrible sleep of ignorance which is the source of all sorrows and calamities, that

* It was in 1955 that I first undertook a journey to Mount Kailas. Soon after the completion of the pilgrimage, a detailed account of it was written and published partly in book form. The following five chapters are a brief summary of the account, meant to make the present book complete.

is, to eradicate ignorance completely. The *Sruti* also assures us that the only means of destroying ignorance is the attainment of the knowledge of the Self. So it is clear there is no other road to salvation. To the mansion of *Moksha* there is no entrance except through *Jnana*. *Bhakti* and *Yoga* lead man to the door of *Jnana* and not directly to the Home of Salvation. The darkness of ignorance lifts only on the rise of the sun, *Jnana*, not on the appearance of the stars like *Bhakti*.

यदाचर्मवदाकाशं वेष्टयिष्यन्ति मानवाः ।

तदा देवमविज्ञाय दुःखस्यान्तो भविष्यति ॥

So says the Swethaswathara *Sruti*. If only one can fold the sky like a piece of parchment, can he cross the sea of worldly sorrows without the knowledge of the Supreme Soul. It is the view of all the *Srutis* that there is no vessel to ferry man across the ocean of worldliness except *Jnana*. But then, what is this *Jnana*? *Jnana* means the full and firm realisation of the Self—a realization beyond all doubt, change, contradiction. Neither the control of breath or mind, nor the performance of *Nishkama karma*, neither devotion to the gods, nor the performance of penances like *Krichhra* and *Chandrayana*, nor yet pilgrimaging is *Jnana*; it is all *ajnana*. Whatever is related to egoism is *ajnana*; when the I-consciousness ends, it is *Jnana*. How does this *Jnana* originate? How does a man who identifies himself with the body and thinks “I am rich, I am happy” or “I am poor, I am unhappy”, turn away from this immoral worldly life and enter that life of the Soul with the thought, “I am *Brahman*, the bodyless, ageless, deathless Bliss”? Enquiry into

Truth, carried on with the help of holy men, is the chief means of attaining true knowledge. All the great teachers of the past unanimously hold *Sanyasa*, which means the renunciation of all action, to be an essential element of spiritual contemplation. Nevertheless, indifference to worldly pleasures, control of body and mind, eagerness to attain salvation, places and time without distractions and other factors are necessary to an intensive search after Truth. Without these, mind can hardly become calm and pointed enough to attain Truth. If a man enters upon a life of thought with all these necessary equipments, he will certainly reach the state of *Jnana* before long. *Jnana* is the result of contemplation ; it annihilates all *ajnana*. Until one reaches the climax of *Jnana* one cannot be said to have attained true firmness of mind or fulfilled one's purpose of life.

The extinction of worldly desires and the enjoyment of spiritual peace are the result of one's devotion to *Jnana*. A *jnani* enjoys *Brahmananda* or supreme bliss without interruption, not after death but in this life itself. It is beyond words to define *Brahmananda*, but it can be experienced by the knowers of *Brahman*. By tasting a particle of salt, one can infer the taste of a mountain of salt. Similarly, from the enjoyment of worldly pleasures which are but the infinitesimal part of *Brahmananda*, common people can guess at the greatness of *Brahmananda* itself. The mind that gets agitated on account of the desire to enjoy worldly pleasures, gets calm and *Satvik* as a result of such enjoyment and in that *Satvik* state of mind *Brahmananda* is experienced in howsoever small a measure. Thus what is called worldly pleasure also is *Brahmananda*. Vyasa and other learned men hold that there is no

pleasure except *Brahmananda*. Even as we speak severally of pot-space (*Ghatakasa*), Mutt-space (*Mattakasa*), etc., the same joy is spoken of differently according to differences of touch, hearing, etc. Worldliness transforms the unlimited, insuperable, eternal *Brahmananda*, into something limited, superable, destructible. How can those great ones who enjoy uninterrupted *Brahmananda*, and are ever content, hanker after the fleeting pleasures of the world? *Brahmananda* is unrelated to worldly things; it depends solely on Self-realization. So it is in no way affected by the pains of acquisition, etc. If anybody still argues that there can be no joy except through the experience of earthly pleasures, he should be classed with the owl that avers there is light only in the night and not in day time!

It deserves to be specially mentioned that the state of knowledge which is the sole source of everlasting peace can be attained only by right thinking and not merely by *dhyana* or *samadhi*. Some do mistake them for *jnana*. They are under the impression that the practice of *dhyana* is the be-all and end-all of existence and that a man who practises *dhyana* for half an hour or an hour daily has completed his spiritual duty and so he is free to do anything afterwards. They are labouring under the mistake that a person who reaches the state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* for a minute or two, has attained his goal and that he has already reached salvation even while alive. It is only when we examine whether this man of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* has attained an unwavering state of spiritual devotion, that is a devotion beyond doubt, that we realize the hollowness of his *Jivan mukti*. It may briefly be said that this class of people are the unfortu-

nates who have not been able to understand clearly the cause, the nature and the result of *jnana* and *dhyana* through association with real *mahatmas*.

Dhyana and *Samadhi* may be regarded as co-operative factors contributing to the perfection of *Jnana* ; but they are neither *Jnana* nor the cause of *Jnana*. One may attain that exalted state of *jnana* where one finds oneself in everything and everything in oneself, only through cultivating detachment and Vedantic thinking. Neither *Hata samadhi* nor *Jada samadhi* can take him to that goal where one experiences eternal contentment. Instead of trying to prove this by scientific arguments and inferences I shall quote here a conversation with a *Mahatma* whom I met in a lovely region among the Himalayas, especially because his words born of practical experience carry greater conviction than Vedic dogmas or logical reasonings.

I : Swamiji, have you seen or heard of *yogis* who have been able to remain in *Samadhi* for long ?

SWAMIJI : In these days *Hatha yogis* and *Raja yogis* are very rare. It was not so some time back. There were then several *Yogis* of the kind in the Northern regions. One of them I knew very well. He was a *sadhu*. He could sit for five or six hours at a stretch quite easily without breathing or letting the mind wander.

I : A holy man indeed !

SWAMIJI : Don't jump to conclusions before you hear the whole story. In fact, he was a very unholy sort of man.

I : What do you mean ? How could that be ?

SWAMIJI : He could, indeed, still his breath and mind at will as a result of long training ; but he never enjoyed peace of mind, nor ever possessed the

knowledge or even the thought of the Self.

I : Alas ! Is it possible that so great a *Yogi* should have no inclination for spiritual life or the necessary competence for it ?

SWAMIJI : How could he have ? The spirit of detachment he never had ; not even a desire for salvation. He hankered after wealth and worldly pleasure. He traded on his *Yogic* feats. Before wealthy people he would exhibit his skill of sitting still for hours like a granite statue and get from them money and certificates of merit as his reward. The men of real learning and detachment, at the time, used to feel sorry for his misbehaviour.

All learned people admit that the paramount duty of a sanyasin (who has renounced the world) is the uninterrupted practice of spiritual discipline which alone leads to *Moksha*.

Having learnt this truth from *Mahatmas* and *Sastras*, I have been passing my days in the forest of Rishikesh seeking to fulfil my duty. It was only two years since I left home and native place and became a *sanyasin*, when, one day, quite unexpectedly, I met an old acquaintance, Sri Swami Santiyananda Saraswati, at Rishikesh. He was now the Sree Sankaracharya of Sarada Mutt, Dwarakai. He had come to Rishikesh to participate in a celebration at the *ashram* of certain *sanyasins*. A southerner as I was, he had a great love for me. On seeing me clothed in saffron robes, living upon alms and leading a solitary life, his face was, for a moment, clouded with sorrow ; tears welled up in his eyes. But in a moment, the great man overcame his frailty and congratulated me whole-heartedly on the acceptance of *sanyasa*. The next two or three days I passed in

his company. In the course of our conversation I happened to mention my desire to proceed to Khatmandu, to participate in the famous *Sivarathri* festival at the holy temple of Pasupathinath. Then the swamiji told me that he too had not visited Pasupathinath yet, but desired to do so, that he would soon be ready to start for Nepal with his retinue and that we could travel together.

At the beginning of February 1925 with the permission and blessings of elderly *sanyasins* and friends I set out on foot on an auspicious day. At Haridwar I was joined by Sri Sankaracharyaji and we then travelled by train. I was at first unwilling to leave the holy Ganga who appears to me as the very manifestation of the Supreme Goddess. On her banks my days pass like moments in *Vedantic* thought, acts of devotion, and meditation. The pain of separation was, however lightened by the pleasant prospect of rambling among the Himalayas. The Swamiji's company too promised to make the pilgrimage all the more pleasant. But that was not to be. On the very day of our start we were obliged to part. After all, meeting is only a prelude to parting, yet the sudden separation filled me with sadness.

Multiplicity of worldly concerns binds down a *sanyasin* as much as any householder. Except in a life of retirement, free from worldly affairs, where can we expect a taste of liberty? Under the illusion that freedom and happiness are to be found in riches, titles and position, people waste their invaluable lives in the vigorous pursuit of these shadowy phantoms. Taking a poisonous cobra for a garland of flowers, they lift it up with their hands and place it eagerly round their necks. Previously, I had seen Swami

Santyananda Saraswathi as an ascetic without position and titles. Subsequently he had been raised, willingly or unwillingly, to the position of Sankaracharya. His new status, titles, wealth, power, etc., which necessarily pertain to such positions made him a slave to them. Now he was called off elsewhere to attend to other duties. He, therefore, got down on the way at some railway station and started for his new destination. Before he departed, however, he pressed me to accept some money from him, as a penniless journey to Nepal was likely to cause me many hardships. I thankfully declined to accept the proffered help, and leaving him, resumed my journey by train.

On the way I rested three or four days at Lucknow and Gorakhpur and then continued my journey to Raxaul, a railway station on the northern border of India. From there I proceeded on foot to Veerganj, a small town, two miles away, situated on the southern boundary of Nepal. The mountainous route to Khatmandu begins here. The distance from Veerganj to Khatmandu is only sixty miles, yet because of the difficulties on the way travellers make various preparations before they start. As for me I had no preparations to make. But a Brahmin gentleman, induced by God, brought me some bread and got me a passport (which is a necessary document for all foreigners who want to enter Nepal State) from a Nepali officer at Veerganj. Provided thus, I set out and proceeded all alone in a crowd of pilgrims bound for the capital of the State.

Thousands of pilgrims, both men and women, *sanyasins* as well as householders, were moving northward along the broad and beautiful road leading to the Nepalese capital. I was in their midst. We had

first to cross a terrible forest frequented by herds of wild elephants, bears, tigers, etc. The long belt of forest, more than fifteen miles broad, forming the southern border of the Himalayas is known as the Terai. That part of the forest which stretches along the Nepal territory is famous especially for its denseness, its beauty as well as its terrors. But in those crowds numbering thousands there was no room for fear. I pursued my journey enjoying the supermundane beauty of the landscape all along the route. On crossing the Terai one finds that the dense forest gives place to hills and hillocks. In this region pilgrims journey all day and rest all night. When they have passed Pramanipur and Bheemabhedi, that is, when they have travelled forty-two miles from Veerganj, they come across two mountains called Seesagadi (2,500 ft.) and Chandragiri (2,000 ft.). It is said that, on clear mornings, one may see from the tops of these mountains Gaurisankar and other great Himalayan peaks, about two hundred miles away. Coming down the Chandragiri mountain, pilgrims reach a broad and beautiful road once again. The road leads to Khatmandu, six miles away.

PASUPATHINADHAM—I

Historians say that “ Nepal ” is the corrupt form of “ Nayapalam ” the land ruled by the great Rishi, Naya. From east to west this mountainous country is 450 miles long and its average width is about 150 miles. In the centre of the state there is a plain twenty miles long and fifteen miles broad. Khatmandu is like a jewel set in the middle of the plain. According to an ancient tradition the plain was once an extensive

lake called Nagavasa. Khatmandu (Kashtamandapam) is a mountain city, two miles square, situated at a height of 4,500 ft. above sea-level. The city appears to be as civilized and as beautiful as any city of the lowlands.

I entered Khatmandu on 20th February and took up my abode joyfully in a monastery at Tappathali, on the bank of the Vagmathi. The Sivarathri festival was on the very next day. At dawn, after the usual bath, etc., I set out for the temple which is situated three miles away on the bank of the same river. On reaching there, I had a rare and wonderful *darshan*. Around the temple was a concourse of thousands among whom were *sanyasins* clad in various ways. Here was a triumph of faith and devotion. For the moment all distinctions between the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, *sanyasins* and householders, men and women had disappeared and the oneness of Godhood was manifest everywhere. The sight of so many *sadhus* filled my heart with joy. "The peacock never attains the speed of the swan. Even so a householder can hardly attain the greatness of *sanyasins* who pass their days in devotion in the solitudes of forests" so says a Buddhist book. The Hindu scriptures hold that a householder, however distinguished he may be, can never approach even an ordinary *sanyasin* in sanctity. The reason given is this: Worldliness, deceit, violence—these are the capital of household existence, whereas the thought of the world to come, straightforwardness and non-violence form the foundations of a *sanyasin's* life. Hence the latter is holy, while the former is sinful. Whatever be the opinions of the moderns regarding *sadhus* whom the ancients used to hold in such high esteem, I was sincerely glad to meet so many of them in the

holy precincts of the Himalayan shrine. I jostled my way into the temple with great difficulty and had my *darshan* of the great Pasupathinath who appears here with five heads. My heart was filled with devotion ; eyes shed tears of joy and body trembled with pleasure. I could not remain there for more than a few seconds because of the pressure of the crowds which were pushing forward to have *darshan*. So my body moved forward, while my face kept turning backward again and again in eagerness to see the form of the holy Lord once more. Soon I found myself outside the temple and for a longwhile I paced around it in deep devotion.

The temple of Pasupathinath is a concrete proof of the deep devotion of the Nepali Kings as well as of their opulence. In the construction of the temple they have used gold and silver as profusely as wood and stone. The temple may be compared to the Nataraja shrine at Chidambaram or the golden temple of the Sikhs at Amritsar. When I had finished the circumambulations of Pasupathinath, I visited several minor temples in the vicinity. Thus the day was passed in the *darshan* of the Gods and the hearing of the holy hymns and scriptures. I gradually entered into a state of *bhavasamadhi*. I found the Divine presence not in this body alone, but in every body that had gathered there.

In installing idols for worship our ancestors have done a great service to humanity ; indeed, we can hardly overpraise their wisdom. It is a matter of common experience that these idols and these religious ceremonies lift the hearts of common men and women to a higher plane of devotion. They are the real fools who condemn people as fools for finding God in

stock and stone. Man may worship God as the *Paramatma* who is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe, and who is immanent in everything or find him in a tree or blade of grass or piece of stone and worship Him in any form. And according to the *Sankalpa* of the devotee, God will bless him. God is omnipresent and omniscient. God is everywhere, whether in stone or soil, pillar or a piece of straw. Nothing exists in which God is not. So there is nothing absurd in worshipping God in any object. The fact that we refer to Siva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Kali, Lakshmi, etc., does not suggest any plurality of gods. We adore Vishnu repeating His thousand names. That does not mean that there are 1,000 Vishnus. Similarly different names and forms do not posit more than one God. For the convenience of worship devotees conceive of God as Siva, Vishnu, etc. Really they worship the one Supreme Being which is only One without a second. Like the Hindus, Christians, Moslems, etc., worship the same Supreme Being in their own fashion under different names. If Hindus can believe in Kailas or *Vaikunt*, in Siva or Vishnu, why not other people conceive of other worlds and other gods according to their own standards of culture? It is beyond all doubts that God will, if He is in everything and knows everything, reward everyone according to his or her desires, provided he or she worships Him in stone or clay, tree or plant, with sincere devotion.

PASUPATHINADHAM—II

“ If a woman enters our *Ashram* we will hack her to pieces with a sword ”—so declared a Tibetan Lama

to me once. The lama was probably exaggerating, yet his words point to their deep seated desire not to get mixed up with worldly affairs which tend to cause violent mental agitations. Compared with the moderns who mingle freely with lustful women every day and yet claim to be leading a life of unadulterated Brahmacharya, the ancients, it would seem, were neither so saintly nor so self-restrained. What silly, good-for-nothing cowards were those ancients ! abject slaves to their senses ! superstitious idiots ! How ridiculous ! They had to retreat to lonely forests to preserve their *Brahmacharya* ! Whatever be the notion of our moderns about their forefathers, the Buddhist lamas still retreat into such solitudes even today. They do not believe it possible to be wedded to worldly life and yet be ascetic.

Swayambhoonatham is a lovely solitary place so occupied by Buddhist monks. It is situated to the west of Khatmandu. One day I went there for *darshan* in the company of some devotees from the capital. That lonely, peaceful hermitage, standing on the top of a small hill, captivated my heart completely. There I saw several beautiful temples dedicated to the five Pandavas, etc. In the chief temple there is a light kept burning day and night and it is never suffered to go out. At the temple we met the chief lama and had a conversation with him. We were told that the temple had been in existence long before the time of Gautama Buddha, the last of the Buddhas. Every year pilgrims from Tibet and other countries pay their visits to the holy shrine. The local people told me that in the very year of my visit a very holy lama from Tibet had performed a miraculous penance—had successfully completed his *Pranati yatra*, filling

all beholders with wonder and admiration. Seeing how difficult it is for an ordinary person even to climb the high, steep, snowclad peaks, and how much more dangerous to climb down, we are left to wonder at the tremendous power of faith that enables man to perform the entire journey in the course of several months or even years, prostrating himself at every step. Such penance cannot fail to inspire beholders with awe and devotion.

The sight of the somewhat circular and uneven central plain of Nepal with the capital city at its centre and extensive rice-fields dotted with villages surrounding it, as well as the far off Himalayan peaks spotlessly white with snow raised my mind to a higher plane of joy. I could not return to the city before I had my fill of that divine bliss. The paddy fields in the vicinity of the city reminded me often of our own Kerala.

In the year 450 B.C. Lord Buddha himself toured this region and converted the local Brahmins and the members of the other castes into Buddhism. About two hundred years later, in 249 B.C. the Mauryan Emperor Asoka, travelled over these places, propagating the Buddhist faith, building *Viharas* and encouraging the new religion. Nepal remained under the sway of the religion for long ; and even today one may come across its relics in quite unexpected corners. I spent one whole day visiting the temples at Pathanam and Bhathugam, two small towns near Khatmandu. I found many temples built in the Buddhist style with the idols of Buddha still intact. The excellence of the Buddhist style of architecture is displayed in every one of them. In the towns Buddhists live side by side with their kith and kin, reconverted into the Hindu fold.

We were told that in addition to all this, there were several monasteries in this area. But the present inmates of these monasteries are not true monks but a kind of householder-sadhuis known as "Gosayees". They serve to show how difficult it is for all to be true to an exalted ideal. Verily it has been said "All those who wear cowl are not monks". Irresistible indeed is the power of Maya which misleads even the great souls who desire to take the path of wisdom !

More than all the attractions of Khatmandu, what delighted me most was the natural grace and beauty of a square shaped, small lake in the heart of the city. Red lotuses bloomed in the lake and at its centre was a small temple. Frequently on evenings I bent my steps thither and enjoyed the beauty of the scene. At times, I was attracted also by the sight of hundreds of Gurkha soldiers in their uniforms drilling on the plain near the lake. This meeting place of natural and artificial beauty in the very centre of the city was, I must admit, the greatest source of my pleasure during my sojourn at Khatmandu.

Within a week of the Sivarathri festival all pilgrims whether sadhus or householders had left the city in obedience to the law of the state. But, at the request of many noble men and *sadhuis* I stayed on. The devotees vied with one another in attending to my needs as if they were under imperial orders to do so. The forenoon was taken up with bathing, *bhajan* and other rites, and the afternoon was devoted chiefly to the discussions of religious topics with men who naturally delighted in the company of *sadhuis*. The Nepalese are a highly religious people devoted to *sadhuis* as well as Brahmins. As the news of my arrival spread through the city several people came

to me and kept coming to me day by day to see me and discuss philosophy with me. Amongst those who thus flocked to me were learned Brahmins and zions of the royal family who bear the title Rana and Kshatriyas who occupy positions of trust and responsibility in the state. Though most of them loved detachment and were devoted to the sacred *Brahma Vidya*, some of the Rajput warriors were under temptations. The possibility of mastering the art of working miracles had fascinated them. They wanted to learn *yogic* feats.

Many are the people who are so misled. The truth is, the greatest *siddhi* is but of the earth ; the greatest *siddha* is yet a worldling. He still remains a slave to passions. In the universe who is a greater *siddha* than *Hiranyagarbha* ? Except those who have detached themselves completely from the world, who possess the talent of wise and careful thought, none can hope to understand *Brahma Vidya*, even indirectly, that is, even intellectually.

Association with the good intoxicates people as much as the intercourse with the wicked and so crowds of people flocked to my residence at the regular hour, day after day, eager to imbibe the true knowledge. Society of the good is like nectar, sweet and beneficent to man. That is why ancient rishis like Vasishta and modern rishis like Guru Nanak have paid unstinted tributes to *satsanga*. The company of virtuous people turns the wicked into the good, the sinful into the blessed. It clears off the trammels of bondage and sets slaves free. It makes the sad happy. But with all this, *satsanga* is yet inferior to *samahita bhava* (firm concentration on God) because the former is only a means to the latter which is our main objective.

At these meetings the subject of discourse was, of course, the philosophy of the Upanishads.

The Vedic dharma is of two types : Karma Yoga (Pravarthi marga) and Jnana Yoga (Nivarthi marga). Those who are still attached to worldly interests are entitled only to the former while people who have abandoned all desires relating to wife, child and wealth may follow the latter. Prosperity attends the followers of Karma Yoga in this life and the next, whereas the Jnanayogis attain the highest goal of life, viz., *Moksha*. Most people in the world, deluded by their desires, stick to the path of Karma and fail to break away from the cycle of births and deaths. Few indeed exert themselves to attain the supreme goal, leaving off the path of *pravarthi* and cultivating wisdom and detachment.

Spiritual truth is extremely difficult to comprehend. It is only very rarely we come across people who ardently desire to learn it ; it is still more rare to find people who are entitled to teach it. Except from well qualified teachers none can understand it properly. He who seeks to learn it from quacks may be subjected to an endless series of calamities ; it is a case of the blind leading the blind. Neither reaches the goal. It therefore follows that those who desire true knowledge should secure the help of those who have attained it themselves. Let no man think, "Of what use is to me an *acharya* ? By means of my own intelligence I will obtain the knowledge of the soul". Truly, up to this moment, no man has attained Truth except with the help of a true *guru* and a study of the works on spiritual science. None can trust to his native intelligence alone to take him to the supreme goal. You can buy any number of

philosophical books in the market, but the books by themselves will not help you realize the Self.

Unlike the things of the objective world, spiritual truths cannot be perceived by one's senses or even by mere intellect and therefore, only those disciples who possess the necessary qualifications and who, having learned the Truth from noble preceptors, constantly meditate upon it, realize the Truth.

The soul is not born ; it does not die. It is eternal. Body perishes, but soul survives. It is devoid of attributes ; it cannot be heard, felt, seen, tasted or smelt. It is self-luminous. It is smaller than the smallest grain and bigger than space. It shines in the cavern of the intellect of all living beings from Brahma to the ant. It is the *chaitanya* (consciousness) that enables living beings to see, taste, smell, etc. It is what illuminates the objects of waking or dreaming or sleeping. It is the same *atman* that, dwelling in the body, makes it inhale or exhale, etc. It is the basis of all universe. Coloured by the power of *Maya* it is called *Iswar* ; particularised by the body, senses, etc., it is known as *Jiva*. The same fire assumes different shapes according to the varying shapes of the firewood ; similarly, the universal Self, the One without a second, associating with different bodies and appears variously. It permeates everything, movable or immovable ; it induces every act and yet remains unaffected by it. It is as free as space. Perceived by the mind and the intellect, it is imperceptible to the eye, the ear, etc., yet it is not mere nothing. It is Truth unaffected by time. It is the light that makes the Sun, the Moon and the stars shine, without ever suffering diminution. It is the limitless ocean of bliss, of which the pleasures of the senses are but an

infinitesimal part. It is the seed of the mighty tree of *samsara*, with all its spreading branches. For the creation, preservation or destruction of the universe, there is no cause other than this *atman*. The sun and fire give off heat, the air keeps moving, Indra sends down rain, Yama punishes sin—all on account of the fear of this *atman*. The *atman* is the basis of all universe and its controller ; yet, it is free, pure, changeless, inactive. It has no *gunas* (attributes) and no shape. It is beyond the power of words to describe. It is self-luminous.

He who perceives this truth directly and without doubt crosses the sea of *samsara* and attains salvation. No more does he return to this miserable existence of births and deaths, sorrows and sufferings. What is commonly spoken of as “ I ” in relation to everybody is directly known to all in its general form ; but in its particular shape it remains unknown. “ I am the free, immortal and blissful spirit ” is a realization that seldom comes to men.

God has created human beings with their minds turned naturally outward, that is, towards the phenomenal world. The mind of course is open to imaginings and doubts. Hence it is really difficult for man to withdraw the mind and the senses from their worldly preoccupations and find God in himself. Out of thousands but one controls the mind and senses through *Vairagya* and the earnest desire to secure salvation, turns the mind inward and finds satisfaction in the realization of the soul. The true man is he who resists the temptations of the senses, overcomes their irresistible attractions, and realizes Truth. The man who fails to utilize this life for the search after Truth or at least for the acquisition of those qualities

which will ultimately lead him to Truth, is really wasting his precious chance. Nothing is more regrettable, than wasting human life in eating, sleeping, fearing, mating, etc., like brutes. The people who, enslaved by the senses, spend their time coveting this and that, subject themselves to death—that is, they continue to be chained down to the cycle of births and deaths. But those heroic souls that have conquered their minds and their senses, know how fleeting worldly pleasures are and therefore they give them up. They aim only at immortality, they live for it ; they exert themselves ceaselessly to reach it. The sole means of salvation is the true knowledge of the one and only Soul. It may be called differently as *Jiva* or *Iswara* according to the different ways of looking at it, but it is the same *chaitanya*. This knowledge is the true knowledge. It can be gained by a proper study of the Upanishads.

The knowledge of difference consists in conceiving of as many souls as there are bodies and regarding the individual soul as different from the universal soul. This knowledge is unreal ; it cannot render one immortal (and therefore incapable of conferring immortality). On the practical plane we may speak of “ You ” and “ I ” but in reality there is no plurality of the soul. Those who are not fully qualified to realize in themselves the supreme soul, should worship the *pranava*. They must constantly pronounce it “ Om, Om, Om ”. The weak-minded should pronounce it loud and long like the tolling of a bell ; people with stronger minds must pronounce it more slowly. At the same time they must try to concentrate on *Nirguna Brahman*. Those who are unable to do so may concentrate their minds upon the “ Om ” sound itself.

This exercise of *Pranavopasana* gradually produces the knowledge of the soul. Yoga which controls the senses and the mind also helps to realize the soul. The soul, *The Atman*, is what enables the body, the senses, the mind and the intellect to function. We are the soul. The soul is *Brahman*. The world is the soul. In truth nothing exists apart from the soul.

Some teachers of Vedanta, however, vehemently argue that not only the knowledge of the soul but even the endeavours to reach It are the private property of sanyasins. But it is meaningless to deny the benefits of *atmajnana* to other *ashramites*. The Srutis and the Smritis amply prove that in the past it was householders, more than sanyasins; that worked in the field of philosophical thought. Indifference to worldly pleasures is the chief requisite for spiritual advancement. Whether a man dwells at home or in the forest, if he has *Vairagya*, he is a sanyasin. One may put on the saffron gown and go on mumbling the *mantras*, but he is no sanyasin unless he has the true *Vairagya*. There seems to be nothing absurd in the idea of a householder's (whether man or woman) immersing himself or herself in Divine thought even as the great rishis in their Himalayan *ashrams* did, provided he or she has the necessary *Viveka* (discretion) and *Vairagya*.

It does not appear that before the great Rishi Yajnavalkya imparted Divine knowledge to his wife Maitreyi, or king Janaka of Videha, he required them to embrace sanyasa. Yajnavalkya, whose heart was ever fixed on *Brahman*, and taught Divine truths, was himself a householder. Though the acceptance of sanyasa is not a condition precedent to the attainment of Divine knowledge, *Vairagya* is a necessary requisite

and this is borne out by the example of Maitreyi herself who was the very embodiment of *Vairagya*. Desiring to enter sanyasa, Yajnavalkya called his two wives to his side and announced his intention to them. He also proposed to partition his wealth between them. His elder wife was a woman of great wisdom and therefore quite indifferent to worldly riches. “Of what use is wealth to me?” she said. “Even if you give me the entire sea-girt earth with all its wealth, will it save me from worldly bondage and afford me the supreme bliss? Never. Like the pleasure-hunting richmen, I too may enjoy earthly pleasures with the wealth, but truly, the wealth can do nothing for me. I therefore pray you, kindly teach me the way to see Truth and escape from the bondage of illusions. I beg of you only the wealth of knowledge and no material riches.” Maitreyi was but a frail woman, but Yajnavalkya was convinced of her wisdom and her *Vairagya*. Pleased with her, and finding her a deserving pupil, he decided to impart the supreme knowledge to her. Like the illuminating rays of light from the sun, knowledge now began to issue forth from the great Yajnavalkya. He said :

“Dear Maitreyi, a wife does not love her husband for his sake ; she loves him for the sake of the Self. Similarly, a husband does not love his wife for her sake, but for his Self. A father loves his son not for the son’s happiness, but for his own. The richman loves his riches, not for the sake of the riches, but for his own comfort and convenience. Thus, my dear, if a man loves others—persons or things—it is for his own sake and not for them. Man’s love for others is greater or less according to the nature of the relationship between him and them and so it is unimportant ;

his love for himself is absolute and therefore it is of utmost importance. Man desires to save himself at the cost of his wealth, even at the cost of his own wife and children. From this it is clear that man's supreme love is for himself and his love for things useful to him is comparatively negligible. He is the soul itself.

To put it briefly, the soul that is the residuum, is the object of supreme love, while wife, children, etc., appear only as objects of relative affection. If the soul is the object of supreme love, it follows that it is also the object of supreme bliss, because, as is well-known, the degree of love depends on the degree of bliss. O Maitreyi, know this : the soul is the mass of bliss—the ocean of bliss. See, how people who ought to know better, people who are deemed generally wise, are running after fleeting pleasures without trying to know the soul—the soul that constantly rains down unsurpassed joy and exists by their own side in their own form, and enjoy the supreme bliss. Is there a greater wonder than this ? Why do the seekers of eternal happiness waste themselves in the search of these petty, earthly pleasures ? My dear, labour not under the delusion that external things are the source of happiness. Give up all attachment and cling to *Vairagya*. Indeed, even now you are rich in *Vairagya* ; yet, I tell you all this only to strengthen your spirit of *Vairagya* : Withdraw your mind from all transient, terrestrial concerns, give it peace and practise concentration, so that you can see God as clearly and as directly as I see you. Now I will tell you how you can fulfil the purpose of life by realizing the blissful soul freely and completely. O Maitreyi, perceive your *soul* by hearing, thinking and meditating. He who aims at realizing the *soul* must, first of all, with

the help of the Mahatmas who have realized It already and suitable books understand to some extent the nature of the *soul*. From then he may learn that *soul* is one without a second ; that It is omnipresent ; that It is the same *soul* that manifests itself as *jiva* in all living bodies ; that It itself is *Brahman*, the ultimate cause of the universe. Then he must convince himself of this truth by independent reasoning. Once he has done that he must meditate upon it intensely and without break. The process is called *Nididhyasan*. In the course of such concentrated, devout meditations the mind merges with the soul and in that state of *samadhi* he perceives It directly. The numberless doubts which assailed him before now resolve themselves completely. Is there a *soul* different from the body ? If there is, does it possess any attributes or functions ? or is it pure without attributes ? If it is without attributes, does it differ from body to body ? or is it one and the same ? Such doubts and the illusory idea that “ I am this body ” ingrained in us in the course of several lives, now melt into thin air. He is convinced that the boast of heraldry and the pomp of power and pelf are nothing but vanity. With the conviction that high birth or low birth, wealth or poverty, pleasure or pain, good or evil, desire or anger, all pertain only to the body and not to the soul, the *jnani* rises to the exalted state of *jivanmukti* where he realizes beyond all doubt “ I am the soul, pure and blissful—the One without a second. That is the ultimate goal of man. For him there is no gain greater than the realization of the soul—no greater pleasure to enjoy—no higher duty to perform. Self-abidance is the paramount duty, paramount joy, paramount gain. It is the supreme

knowledge, O Maitreyi, self-abidance is the sole means of attaining immortality : so, if you aim at immortality, spare no effort towards reaching that state of self-abidance.”

Brahman is infinite and like a lump of salt. It is homogeneous in taste—that is to say, it is the mass of being, intelligence, bliss. It is free from the differences of three kinds. Being without parts it has no internal difference ; since there is nothing positive like it, it has no difference from things like it ; Nonentity alone is different from it, but a nonentity cannot be a counter entity of difference (or similarity) whence *Brahman* has no difference from things unlike it. Thus *Brahman*, entirely free from diversity, appears in the phenomenal stage to be many, though it is in fact one ; though unlimited by time and space, etc., it appears to be limited ; yet, always in its own grandeur it shines all by itself.

Brahman is one-without-a-second. It transcends nature. Therefore, questions pertinent to the objects of nature are out of place in relation to It. Questions like, “ where did *Brahman* originate ? ” “ When did *Brahman* originate ? ” are as ridiculous as “ Please see, have I a tongue ? ” “ Is my mother barren ? ” When It is without a second, how can it have a cause ? Interrogatives like “ where ” and “ when ” are irrelevant to *advaita* ; they have their place only in the illusory world of duality.

CHANDANANATH

The famous Chandananath is a spacious plateau, 10,000 ft. above sea-level, situated up the hills, over 150 miles from the foot of the Himalayas. It is

surrounded on all sides by chains of snow-clad mountains and in the centre are rich paddy fields cut up into small plots. Here and there, there are small villages and through the heart of the plain flows a slender but perennial holy stream called *Thila*. According to tradition the plateau derived its name from a saint called Chandananath.

Chandananath and Bhiravanath were two great saints who passed several hundreds of years in penance in this inaccessible region among the mountains. On their attainment of liberation, they and their sandals came to be worshipped here. Because of their long association with the spot, the place itself came to be named after the greater of the two. That the Himalayan region was the home of saints with marvellous powers and seers of Truth, does not require any special mention. On incontrovertible evidence historians hold that many of the great seers of the Vedic Age and several teachers of the schools of philosophy in the Sutra Age had adorned these regions with their holy presence. The solitary caverns among the Himalayas and the banks of the rivers were the places of penance and meditation for the Arya seers and thinkers. It is no wonder their guileless hearts found these harmless, unexciting, perennially beautiful holy places extremely congenial to them, for, their minds, shunning the external world, were occupied with the inner life alone. With plausible reasons, historians maintain that Rishi Goutama produced the *Nyaya aphorisms* on the banks of the Mandakini, Vyasa composed the *Vedanta Darshan* on the banks of the Saraswathi and Gargga compiled his treatise on astronomy on Mount Drona.

Except a small number of *sadhus* who have

cultivated great powers of endurance, few people from the low lands travel to the holy place, situated inside Nepal, close to Dhavalagiri, one of the three highest peaks of the Himalayas. Usually, the Nepalese alone visit the sacred spot. But as soon as the report of the holiness of Chandananath reached my ears at Khatmandu—it was the very first time I heard of it—I began to look forward to that auspicious day when I might see the place with my own eyes.

I passed two months at the capital of Nepal in great joy. The two months seemed as short as two days. Several people acknowledged to me with gratitude how much they had gained in knowledge and peace of mind as a result of our daily discussions. Out of the thousands who inhabit the town, only a small number attended these discussions as a rule. But it is nothing to be wondered at, since most people naturally prefer gossip to serious discourses on philosophy. Only a few virtuous souls with real wisdom realise that sensuous pleasures which cause bondage are ultimately the source of sorrow, and cultivate a spirit of detachment in an effort to attain the Divine Joy. All mankind, without any distinction of the learned and the ignorant, lose themselves in the fleeting bodily pleasures and consequently suffer from a series of calamities such as births and deaths and illness. Yet, paradoxical as it is, they fancy that state of bondage to be happiness. The very awareness of bondage is the result of keen discrimination. He who knows not he is bound, will not try to set himself free. He who does not desire freedom, cannot find any interest in the search after Truth or in philosophical discussions. Philosophical discussions lead to philosophical wisdom. Knowledge of Truth leads to Soul Force. Soul

Force is ever homogeneous, unexcelled, eternal. The seductive power of the sense objects is as momentary as the flashes of lightning. In the presence of Soul Force, power of the sense objects loses all lustre and appears as a glow-worm in the presence of the Sun.

The Soul Force is the great force in whose presence all earthly power, the power of the emperor, the power of even *Hiranyagarbha*, becomes infinitely negligible. When man attains that power, all his bonds break, and he comes to enjoy a free, blissful life with a feeling of eternal contentment and finality. So long as man mistakes the body for the self, and consequently entertains feelings of "I" and "mine", he can hardly reach the portals of Soul Force. Most people caught in the toils of Illusion waste their lives, not only without attaining Soul Force or self-knowledge, but even without realising that they are in a state of bondage. Among all mankind, who has the strength to overstep the limits of the wide realm of the mighty Illusion which holds sway over everything, and engulfs all men and women in the shoreless sea of desire and dances intoxicated, blowing the trumpet of her victory that signifies undisputed sovereignty ?

In place and out of place my acquaintances at Khatmandu prayed me to stay on in the town. But without paying any heed to their requests I resolved to visit Kailas (in Tibet) across the Himalayas. When I broached the matter to the more intimate acquaintances, a nobleman named Karna Vikram Shah, brother-in-law of the then Prime Minister of Nepal and a great devotee, made all arrangements for the journey. Then one auspicious day, after worshipping Pasupathinadha with great devotion, and obtaining His permission, I started on my way to Kailas. Having heard

again and again about the holiness and sublimity of Kailas and Manasarowar, I had been awaiting this opportunity for a long time.

From Khatmandu I retraced my steps to the lower regions and reached Raxaul. I entrained myself here, and reached a small town called Nepalganj, *via* Gorakhpur. A young Assamese sadhu named Anandagiri was accompanying me on this journey to Kailas. At Nepalganj we rested ten or twelve days in the guest house of the Subba, who was the chief Government officer at the place. He was a zion of the Royal family of Jagarcot. He treated us with great respect and consideration. At the end of our stay, we started in the direction of the capital of Jagarcot State which then formed part of Nepal. We were now proceeding into the recesses of the Himalayas. The plain which comprised several small villages ended and a dense forest, frequented by wild animals unrolled itself before us. Deer and wild boars were seen roaming about freely through the forest glades. One day we heard also the tiger calling at close quarters. The forest appeared dark and terrible, but as we were accompanied by a prince of the Jagarcot royal family and others all of whom knew the forest paths very well, we had no great cause for anxiety. On the way, we sometimes forded mountain streams, struggling against powerful currents ; sometimes we picked a way through dangerous wildfires at great risk ; in the night we kindled fires and sat near them keeping vigil, lest tigers or other wild beasts should attack us ; now and then we rested a little lying on the ground and then continued our long journey. As we proceeded, I sometimes fell into a trance, standing motionless for a time or sitting on the ground without stirring,

because my mind was wrapped in the thought of the ineffable Divine that expresses Itself in the sweet music of the singing birds, in the harsh grunting of wild boars, in the dreadful roaring of tigers, in the menacing rustling of dry leaves, as well as in the supermundane beauty of the luxuriant plants and creepers, groves and arbours. When I awoke to my environments, I resumed my journey ; but my progress was, indeed, very slow. Threading through dense, terrible and apparently boundless forests we reached at last, to our great relief, a thinly wooded region where there were scattered villages and open fields that grew a great variety of crops.

The route is running upward through matchless scenery, along the banks of the Bhairavi Ganga with her pellucid waters. The Bhairavi Ganga is a stream that joins the Karnali which is a tributary of the Sarayoo Ganga. Exhausted both physically and mentally, we at last reached the foot of a banyan tree near a village on the bank of the river. For days we had been almost starving for lack of food. The villagers now fetched us food from the village, partly out of reverence for us, sadhus, and partly out of regard for their prince who was escorting us. We can hardly forget that pleasant night when, after such intense privations, we enjoyed a full meal and sound sleep without fear and anxiety. God is everywhere and at all times ; He sees everything. He understands the needs of all and supplies them as He knows fit. But man is hardly aware of this truth ; even if he is aware of it, he does not fully believe it. Some evil in him obstructs complete self-surrender. Once a devout eighteen-year old Christian girl left her hearth and home to follow the Lord. When she renounced all

earthly possessions, she kept just a penny with her for the next meal. Then she heard a Voice from the sky, "Did you give up everything else trusting to this one penny?" At once she replied, "My Lord! I came out trusting you, not to the penny" and immediately flung away the coin. Now trusting solely to the care of the Lord, she proceeded on her way. For the man who relies on wealth, of what avail is God's aid? For the devotee of God, of what use is worldly wealth?

Although I was travelling as a guest of wealthy and powerful princes and under their arrangements, I was unwilling to provide myself with a large quantity of food, because of my simple faith in God and my spirit of renunciation. This sometimes put me to serious difficulties on the way, but the Lord of the Universe was everywhere sheltering me under His care. When *mahatmas* wander all alone even in deserts, wasting not a thought on the morrow, of what to eat or where to rest, God protects them against all harm. For people who repose implicit faith in God and His infinite mercy, can there be anything like want? Even in the solitary Himalayan recesses where one hardly ever hears of food, they experience plenty. God is ever ready to attend to the welfare of His devotees. For them too, as for the birds in the air, He provides necessary victuals. Not only in the matter of food, but also in other matters God used to stretch forth His helping hand and pull us out of every difficulty.

We continued our upward journey along the bank of the Bhairavi. Crossing several forests and mountains and passing through many small villages we reached the capital of Jagarcot in two or three days.

We passed a few days there in a house close to the palace built on the top of a lonely hill. Then at the request of the members of the royal family we accompanied them to a summer health resort called Daha. Since the Raja was away, it was his son who was acting as Viceroy, that led us to Daha. Being physically ill and repeatedly urged on by the Prince, I rode on horseback for a furlong, though most unwillingly, in the course of that difficult ascent. It was an unforgettable act of sin of which I had been never guilty in the past or became guilty ever afterwards. In a very short time I realized that horse-riding was by no means congenial either to the nature of my constitution or to my *dhârma* as a sanyasin. So I hastened to get down and continued my journey on foot.

Daha was an extensive circular forest area bathed in the beauty of spring. It was covered with a luxuriant growth of deep green vegetation. Trees and plants and creepers and grass were all putting forth fresh leaves, flowers and fruits. At a short distance from the royal palace a beautiful hermitage had been built expressly for our use. There we took up our abode. Our days passed in perfect peace. Every day enquiries were made from the palace regarding our wants and conveniences. On that plateau of solitary grandeur, I spent most of my time in meditation. It is not impossible to keep the eyes open, engage ourselves in various activities and at the same time see the *Paramatman*, even as we see Him directly in our meditation while we sit with our eyes closed. Yet if the latter course is preferred, it is only because we desire to reach the sublime state of supreme peace without the obstructions of perceptible things, and because concentration gradually develops into one's

second nature. Having consciously overcome obstacles like *laya*, *vikshepa*, *kashaya* and *rasaswada*, man's mind soars higher and higher like birds to the very zenith of *Nirvikalpa Brahman*, and finds rest and happiness there. To those who have realized, this kind of *samadhi* is a source of bliss ; to the seekers, it proves helpful in reinforcing knowledge. There is no doubt that the congeniality of time and place goes a long way towards making the mind still and pointed like the flame in a windless room and leading it on to the state of *Nirvikalpa* and bliss. It may be stated with certainty that the Himalayan atmosphere permeated with the noble penance and energy of the great rishis, has exceptional powers of easily leading minds to peace and concentration.

At times the elderly people of the villages used to come to the hermitage with presents of *Kaphalam* (a wild fruit, dark in colour), honey, etc. Though the natives of these mountainous districts are quite uncivilized, they are highly cultured in their devotion to God and to people devoted to God. That these people without even a smattering of learning took no interest in spiritual discussions, hardly deserves any mention. It was for me a pleasant entertainment to be wandering all alone in the evening in those thick forests near the hermitage.

Thus we had a happy time on that lofty mountain peak until it began to rain. Now it seemed to me high time that we resumed our upward journey. Yet, because of our association with Royalty we postponed our departure for some more days in deference to other people's wishes. Two or three weeks later, we started again and travelled with the members of the Royal family to another palace, eight

or ten miles ahead, along the route to Kailas. As my body was very weak on account of dyspepsia, I took the Royal advice and agreed to travel in a sort of palanquin. But on the terrain full of ups and downs, the journey proved equally uncomfortable to the carriers as well as to the carried and so, before long, I got out of the vehicle and resumed my journey on foot. In accordance with other people's wishes, I had to perform a similar journey at Nepalganj. Perhaps it is because association with princely people thus encourages *rajasa* conduct, that the writers of *smritis* hold it to be unsuitable to *sanyasins*.

However, walking slowly and steadily along the difficult route we reached our destination by evening. Without spending more days there I set out on my way, accompanied by Anandagiri and another youth under orders from the palace to escort us along. We patiently climbed many mountains on our way and passed through forests at a slow pace. For some distance along the route both legs looked red with bleeding on account of leech bites. Here and there in the forest there were temporary sheds put up to accommodate she-buffaloes. From them we could get plentiful supplies of milk and curds. In the blazing heat of summer this was indeed a blessing to us. Walking all day and resting at way-side villages in the night, we reached a famous and terror-inspiring mountain called Chackooria, on the third evening. We passed a memorable night in the dangerous forest at the foot of the mountain haunted by bears and tigers.

At dawn we got up and began to climb that difficult mountain pass. The pass was to be crossed before 10 or 11 a.m., as powerful gales sweep over the mountain after that hour making it extremely difficult to

secure a foot-hold at the great height. Slowly we climbed the mountain reaching the top of it in three or four hours. Rising to a height of 14,000 ft., the top of the pass seemed extremely beautiful. Here and there, there lay blocks of snow, not yet melted, but the land was no longer covered with snow. As the snow had melted away only recently the land looked perfectly bare without even a green patch of grass or shrubs. Enjoying the distant sights from the top of the pass, I sat or walked, afflicted by the strong wind that now started blowing. It was a precipitous descent that I had now to negotiate. It lay before me like a royal road to the realm of Yama. But knowing as I did, that following the principle “*शनैः पर्वतलंघनम्*” (one has to cross mountains slowly) it is quite possible to cross any difficult mountain. I began to work my way down slowly with my two companions. In two or three hours we reached the foot of the mountain. When we had walked along level ground for some distance we reached an extensive plain covered with green grass. Spying us from afar some Brahmin youths who were pasturing their horses on the plain ran up to us and humbly requested us to accept *bhiksha* (food) from them that day. As we had not yet cooked our food for the day and as our destination, Chandananath, was not far from the place, we agreed to do so and followed them to their small cottage constructed with the bark of trees. We rested beside their cottage chatting with them like old friends. Then we bathed in an ice-cold stream and shared the food our hosts had cooked so quickly. We filled our stomachs with rice and a curry of pulses. Since we left the palace we had not enjoyed such tasty food. Their devotion and our hunger had both contributed to its enjoyability.

After the meal we passed through forests full of deodar and other sacred trees, reaching Chandananath, accessible only to people of great *punya*, before nightfall. We were filled with a feeling of great satisfaction.

There is also another route from Pasupathinath to Chandananath. Sadhus with great powers of endurance go straight west through the heart of the Himalayas and reach Chandananath *via* Mukthinath which is situated a little to the north. The holy spots Mukthinath and Damodarkund, at the source of the river Gandaki famous in the Puranas, are well-known to pilgrims. The Gandaki is also known as *Salagrami*, and *Narayana*. In the Salagrami to the west of Khatmandu, *salagramas* are found in profusion, even as *sivalingas* are found in the Narmada and *rudrakshas* are found in the rudraksh forests on the banks of the river Kausiki. It is said that even along the straight route Chandananath is two hundred miles from Khatmandu.

On arriving at Chandananath, we took up lodgings at the house of the village headman known as *Mukhya*. The village chief and the village officer (*Hakim*) as well as the village judge (*Deeta*) attended to our needs in pursuance of directions from the Jagarcot royal family. One morning, having bathed in the ice-cold water of the Thila, I went to the Chandananath temple for *darshan*. To the temple is attached a monastery of the *Dasanami sadhus*. The sadhu who was both priest and supreme head of the temple, as well as other sadhus, welcomed us with *pranams*, arranged for the *darshan* and entertained us with great respect. We visited also the Bhairavanath temple nearby. The temples were small but they were bright with spiritual effulgence. The sadhu brethren regretted that we

had chosen to stay in the village, a mile away, instead of joining them at the temple. They even indulged in some friendly criticism.

After passing some days at the house of the Brahmins, we spent also three or four days in the temple, as we were pressed again and again to do so by the Mahant (the head priest) and others. The meals at the temple resembled the Malayali meals and so they were highly agreeable to me. Rice, pulses, curries and curds were the chief items. In Uttarkhand and the Himalayan regions I generally take bread made of wheat flour, etc., but in these few places where paddy is cultivated I eat rice twice a day. Though the dishes were all agreeable I could not enjoy them fully because I had an attack of fever while I was residing at the temple. The *Deeta* who loved religious discussions and held sadhus in great veneration, used to visit me every day. Once he told me that real sadhus who shunned wealth and women and devoted themselves wholly to God, visited the place but rarely. The *Deeta* was a highly religious man who was never tired of treating sadhus with the utmost *bhakti* as if they were equal to Suka and Dattatreya.

In that land of the rishis, Chandananath, of all the sadhus and laymen I came across, the only person with some degree of culture and education, was that Brahmin judge. That even in Nepal, the northern boundary of India, as in the other parts of India, most of the spiritually inclined people believe in Vedanta as the sole means of salvation, I had come to learn during my stay at Khatmandu. It is nothing unknown to the historians that after the triumphal progress of Sri Sankara, the teaching of the Upanishads

“अयमात्मा ब्रह्म” (This Atma is *Brahman*) “स यो हवे तत्परम् ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मैव भवति” (He who knows *Brahman* himself becomes *Brahman*) spread throughout the length and breadth of India.

The function of the Acharyas in this land has been merely to revive the Sanatana Dharma which became moribund under the stress and strain of ages and establish a new Dharma. If it was to create a new dharma as pot maker makes a pot, the dharma so created cannot evidently be eternal (Sanatana). The sun of Sanatana darshana may sometimes be eclipsed by short-lived new systems ; but by the efforts of philosophers who have realized Truth, it is restored to its pristine brilliance again and again. Once, when the Advaita darshan grew weak and dim under the attack of inimical faiths, Sri Badarayana rescued it by the composition of the Brahmasutra. He tore the dualist systems into shreds. Philosophers like Goutama recognise only the knowledge of self, and do not accept monism. Goutama's soul is not a pure spirit without qualities ; on the contrary it is an inert object with qualities like desire, anger, industry, etc. He argues that the qualified soul may be inferred from the qualities. According to him salvation consists in the destruction of the sorrow originating from illusion. But Vedavyasa proves, with reference to authorities, that soul is the pure spirit without qualities. It is the One without a second. It is *Brahman*. The direct experience of It is what is called liberation. *Kaivalya* or *Moksha* consists not merely in the annihilation of sorrow, but in the positive blissful realization of one's true Self. This Vedantic view expounded by Vyasa conveys undoubtedly the eternal, the paramount truth, the goal of all human endeavour. Yet the

views of Goutama, etc., are not absolute untruths. They express a relative truth and conduce to comparative progress.

The *Nyaya* of Goutama helps greatly in establishing the existence of the soul and of God by the process of induction. He demolishes the theories (which do not recognise the authority of the Vedas) such as “body is self” or “void is self” by pure logic without any recourse to the authority of the Vedas and establishes the existence of the soul and of God instead. Since Goutama acknowledges an individual soul separate from the body and a supreme soul on which all individual souls depend his *jadatma vada* (inert is self) is superior to the *dehatma vada* as well as *soonyata vada*, because it is truer and more laudable. Kapila’s *chetanatma vada* is still superior to Goutama’s. The theism of Goutama and Patanjali is superior to the atheism of Kapila and Jaimini. When we thus analyse the various schools of philosophy we find that all of them are reconcilable in a way. All these relative truths are acceptable because they help towards the realization of the ultimate and absolute truth that Jivatma and Paramatma are one. Thus all the *dwaita* philosophies end in *advaita*. The *dwaita* that treats of Jiva (soul), Iswara (God) and Jagat (universe) is nothing but *advaita*. It is therefore doubtless that our ultimate objective is the attainment of *Advaita*, not of *Dwaita*. This may be illustrated here by an interesting short story.

Once upon a time, there was an immensely wealthy lord. On his death-bed he made a will. By this will he made over his great estate to one of his beloved slaves. But he included one provision in the will, that each of his sons must be allowed to choose from

his father's possessions one thing that appeared to him most precious. One by one, his sons exercised their option. The eldest chose the luxurious palace ; the second son selected the lovely garden ; the third accepted the jewelled throne and so on, and so forth, until it came to the turn of the youngest son. Then the young man rose and made his choice. He said quietly, " Here I choose this slave of my father's as my property ". Hearing the words, the judges and the people gathered there were aghast with wonder. They all applauded the sagacity of the young man. Even when all the other sons had taken their shares, an immense quantity of wealth had been left to the slave. According to law, a slave's wealth belongs to his master. So, when the young man became the owner of the slave, he became the owner of all the wealth left in the slave's possession. He aimed at the one thing whose ownership brought him everything and got it.

KHOCHRANATH

The story that forms the sixth lesson in the Chandogya Upanishad and which puts all the gist of all the Upanishads in a nutshell is this :

A great Rishi named Uddalaka, looking at his twelve-year old son called Swethakethu, commanded him thus : " O ! Swethakethu, join some *gurukula* and study all the Vedas before you return home. In the entire history of our family, there has never been a nominal Brahmin unacquainted with the holy texts ". In obedience to his father's orders, Swethakethu joined a *gurukula*, and in the course of the twelve years he resided there he made an exhaustive

study of the Vedas with all their commentaries. Then in the full arrogance of his learning he returned home. Finding his son so proud, Uddalaka desired to give him real education and impart to him true knowledge. By way of introduction he thus began : “ O ! Swethakethu ! What is that wonderful knowledge you have acquired from your teacher to make you so proud ? When one has actually seen a piece of clay, all the transformations of clay are as good as seen. For effect is not different from its cause. Pitcher, etc., are but the nominal variations of the clay. So the clay alone is true. Similarly there is one Truth (*Brahman*) on knowing which one knows everything. Did you get that knowledge from your master ? ”

Puzzled by the questions, Swethakethu replied “ Father, my teacher knoweth not that thing of which thou speakest. If he knew it the good man would have told me about it in his mercy. O Father, I pray thee, therefore, teach me that Truth thyself ”. “ All right, I will teach you. Listen to me with attention ”. With these words the *Maharshi* began to describe that Wonderful Object, so profound and recondite, in these words : Dear son, this universe of name and form was before its creation *Brahman* (Paramatman). *Brahman* is whole, undivided, eternal, without differences of any kind. But some people hold that the universe has come out of nothing ; that it was nothing before its creation. That view is erroneous for how can something come out of nothing ? If something can come out of nothing the son of a sterile woman can become father of many children and the bees will get intoxicated by drinking the honey of the *akasa kusuma* (sky-flower which exists only in imagination). The hypothesis is therefore entirely unsupportable. The

Paramatma with the power of Maya, willed to create the universe and one by one created the atmosphere, air, fire, water and earth. With these five elements He created all corporeal beings, movable as well as immovable. And the Paramatma himself entered all these bodies as life. All objects metaphysical, material and theological are of the elements. Since effect is not different from cause, none of these exists as reality apart from the elements themselves. On proper thinking, all these will appear merely as nominal and therefore unreal, the elements alone being real. But as elements are subject to change, they are the same with their cause and they are therefore relatively unreal, compared with their cause. Thus for all this material world the ultimate cause—the material as well as the instrumental cause is the Paramatma and naturally the Paramatma alone is real ; all the world existing in speech being changeful and unreal.

Even as a bird, tied to a post, flutters about here and there and failing to find a foothold elsewhere returns to the post, *jiva*, having experienced while waking or dreaming, pleasure, and pain according to its own *karma*, returns to Brahman as the sole refuge. Thus the period of *sushupti* (deep slumber) is the period of reunion with the Paramatma. That object with which the *jiva* becomes one in slumber, is *Brahman*, the eternal Material Cause of the Universe.

All movable and immovable objects have their origin in Brahman. During the period of Preservation, they depend upon Brahman for their existence. During the period of Dissolution, they merge with It. Such is Brahman and it is infinitely subtle. That alone is the one real thing that exists at all times, past, present and future. Even as the clay gives shape to the

conceptual pitcher, Brahman supplies the forms to the Conceptual Universe. “ That thou art, O Swethakethu, Yourself is Brahman ! Brahman is yourself, there is no Brahman other than you ”.

The bees collect particles of nectar from the flowers of different kinds of trees and produce honey. Once those particles are blended to form honey it is impossible to identify the constituent particles. Just as clay is the essence of the imaginary pot, Brahman is of the imaginary world. Similarly living beings enter Brahman in deep sleep, death and dissolution but as they become one with It, they do not know, “ I am now one with Brahman ”. Though living beings attain Brahman in deep sleep day after day, they do not know that they are in Brahman and Brahman is Self. So, whether it is man or tiger, lion or boar, worm or fly, when it returns to consciousness, it appears in the same form and with the same tendencies as it had while it dropped off to sleep. “ O Swethakethu, That thou art, O Swethakethu, you are that Brahman which living beings unconsciously enter everyday. That Brahman is nothing different from you ”.

Various rivers such as the Ganges, the Godavari and the Sindhu empty themselves into the sea and become one with it. From that moment it is impossible to distinguish them. In the same way, all living beings reach the Undivided Reality and when they return to the earth, they do not know that they are come from that Reality. “ O ! Swethakethu, That thou art ; O Swethakethu you are that eternal Brahman ; that Brahman is yourself ”.

“ O dear son, if you strike at the root of this big tree with an axe, if the root is alive, you will find its juice oozing out of it ; if you strike at the middle, if

the middle portion is alive, you will again find its juice exuding. Cut at the top, the same thing happens. This mammoth tree is full of life and so it draws up water, etc., through its roots and leads a merry life. But if a branch of this tree dies, it gets dried up. Whichever branches get dried up, fall off one by one. So it is clear that when life departs, body gets destroyed. But it is the body alone that perishes, *jiva* never does. “ O Swethakethu, That thou art, O Swethakethu ! that *jiva* is Brahman, that Brahman is yourself, yourself is Brahman ”.

“ Swethakethu, bring me a banian fruit ! ”

“ Sire, it is here.”

“ Split it open ! ”

“ Here it is open.”

“ What do you see within ? ”

“ Very minute seeds, Sire.”

“ Take a seed and break it open ! ”

“ Sire, it is open.”

“ What do you see there inside ? ”

“ Sire, I see nothing at all.”

“ Dear son, this huge banian tree with its rambling branches, came out of a seed so minute that one could hardly see it with his naked eye. So also, it is from this minute, subtle, eternal thing imperceptible to the senses that this big solid world, perceptible to all human senses, takes its origin. Learn with great attention. O Swethakethu, that eternal object, Brahman, is yourself. You are that Eternal Thing.”

“ O Swethakethu, keep this lump of salt in a pitcher of water. In the morning come to me again.” Swethakethu did as he was bid. When the son came to him in the morning the father said, “ Dear Swethakethu, bring me that lump of salt which you threw

into the pitcher yesterday ! ” At these words Swethakethu returned to the pitcher but he could not see the lump of salt apart or take it back.

“ O son, the salt is dissolved in the water. Now take a drop of water from the top and put it on your tongue.”

“ Father it is done.”

“ How does it taste ? ”

“ It is saltish.”

“ Take another drop from the middle and put it on the tongue ! ”

“ Yes, I have done so.”

“ What is its taste ? ”

“ It is saltish.”

“ All right, now take another drop from the bottom and taste it.”

“ How do you find it ? ”

“ Again it is saltish.”

“ O son, the salt remains dissolved in the water. You cannot separate it with your sight, or touch. The tongue alone can now discover its presence. Even so this Eternal thing exists everywhere ; you cannot feel it with your hand. But you can ascertain it by some other means. ‘ O Swethakethu, That thou art ! ’ That Eternal Thing, that Omnipresent thing is yourself, yourself is that Brahman.”

Once a native of Gandhara fell into the hands of thieves. They bound him, blind-folded him and took him to an extensive wilderness and left him there. The poor man, knowing not even the directions, began to cry out in terror. “ Thieves have blind-folded me and left me in this wilderness.” A passer-by heard his cries and out of pity went to him and set him free. The good Samaritan told him where Gandhara was,

how far away, and which route he should take to reach his native place. The traveller took him out and set him on the right road to Gandhara. Having understood the directions and being clever enough to draw out inferences, he made his way back to his native village and reached home in safety. Even so, man is blind-folded by the veil of illusion. He is captured by the thieves, Dharma and Adharma, and left in the forest of this body so full of woes. Then the kind master takes pity on him, removes the veil from his eyes and sets him on the right road to his goal. The man being clever enough to understand advice, and being contemplative by nature, escapes from the wood and reaches the Eternal Object. Understand, therefore, that the advice of the master is the chief means of attaining that Eternal Entity. "That thou art, O Swethakethu, you are that Eternal Entity. That Eternal Object is yourself."

Sitting beside a moribund man, his relatives ask him, "Do you recognise me? Who am I?" So long as his word is not resolved into his mind, the mind on *prana* and *prana* on *tejas* (light) and *tejas* on the Eternal Being, he recognises his relatives. But once the word, mind, etc., have merged with *Paramatman*, he knows nothing. In the order an ignorant man attains the Eternal Being, the learned man also, on his death, reaches the Everlasting one. In the attainment of eternity there is no difference between the learned and the ignorant; but there is this difference; the ignorant man, as a result of his unenlightened actions performed with desire, is obliged to return to earthly life; the enlightened one dwells eternally in that Eternal Home. "O Swethakethu, you are that Eternal Being: the Eternal Being is

yourself.”

“ This fellow is a thief ; he has stolen property ” so saying policemen bind the hands of the suspect. As he refuses to confess they subject him to torture. They force him to hold red-hot iron in his hands. If he has uttered untruth his hand is charred and scarred ; if he has spoken truth his hand escapes injury. The contact with red-hot iron is common to both. But Truth saves the one, and untruth destroys the other. Similarly, in death, the learned and the ignorant, both reach the Eternal Being. But the *jnani* knowing himself as Brahman no more desires bodily existence. On the contrary, the *ajnani* not knowing Truth, still loves the unreal body, etc., and desires to be born again. “ O Swethakethu ; ‘ That thou art ’—that Eternal Brahman is yourself ; you are that Brahman.”

Thus nine times did Uddalaka teach his son the Ultimate Truth “ That thou art ”, illustrating it by apt examples. Swethakethu, who was already well qualified to realize Truth, listened to his father’s words with wrapt attention and grasped the truth like a myrobalan in one’s palm—the truth that the soul itself is the Brahman which is the substratum of the universe. Having found deliverance even while on earth, he lived in supreme contentment and heavenly bliss for ever more.

Such were the lines on which the ancient rishis thought. By very careful reasoning they determined the nature of Reality and found everlasting bliss. Indeed, thinking alone helps in determining the nature of Reality. No amount of penance or ritualistic worship can take us to the goal. Penance, by itself, cannot destroy the *I-Consciousness*. That can be rooted out only on the direct perception of Reality

resulting from thought. Until that is done there cannot be real peace and freedom from suffering. All creatures, from the worm to *Hiranyagarbha*, are strung on the ego-sense called *adhyasa*, by the Vedantins. (Saririka Bhashya.) The impression that something is what it is not—the notion that the soul is the body (which it is not)—is what is called *adhyasa* or *ahamkara*. *Ahamkara* is *samsara*. The escape from *Samsara* (cycle of births and deaths) is called *moksha*. The state in which one has destroyed egoism, realized the soul, and found the soul in everything movable or immovable, is called *mukti* (liberation). The attainment of that state is the highest purpose of life. When the Malayali poet wrote the famous prayer :

“ Ananda ! Chinmaya ! Hare ! Gopika Ramana !
 Njanenna bhavamiha thonnyaka venamiha,
 Thonnunnathakil akhilam nja nithenna vazhi
 Thonnenname, Varada ! Narayanaya namah.”
 [O Lord of Bliss and Knowledge, Lord of Cowherdesses,
 Save me from egoism, spare me even here.
 But O Narayana, Dispenser of Boons,
 If at all I feel like ‘ I ’, let me feel everything as ‘ I ’.]

it was this state of *Jivanmukti* that was predominating his thoughts.

He who has transcended egoism, experiences everlasting joy, finding himself the Paramatman, in everything. Once when the saintly Kabeer Das was sitting at his meal, a dog snatched away his bread and walked off. The saint ran after it crying : “ My Lord, My Lord, how can You eat bread dry ? Allow me to butter it for You ! ” So he buttered it for the dog ! Just think of the way he addressed the dog ! How sweet ! How Holy ! Let me bow down a hundred thousand times before the holy feet of those saintly

men who, having uprooted all egoism, found all things equal and attained Godhood.

The Hindus as well as the Buddhists originally designed the fourth *asrama* as a help to the determination of reality by undisturbed thinking. But in course of time, the Buddhist lamas, like the Hindu sanyasins, forgot the ultimate objective and contented themselves with wandering along crooked and remote tracks leading nowhere, or still worse, vegetating like trees, moving along no path at all. The lamas of Khochranath were no exception. They led a life of routine penance, aiming at no life of thought. However, even for the performance of that penance I honoured them ; for they were not passing the time in total idleness, tree-like.

Khochranath is an important monastery, inhabited by about 200 lamas, all the year round. Standing on a vast and lovely plain, to the left of the river Karnali which takes its source from the western shore of Lake Manasa, and surrounded by snow-clad mountain chains on all sides, the monastery cannot fail to fascinate any æsthetic soul. At no great distance from that sacred spot there was a beautiful village and there were also some green fields where a kind of pea was cultivated. It was, however, doubtful whether these objects added to the monastery's attractions or subtracted from them.

My life at Chandananath was disturbed by fever. I declined in health day by day. Yet the indisposition was not strong enough to shatter my resolve to proceed to Kailas. The *deeta* and other devotees pressed me again and again to cancel my plan to visit Kailas that year, partly on the ground of my ill-health, and partly on account of their desire to spend more time in my

company. But I declined to do so. In a week or two, I set out on the upward journey. I was accompanied by Anandagiri and another Brahmin. For our food on the journey, the people of Chandananath presented us with some *saktu* flour mixed with ghee and honey. The *deeta* who was a keen devotee, accompanied us some distance and before we parted made us a gift of money in the form of *mohur* coins current in Nepal. I accepted it with thanks, not out of love for money, but out of regard for the feelings of the giver. On the orders of the *deeta*, a young officer escorted us to the next village.

Ill as I was, I had now to encounter huge mountains, which held up their heads in impregnable grandeur. God alone was my help and relying solely upon Him, I began to ascend the mountains slowly. At nightfall I reached a village after crossing a high mountain. The people of the village welcomed us and led us to the village temple, where they provided us with the best food and drink available in the village. From Khatmandu up to this point, some royal representative or other was accompanying us. But from now on we were travelling alone. However, we had no occasion to feel the absence of the royal representative. The hospitable people of Nepal looked after us with great devotion. We passed several nights in wayside villages without any special discomfort. But on occasions, difficulties cropped up unexpectedly. More than once we were benighted in deep forests full of wild beasts. In those terrible forests, spreading for miles and miles around us and vibrant with the sound of cicadas, we passed our nights in vigil, gathering lots of firewood and keeping them blazing throughout the dark hours to scare away wild beasts.

We continued our trek day after day. Sometimes we passed through dark forests full of *devadaru* and other familiar trees, climbers and creepers. Sometimes we came across villages which should be deemed holy because they are situated among the holy Himalayas and inhabited by guileless mountain-folk. Of course, from the point of view of sanitation, etc., they are the very antithesis of holy. Externally the mountain-folk cannot be said to be clean, but internally they are pure. These extremely poor people who have no education of any sort are certainly lacking in the cleanliness of the body, clothes, homes, etc. They wash their bodies but seldom ; they are therefore, covered with soot and dirt. It is indeed a revolting sight. Usually they get no opportunities of coming into contact with cultured people. So it is only natural they lack the mental purity, resulting from proper thinking. Yet they have inherited a culture which saves them from lying, theft, deceit, laziness, undutifulness, lack of faith, hankering too much after worldly pleasures, etc. The natural humility and self-control of these people, their unostentatious and innocent nature, deserve to be imitated by the city people who boast of their education, culture and wisdom. These people won't touch even a piece of cloth, or a vessel dropped by chance on the high road, far less misappropriate them. This innocence is some times carried to such a ridiculous extent that it may easily be mistaken for idiocy or poltroonery.

Yet, it may not be wrong to regard them as pure in view of their great devotion to their gods and goddesses. In their methods of worship they easily lend themselves to a comparison with the Tamil saint, Kannappa, who worshipped Mahadeva offering him

spittle and baked meat, the taste of which he had tested by licking it now and again, while in the process of cooking. Their modes of worship are certainly loathsome. They make these offerings with unclean clothes and bodies ; they sacrifice goats, etc., to their gods, drenching the temples with blood. They make an offering of the unclean rice they themselves consume. They do not stop with making such offerings to their parochial gods ; they offer the same things to Lord Krishna. One Krishna Ashtami day in *Chingom* (August-September) on my way back from Kailas, I happened to pass the night at Garbyang—the first village below Tibet. As everybody knows, Krishna Ashtami is sacred to every Hindu. No Hindu can afford to forget or disregard that day of Lord Krishna's incarnation. At about 1 o'clock in the night, an aged and high class Brahmin, who was also the village schoolmaster, invited me to accompany him to the place of worship and share the *prasada* (the sanctified offering). I accepted the invitation and followed him to the spot. The pious Brahmin had passed the whole day in fasting and prayer. He kindly made me sit in a place of honour and then started placing before me various dishes which had previously been offered to the Lord. At last he brought me some cooked meat—holy meat that had already been offered to Krishna and enquired “ Swamiji ! don't you eat meat ? This too had been offered to the Lord.” With a smile I declined to partake of that *prasada*. Alas ! what rank superstitions have sprouted up in this holy soil of India ! Lord Krishna, Father of all Universe, Embodiment of Love and Mercy, went about all day tending cows and calves, satisfying his hunger and thirst with milk and butter. Did He secretly tell any

one that His belly would be filled only with mutton ? Did any of our gods or goddesses tell any one that their thirst could be quenched only by drinking the thick blood of sheep or buffaloes ? Alas ! how curious are these excrescences of religion !

Notwithstanding all this uncleanness that attends their forms of worship, it is yet possible to maintain that essentially their worship is pure, because it is the outcome of simple and firm faith. There is no doubt, it is the deep faith in their gods and goddesses and the rooted conviction that they cannot be propitiated except by bloody sacrifices that makes them resort to such modes of worship. Many are the simple and straight paths that will lead man to his Maker ; yet if these poor people follow such heinous and crooked routes, they do so out of ignorance. They deserve our pity rather than our censure. Well, let us now return to our theme.

As we proceeded it began to rain heavily. But braving all high mountains, we moved forward five or six days and reached an important village called Seemacot. The *Deeta* of the village had been informed in advance of our visit by the *Deeta* of Chandananath and so the former had made every arrangement to make our stay as comfortable as he possibly could. Our host was a pious young man, very much devoted to *sadhus*. Not only that, he looked a real *Brahmin*, bright and clean. The village folk consisted of *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and a low class people called *Athisudras*. However, it was not easy to tell a *Brahmin* from a *Sudra* . . . so dirty they were all. In such company, when I met one who looked really like a *Brahmin* my heart was filled with joy.

Indeed, it is meaningless to regard a man as a

Brahmin simply because he was born in a *Brahmin* family. The name denotes certain qualities whose possession makes a man a *Brahmin*. If a person is dark both inside and outside, how can we designate him by that honourable name? A division into castes, not based upon the qualities set forth in the Geeta but based solely on birth, cannot be eternal, universal, or universally acceptable. Of course, it is wrong to overlook birth altogether, seeing the essence of culture that passes from father to son; at the same time, the fact that the basic principle of caste distinction is quality should not be forgotten or disregarded. A *Brahmin* ought to be honoured in the measure of his *Brahminical* qualities. If that is so, let those who insist on the importance of birth value it as they will, but at the same time, let them not fail to examine whether a person of high birth has derived the benefit of such birth. Otherwise, the very name will become a misnomer. If we call a man who has no *Brahminical* qualities a *Brahmin*, simply because he happened to be born in a *Brahmin* family, it will be as ridiculous as naming an ugly hag a 'Beauty'. The terms lose all their original significance and become purely arbitrary. If a *Brahmin* possesses the qualities connoted by the name, he is a holy person: if a *Chandala* has such qualities as connoted by the term, he is a despicable creature. If, on the other hand, a *Brahmin* has all the qualities of *Chandala* or a *Chandala* the qualities of a *Brahmin*, it will be absurd to determine their status on the sole criterion of birth.

We rested a day or two in a vacant house quite comfortably as the *deeta's* guests and then resumed our upward journey. Khochranath is about 100 or 150 miles beyond Chandananath. Half the way still lay

before us. Before reaching our destination we had to climb mighty rock cliffs for five or six days. As if to usher in the holy month of *Karkataga* (July-August) clouds now began to gather overhead, and come down as continuous rain. Sun or rain, we proceeded along our route, regardless of discomforts. Here and there we came across rivers which we had to cross on dilapidated timber or rope bridges which shook under our tread as we proceeded on them, warning us of danger and death. Across several rivers there were no bridges at all ; so we had to ford them. Usually when we reached a village, we collected *bhiksha*, cooked it and ate it. Sometimes we rested a little before we started on our journey again. The journey was indeed a severe penance. Personally I did not feel the hardships and privations of the journey very much as I was drifting like a drunkard, intoxicated with the Divine beauty of the surroundings that proclaimed the greatness and power of God. As we climbed higher and higher, the cold became more and more intense. We began also to come across glaciers a touch of whose waters was enough to petrify the body. It is these rivers which are often described in pilgrim lore with some exaggeration as “ stone rivers ”. As a child I had occasions to listen to those wonderful and highly exaggerated reports brought home by aged pilgrims on their return from Benares and other holy places in the north. Those marvellous streams which I had hitherto seen only mentally were now before my naked eyes. Among the Tibetans there is a saying, “ Pick up the glowing embers with your fingers, but touch the water with the pincers ”. Perhaps the proverb has had its origin in the fact that in these regions the touch of cold water is more hurting

than the touch of fire. Here we were now on the borders of the holy Tibet.

Leaving Seemacot we trekked four of five days and reached a very small village on the extreme border of Nepal. There were neither human beings nor human dwellings. Though the Nepali Officer had instructions to accommodate us in the village, we could not get the expected help as he was out of station. If I survived the intense cold of the place it was certainly not because of my powers of endurance : it was merely on account of God's own mercy. I was very ill. Day by day, the body had grown weaker, especially as we had to sustain life on *Saktu* flour mixed with molasses in tea or cold water, in the absence of cooked rice or wheat bread. At these great heights neither rice nor wheat is available. Even if they were available, it is not easy to get the fire-wood for cooking them. So people generally live upon *Saktu* flour. It does not require to be cooked and so it is a convenient and readily available form of food. To light a fire on the peaks of the Himalayas or on the heights of Tibet is a Herculean task, partly on account of the lack of fire-wood and partly on account of very strong winds. Even if one succeeds in lighting a fire, it is no easy task to cook rice and pulses in the extremely cold water and the extremely cold atmosphere of the place. As for us, we some times succeeded in cooking rice, but never in cooking pulses.

The next day at about 8 or 9 a.m. we took our meal and resumed our ascent. Before us stood the famous Yaree or Nara Pass (17,000) which forms part of the northern boundary of Nepal. As we went higher up the peak totally devoid of vegetation, my heart began to thrill with joyful surprise at the divine

beauty of the sights around us. And naturally I began to climb with still greater vigour, forgetting all the exertion and all the difficulties of the ascent. On the extensive plain of the pass we saw *chamari* cows freely grazing in large numbers. Before 2 or 3 p.m. we reached the head of the pass and the sight that greeted us there was of indescribable loveliness and what we saw to the west of the Nara Pass was enough to raise the mind of any spectator immediately to a supermundane plane. It is impossible to describe the beauty of those unending chains of snow-covered mountains dazzling like mountains of silver in the glow of the afternoon sun. There are certain things in the world like the sweetness of honey which can be enjoyed but not described. The beauty of the scene around Nara Pass may be included among them. I am guilty of no exaggeration when I say that the peaks of snow glittering brightly in the sunshine kept me rooted to the ground for a long time. Chaukhamba peak near Badrinath, Sumeru, Kedarnath and other peaks farther west, are supposed to belong to these chains of snowy mountains.

As the Yaree Pass is a bare plain, ever basking in the sun, all the snow had melted away and the way was clear for us. From the Pass began a steep descent. Every mountain climber knows that descent is more dangerous than ascent. So we proceeded slowly and with great care until after several hours of anxious toil, we found ourselves on the bank of the beautiful Karnali. Following a narrow zigzag route along the bank of the river we moved forward. Now we were on the Tibetan soil. It is the crest of Yaree Pass that separates Tibet from Nepal. Khochranath was the first village we had to pass through in Tibet.

We, Anandagiri and I, had not proceeded far in that direction when the sun set. Darkness was fast coming on. We were weary and exhausted. Having toiled and moiled all day without agreeable food or drink, we could hardly proceed any farther. Besides, our *Brahmin* attendant was lagging far behind in the company of other *sadhus*. Our extra clothing and *saktu* flour were with him. To leave him behind was not merely imprudent, but ill manners. So we thought of halting somewhere on the way for the night, but we could find no suitable place. We were therefore compelled to push forward, leaving our attendant to overtake us when he could. By this time the twilight faded away and night descended upon the earth. We, therefore, proceeded half walking, half running, for safety. Crossing the timber bridge over the Karnali, by the grace of God, we somehow arrived at the well-known Khochranath monastery on the other bank of the river.

The lamaseri of Khochranath appeared to be as beautiful as extensive. Without wasting time outside, we directly entered the inner apartments. There, in a vast beautifully decorated hall, we saw the lamas seated in two rows on thick, multicoloured, woollen carpets, facing each other, repeating their holy texts. Before them stood a huge image of Lord Buddha. After paying my respects to Him, I took my seat among the lamas, as desired by them. Though I was hungry and thirsty, I forgot all my woes at the sight of the holy figures of Buddha and other saints. As I sat listening to the chanting of holy texts I entered into a state of *Samadhi*. I remained in that state for a long time. Meanwhile, the lamas had greeted us and comforted us with tea, etc. We passed the

intensely cold night in a vacant outhouse, with extreme discomfort for lack of extra clothing which had not yet been brought to us.

At night and in the morning we visited various holy spots in the monastery, under the guidance of the lamas. We also paid homage to the various idols in the lamaseri. From the lamas, who knew a little of Hindi, we gathered the history of some of those idols.

I was filled with admiration for the quiet, peaceful life of the lamas and their acts of self-denial. Such people who shun worldly pleasures and prosperity and spend their time in penance in solitude may appear as fools in the eyes of fools, but in the eyes of wise people they are extremely fortunate men who have fulfilled their purpose in life. I still recollect vividly what a Western scholar told me with great feeling, when he visited me at Uttarkasi in the company of his wife. The substance of what he said in the course of a discussion on moral and spiritual topics was this :

“ One of my chief objects in coming to India is to visit the world famous, singularly holy Himalayas, and the great *Mahatmas* who live in them. Unique is the place the orientals hold in spiritual life. Beside their spiritual wealth, we Westerners, are beggars. In our land, philosophers, like *Sankara* are held in the highest esteem. Our wise men are unanimous in their view that the people of the East who dive deep to pick up spiritual gems and enjoy them are the real men and women, while the people of the West are mere smatterers satisfied with puerile superficialities. If then the man in the street who knows nothing of the value of spiritual life or of the vast spiritual heritage of the East, declares that the Easterners are ignorant

barbarians engaged in the foolish pursuit of a will-of-the-wisp, what weight should we attach to his shallow views and opinions ? ”

THE MANASA AND KAILAS

The ancient Rishis who believed in an immortal soul considered *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of births and deaths) as the supreme goal of life and directed all their sciences and scientific studies to that one end. They did not look upon the study of lifeless matter and the resultant sciences such as law, economics, erotics, astronomy, medicine, phonetics and histrionics, as so many ends in themselves but only as means to an end—the end being the attainment of Truth, of salvation. The materialists of our present day are utilising all knowledge, all discoveries and inventions solely for one purpose—the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. To the rishis the term “worldly pleasure” was hateful. They were of the view that the free enjoyment of sensuous pleasure is suitable only to brutes and not to man. They found no pleasure in transitory material things ; they found it only in God, the seat of all Bliss.

But we cannot forget that even in ancient India there were learned men like Brahaspati, who held body to be Self ; who, failing to find the immortal essence in the course of their search, took the enjoyment of worldly pleasures as the ultimate happiness and taught the world that there was no other goal. They argued that life originated in a concourse of atoms, even as some intoxicating power is generated on combining betel leaf, arecanut and lime. While

rejecting this view altogether I may even say that this view is at the root of all calamity and the protagonists of the view are the enemies of mankind. One can only smile on hearing it seriously argued that life originated from lifeless matter. Those who hold that life originates when inert matter assumes some definite shape and then begins to activate the senses, argue that there is no compelling reason to believe in the presence of an immortal soul apart from the body. But then they have to answer the relevant question, "If that is so, which is that power that brings about the combination of lifeless matter so as to produce life?" If lifeless matter can automatically combine itself into some such shape, it must be possible for the common clay to become a pot, passing through all the intervening stages, without the agency of the potter. That, however, does not happen. To argue that life results when lifeless matter combines itself, is as absurd as holding that light comes out of darkness.

From the ancient books of the Hindus we can understand that the misconception, 'body is self' was once more or less wide spread in our country. The majority of the people, of course, never endorsed the view; they believed in an immortal soul, separate from the body. Kanada, Gautama, Prabhakara and their followers held the view that soul is an inert thing like the sky and knowledge is its attribute, even as the sound is the attribute of the sky. Among the Meemamsakas, Bhatta and others argued that soul cannot be matter in the sense a pot is, and they, therefore, sought to establish, on the authority of the Vedas and logical reasoning, that soul is partly matter and partly spirit, like the glowworm. But the group of philosophers led by Kapila objected to this view and held that soul,

being one without limbs, cannot be partly matter and partly spirit. They maintained that soul is purely spirit ; at the same time, they supposed that each individual has a separate soul. Dvaipayana, Sankara and other Vedantins went further. They held that soul is not *chit* (knowledge) alone, but *chit* as well as *Ananda* (Bliss) ; that, though soul appears to be different from person to person ; it is not really different, but it is all one. The promulgation of such views by various schools of philosophy stamped out materialistic atheism from the country. In recent times, however, it has begun to raise its head again in the West and because of our contact with the West, it has begun to rear up its head again in India.

This is a matter for great regret for all thoughtful people who have the welfare of the world at heart. The echoes of curious arguments come floating to India from the West. Some say that the work of creation, maintenance and destruction is going on according to the laws of Nature—it goes on independently of any immortal, conscious, directing power. Some hold that everything is the result of evolution and not of any conscious process such as creation. Some proclaim that the teachings of religion which urge man to be moral and exercise self-control, are absurd and that the conquest of instincts is as impossible for man as it is for animals. Yet others are of the view that even if there is a creator of the entire universe with numberless suns and moons and earths, man who “ is but a minnow in the creek of a little planet called Earth ” can have very little indeed to do with Him. The west is still resounding with such uproarious arguments and their echoes cannot fail to reach even our distant shores. But if truth is ever truth and

untruth is untruth, we need not be perturbed over such atheistic arguments. How can the billows of untruth, which keep on advancing and retreating, shatter the mighty rock of Truth ?

The Soul is God. It alone is truth. It is without a second. It is what gives life to the body, the senses and the mind. Like the sky it exists everywhere and in everything. It is unlimited by time and space. It is self-luminous and is the embodiment of Knowledge, Existence, Bliss. None can deny It. The most careful observation of natural laws, the speediest progress of science, the newest and the most valuable discoveries—none of these can repudiate the existence of God. On careful thought we can see that the discoveries of Natural Science, etc., only prove and not disprove the existence of the soul. If anyone thinks otherwise, it is nothing but his folly. That I am not this inert, earth-like, mass of flesh, five or six feet long, but the soul, the embodiment of life, is a truth which can never perish. It was so in the past, it is so in the present, and it will be so in the future. Out of personal experience the rishis have sung, “अंतवंत इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः” etc., and even now holy men have direct experience of Truth. If some are yet tempted to disbelieve such testimony and regard it a mere figment of the imagination like the proverbial ‘rabbit’s horn’, It will not become nothing. We can only say that such people are blinded by their own sin. The frogs in the well will assert with all the force at their command that there is no sea—the magnificent, shoreless sea with mountain-like waves sweeping its surface. Notwithstanding all their denial, the deep blue ocean rolls on. Let the west deny the existence of God and soul, if it will. For it, it is but appropriate.

But, for this holy motherland of ours which once resounded with the voice of the great saints who sang of the immortality of the soul, such views are entirely unsuited. It is not enough if we discountenance such atheistic tendencies ; we should sweep them clean out of our holy land. For us, children of the great rishis, faith in ourselves, knowledge of the soul, and soul force are ours by birthright. It is our paramount duty not to waste that spiritual heritage, but to keep it and increase it for ever more. *Brothers and sisters of India, children of rishis, inheritors of their culture, remember this. Even when this body composed of the five elements decomposes, the life that illuminates it and activates it, never perishes. That life is the soul. That soul is yourself. Believe this firmly.* Save your faith from the invasion of atheistic creeds. Children of rishis, that faith must be within you. Kindle that spark into a never-dying flame ! Remember your ancestors, the great rishis, who, steeped in faith, ever lived in bliss. Bow down your heads in loving reverence before the Himalayas which was their dear abode. Detach yourself from this body which may perish today or tomorrow ; believe in the immortal soul and acquire soul force and thereby bless yourself ; bless others ; bless all the world and reclaim it from all disability. May you become bejewelled beacons of inextinguishable spiritual light ! May the Divine Himalaya, father-in-law of Sri Parameswara, bless you !

To the materialist, the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas are earthly. Their beauty is earthly ; the joy they kindle is earthly. But to me, the peaks, their beauty and the joy they evoke are all Divine. Enjoying that supermundane experience I continued

my journey. My health was fast declining but as the Manasa and Mt. Kailas were nearby, I moved forward merrily like a boy in anxious expectation of the sights awaiting me. When I had proceeded seven or eight miles leaving some pretty little villages behind, I reached a famous market place (*mandi*) in Western Tibet called Taklakote. On the other bank of the Karnali stands Taklakote ; on the side stands Poorana *mandi*. At Poorana *mandi* we rested two or three days as the guest of a Nepali official. There rice, wheat and other food-stuffs were on sale ; they were also available for us free of cost ; yet I could not use them and recoup my health as fever continued to harass me. Luckily, Lake Manasa was only 25 miles away. Encouraged by the shortness of the distance we set out early one morning in the direction of the lake. Near Taklakote we came across two or three villages and a few farms by the way side. In the villages of Tibet and the Himalayan valleys it is the women who work more tirelessly than men. As it requires hard labour to eke out a living in this unfertile region, you can hardly find any one here rolling in luxury. Laziness is really ruinous to any one caught in its web and it is ruinous also to the state to which he belongs. The idlers who refuse to work are breakers of the Divine Law.

Having travelled all day along beautiful plains, we reached by nightfall a notorious spot called Gouri Oddar (Gouri's cave) usually dreaded by merchants and pilgrims as the haunt of highwaymen. But what could robbers do against us ? Why should they attack us, poor mendicants, who carried no valuable things—neither money nor fine clothes ? Yet, once or twice they approached us ; they examined our clothes and

packages with eager curiosity and finding nothing with us that they wanted, instead of molesting us supplied us with *saktu* flour, etc., with pleasure. They indicated to me the shortest route to Kailas and the places where we might rest at night. By the grace of the Lord of Kailas, even the highwaymen turned out to be our helpers and not oppressors.

On the open plateau of Tibet, 16,000 ft. high, Anandagiri and I sat in the freezing cold to pass the night battling with biting cold blasts and the rain and the sleet that might fall. Sitting up for a time and lying down for a while and alternating these processes again and again we somehow passed the night and at dawn got up and without paying heed to the intense cold moved slowly from and along the valley below the snow covered peaks. Tibet is a land of misery ; yet, the sights there are so delightful that they make the people forget all the misery in no time. The Tibet I saw was altogether barren, without a touch of greenary anywhere. The fuel used in the Tibetan villages is a kind of shrub which burns green, brought from far off places. The plateau is one vast stretch of land, cold, bare, solitary, tranquil. The glaciers, big and small, and the rows of mountains covered with snow which glitters like gold or silver, help to raise a spectator's mind to a plane of divine magnificence. It is all a picture of peace, with no scope for excitement. Perhaps that was why the wise men of yore called it : " Thrivishtapabhoomi " (land of the gods). Scholars say that the word " Tibet " is a corruption of " Thrivishtapa ". Whatever that be, I may say from personal experience, that the environments of Mt. Kailas are such as to liberate one's mind immediately from one's mundane worries

and cares and raise it to a wonderful, painless and sorrowless world fit for gods alone.

On crossing a comparatively low mountain called "Gurlamandhatha", one arrives on the shores of the famous lake, Manasa. As we reached the top of the mountain, we had that wonderful first glimpse of the lake—a sight rare even for the gods. We sat there for a while on a boulder of rock, greedily swallowing the beauty of the lake. Then we rose and wended our way down to the shores of the lake. Before long we reached its margin. The holy water of Manasa stretched before us dancing in the gentle breeze. Following the shore line, we walked a few miles to the east and before the sun set, arrived at a beautiful lamaseri, situated at the south-east corner of the lake.

The sacred beauty of L. Manasa, has been described variously by the ancients and the moderns, but all descriptions have fallen far short of the original. The lake is over 45 miles in circumference and perfectly circular in shape. On all sides it is surrounded by snow-clad mountains. The water in the lake is like a sheet of glass, pellucid and pure. It is nowhere contaminated by mud or dirt. The shores are paved with small stones which glitter like so many precious gems in the water. At the eight corners of the lake stand eight monasteries occupied by holy lamas, who spend their lives in penance. In the *Puranas* the lake is described as being adorned with golden lotuses, and frequented by royal swans which live upon pearls. In the lake, the *Apsara* beauties are engaged in perpetual *Jalakreeda* (water sports). On the banks stand the divine *Kalpaka* trees bending under the weight of flowers and fruits and swaying in the cool breeze. Not only Kamadhenu, and Uchaisrawas but also Aira-

vatha is freely moving about on the shores. The Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas, etc., meet there to pass their time in pleasant games. Above all, the lake is in the vicinity of Mt. Kailas, the renowned abode of Sri Parameswara. As the lake was first conceived in the mind (manas) of the great creator Brahma, it came to be called Manasa.

कैलासपर्वतेराम ! मनसा निर्मितं परं ।

ब्रह्मणा नरशार्दूल तेनेदं मानसं सरः ॥

Who can describe the matchless beauty of this Queen of Lakes ?

I got down into the lake and had my bath with great joy and devotion. The lake appeared to be full of huge fishes but there was no sign of water plants like the lotus. A kind of beautiful, small, swan-shaped birds, white or black in hue, were seen flying in flocks of forty or fifty over the surface of the lake.

After the bath I paid my homage to Lord Buddha and to the lamas who were engaged in acts of devotion. Later, I passed several hours talking with the lamas. Thus bathing in the Manasa, drinking its holy waters and its heavenly beauty, I rested a couple of days in the lamaseri. At the end of our stay we resumed our journey with renewed vigour. The silvery peak of Kailas appeared bright and clear at the north-west corner of the lake. Travelling all day along the shore of the lake, we reached a monastery to the west of the lake, at about sunset. We spent the night with the lamas there and in the morning set out again. Following the old route we came to the source of the river Satadru (R. Satlej) which flows into the lake Rakshasathal, below Lake Manasa.

The water in the river reached only up to the waist but it was with great difficulty, we forded that benumbing cold stream. At no great distance there stood another lamaseri. But being exhausted, we made no attempt to climb up to it. Leaving L. Manasa, we had been travelling westward along the extensive plain and now we saw the deep blue Rakshasathal to our left and the dazzlingly white Kailas to the right. Turning to Kailas, we moved in a direct line towards it. We at last arrived on the sacred plain, several miles long and broad, spreading all round the great peak. Stretching between L. Rakshasathal and Mt. Kailas and covered with green grass and watered by several rivulets, the plain presented a fascinating sight. We passed that night with great difficulty on that cold and bare plain.

As the sun rose, after our bath, etc., in a nearby stream, we moved slowly forward. There stood before us the great silver mountain in all its austere grandeur. It is the home of Lord Siva and Parvathi : it is the holiest of holies, unapproachable even to gods like Indra and *siddhas* like Kapila. It is the place of pilgrimage even for Lord Vishnu. It was such a mountain that now stood close to us, and blessed us with a clear and delightful *darshan*. It seemed to offer us a hearty welcome. Mt. Kailas, thirty miles in circumference at its foot, rises high into the air like a tapering tower, its crest covered with snow. It is a beautiful mass of granite, standing like a Gem set in the middle of a chain of mountains. As we drew nearer and nearer to Mt. Kailas, my heart expanded with devotion and joy and satisfaction. Crossing several glaciers with difficulty we at last reached the foot of the Lord of Kailas—that is, a

small village called Tarchan in the valley close to the great peak—in the afternoon.

The holy night we passed in the valley of Kailas was a night memorable for ever and for ever. In all my life I had hardly experienced a night half so taxing. As we could not find any place of shelter on the open plain, we spread our clothes on the ground and sat down to pass the night as well as we could. How can I describe the intense cold to which we were exposed that night at a height of 18,000 ft. ? As night advanced, the ceaseless rain of Karkataka (June-July) started. Snowing followed in a short time. But the Lord of clouds, however, took pity upon us and the snow that fell within a few yards of us suddenly stopped falling and the sky cleared up.

I knew very well that one of the essentials of a visit to Kailas is the circumambulation of the holy peak ; but in my state of health enfeebled by illness, I had to give up that ambition and conserve the last ounce of my energy for use on the return journey. On the way a Tibetan lady near her tent stopped us and some other *sadhus* who accompanied us and with great pleasure offered us several kinds of food and drink considered as delicacies in those parts. It was an unforgettable incident. I admired the natural liberality of that young lady as well as her extraordinary devotion to *sadhus*. That evening we reached a small village called Varka. The lord of the village, whom the villagers called their king, and his wife received us, Kasi lamas, with deep reverence, and supplied us with tea, etc. He also made arrangements for our convenient stay in the village during the night.

The next day we started from there, passed along the eastern shore of lake Rakshasathal (named after

Ravana the Rakshasa, who performed his penance there) journeyed over the great plain, "Gouri Oddar", then moved from village to village, and farm to farm, until we reached Taklakote again after four or five days. Now that we were back at Taklakote in safety, our minds were at greater ease and we passed a day or two there agreeably. Then once and for all we parted from the *sadhus* who used to travel in our company now and then and we two alone set out for India, *via* Lippu Pass. The next morning as we started climbing the pass, it began suddenly to rain. We cannot forget that day's misfortune of having had to walk barefooted across the extensive snow-field at the top of the Pass. Somehow we reached the other side of the pass and passed a troublesome night in a dilapidated old room, cut out of stone on the side of the mountain. It continued to rain; the land around us gleamed with snow. In the morning, when the snow began to thaw, we resumed our journey across the snow. The next night we passed with a merchant in the valley.

On the return journey I continued to have attacks of fever. That not only added to the discomforts of the journey; it also caused considerable delay. From Taklakote to Almora the distance is barely 190 miles. But we could cover it only in a number of weeks. Our route lay along the bank of a river called Kali which has its source not far from the spot where we then were. In two or three days we reached a bigger village called Garbyang. Exhausted with fever, I was able to cover a normal day's journey only in two or three days. We passed the Krishna Ashtami Day at Garbyang and then resumed our journey. We proceeded on our way sometimes crossing mountains, and sometimes

passing through beautiful villages. Partly on account of my physical weakness and partly on account of the difficult nature of the terrain, it took me several days to reach Dharchoola, an important village along the route. It was at a Ramakrishna Mutt on the way that I cooked my food one day. As it was August-September the fields were bright with ripe corn and the woods were deep green. The sight refreshed me and gladdened my heart. Besides, vegetables like pumpkin, lady's finger, gourds, etc., which we had never seen in the higher regions of the Himalayas now became available in plenty, and food naturally became more agreeable. From Dharchoola I continued my journey, passing through important centres like Asukode, and Veninag and climbing big as well as small mountains with great care. At last, we reached Almora and now on, the difficulties of the path disappeared.

Even at Almora, I did not like to remain in the town. So we stayed in a solitary temple as the guest of an educated *sanyasin* of the *vairagi* type. The *sadhu* who went about stark naked was young in age but ripe in endurance, generosity and other great qualities. He would not even touch a piece of cloth with his hand ; his powers of enduring heat and cold were simply marvellous. The truth is, there is nothing in the world, spiritual or material, which faith cannot achieve. To a man of faith, no penance however hard or risky, is impossible ; in fact such things become quite easy.

For the journey down to the low lands from Almora, motor vehicles were available, but we resolved to proceed on foot. Crossing many small mountains, passing through lovely villages, skirting beautiful

lakes and enjoying the charming sights on the way, we at last reached an attractive small town called Haldoni, situated in a valley at the foot of the Himalayas. The visit we paid on the way to an Arya Samajist leader named Narayanaswami and various other distinguished persons in their *asram* deserves special mention here. We passed a few happy days in a temple at Haldoni and then took train to Bareilli. Bareilli is a big town. We lived there on *bhiksha* for a day or two. In the course of the short period, we got acquainted with some important people who pressed us to stay on. We complied with their request and passed a few days in comfort under their special care. Then we entrained ourselves for Hrishikesh, which we had left a long while ago, and arrived at the holy spot on the bank of mother Ganga—the meeting place of ever so many holy men—with hearts full of joy.

PART THREE

HIMAGIRI VIHAR

OR

WANDERINGS IN THE HIMALAYAS

PART III

THHOLINGAMATAM

Thholingamatam is a vast lamaseri in Western Tibet. The area surrounding the mutt also is called Thholingam. The lamaseri stands on a vast plain stretching along the bank of the Satlej. It is an uncommonly beautiful and holy place. The land here is reddish in colour and it is surrounded on all sides by chains of bare, dark mountains whose peaks are capped with snow. The building is surrounded by walls of mud. The walls of the building too are made of mud and are erected in a peculiarly local fashion, with no roofing. Compared with the other structures of the region, the monastery is indeed majestic with its grand decorations and lavish furnishing. It has a dignity of its own. High over the edifices of the monastery, fluttered flags of different colours. It is said that usually hundred to hundred and fifty lamas reside at this lamaseri.

In the early part of June, I travelled from Hrishikesh to Badarikasram, intending to observe the *Chathurmasya* there. I took up my abode in a lonely cottage on the bank of the Alakananda. In a few days I was joined by a small band of *sadhus* who wished to visit Kailas. They pressed me to accompany them. A visit to Kailas was ever dear to me. I have always

been of the view that a glimpse of Kailas is attainable only on the full maturity of *punya*. In spite of all this, this time, I declined to join them, partly for lack of suitable clothing and other necessary provisions and partly for fear of extreme physical fatigue. But man only proposes ; God alone disposes. God did not accept my refusal. He ordered, " Start ! Start again to Kailas ! Visit it once again ! " who can say " nay " when He says " yea " ? I surrendered to His will. What appears to man as impossible, is absolutely easy for Him. By His design, everything necessary for the journey—woollen rug, money, food-stuffs, etc.—arrived at the nick of time. I had done nothing.

The head priest of Badrinath, my familiar friend, the Namboodiri, who was the lord of great wealth, was ready to offer me any help, financial or otherwise, to enable me to undertake the pilgrimage. A *sadhu* follower of mine, who had arrived by chance from Hrishikesh, just in time, had expressed his willingness to serve me on the pilgrimage and so I had to find the means for him too. So I accepted a small sum of money from the head priest towards our expenses on the way. Since the other *sadhus* had provided themselves with extra accommodation by way of tents, etc., I had no need to bother about such matters. Thus, at last, I got ready for my second journey to Kailas.

On the morning of 18th July, I had my bath in the *Taptakunda*, prostrated myself at the feet of Badrinath, and started on the pilgrimage. The party from Badrinath consisted altogether of seventeen or eighteen *sadhus*. The first important place on this route to Kailas is Thholinga. At Kesava Prayag, the holy confluence of the Saraswati and the Alakananda, near the cave of Vyasa, three miles up Badrinath, we left the

Alakananda and proceeded north along the bank of the Saraswati. Because of the difficulties of the path and of extreme cold, we could cover only four or five miles a day. Yet we continued our journey, crossing the mountains, one after another.

The pilgrimage to Kailas this time was remarkably different from my earlier journey from Nepal, in 1925. On the former occasion, the journey was in itself a severe penance. Then I carried no money or provisions with me. For sustenance I depended mostly on *bhiksha*. I cared for neither rain nor cold and passed my nights in caves or forests or on open plains. This time, however, the journey was less of a penance. Meals were almost regular ; for we had provided ourselves with the necessary food-stuffs (which were carried on the back of *chamari* cows) and we had among us some enterprising young *sadhus* who baked our bread, etc., at the proper time, day after day. During nights we rested in our tents, instead of sitting up in the open, battling with the elements. Still, the journey was, by no means, comfortable. The route from Badrinath to Kailas is extremely difficult to traverse. There is hardly a track. One has to make one's own way over boulders of rock or heaps of snow, with only the Saraswati for a guide. Up to Badrinath, it is different. There is a clear path ; but beyond it, there is none. Badrinath itself is 11,000 ft. above sea-level. As we climbed higher and higher, the intensity of the cold increased. One or two *sadhus* in our company got frightened and wished to go back. But, when I said, " It is all for the best if this body succumbs to the difficulties on the way to Mt. Kailas and perishes in the snow. Why get frightened ? " the *sadhus* plucked up courage and decided to go on.

Our route lay along valleys dominated by cloud-capped mountains. The movement had become so difficult that in an hour we could hardly cover a mile. On the way we crossed several streams ; but when we came to a tributary of the Saraswati, we found it extremely difficult to get across. The current was powerful and the water was so cold that it could petrify the body in a couple of minutes. With the help of porters, we somehow managed to cross the stream. Twenty or twenty-five miles beyond Badrinath, the landscape appeared to be still more grim. Snow lay thick all round and chains of snow-clad mountains appeared wherever the eyes turned. For fear of slipping, it became difficult to walk over the extensive snow. We had all along been following a party of Tibetan merchants who were on their way home from Badrinath. They had their horses and other animals with them and especially for their sake, the merchants had to do some spade work, removing the snow and levelling the ground where it was all too steep. We, who followed the party, benefited by their labours and were spared much hard work. Yet, as we proceeded, the difficulties that beset us grew harder and yet harder.

The main Himalayan Pass, the travellers between Badrinath and Tibet have to cross, is known as Mana Pass. It is about 18,000 ft. high. The difficulties that travellers have generally to face in negotiating the Pass, are well known to mountaineers. Compared with the other Himalayan Passes, Mana Pass is remarkable for its great height and its never-melting snow and for the same reasons it is more difficult to tackle. It is also more holy because it was the only route used by the Ancients on their journey to

Kailas. The Puranas say that Lord Krishna and the Pandavas as well as several great rishis, used the Pass on their way to the mountain. Some scholars hold that the *Crouncha Randhra* described in ancient poems, etc., as the route used by the Royal Swans of Lake Manasa is none other than the Mana Pass. That famous and majestic Pass now stood before us with its dazzling white heights. The Puranas say that Badarikasrama is on the side of Mt. Gandhamadana and so the mountains we had been crossing so far must belong to the Gandhamadana range. Now the Neela Parvata (Blue Mountain) came into view. It is said that the deep blue mountain was or is the abode of the immortal Kakabhusunda, famous in the Puranas. Truly, there is no limit to the greatness of the great rishis. Their hermitages stand on remote peaks inaccessible to the common man or uninhabitable for him.

On the sixth night after our start we pitched our tents on a small plot of bare ground in the midst of snow, five or six miles below Mana Pass, and rested there for a few hours. Next morning, intending to cross the Pass that day, we set out with the merchants. On the way we could see nothing but glaciers and rocks. No patch of earth was visible. With very great exertion and difficulty we continued our ascent. As we went higher up, whether it was for lack of oxygen, or because of some poison in the air, or for any other reason, our heads began to ache. We had to rest after every three or four furlongs. The experience was not anything peculiar to us ; the sturdy merchants who were used to such high altitude travels were equally affected. Three or four of their horses had been drowned in the streams ; one of the weaker men

had perished on the way. We had been helpless witnesses of these woes ; we could do nothing to save the man or the animals. At such great heights, who can help the dying ? The destroyer God may be compared to a large-scale butcher. The butcher himself chooses the sheep to be slaughtered on a particular day. He does not ask for the sheep's permission or wait for its convenient time, so also God mercilessly destroys animals individually or in mass, at His will. Though He is the Lord of Mercy, He does not wait for the consent or convenience of His victims. In dealing out death, He makes no distinctions. Death lays his icy hand on scholars, philosophers or priests ; kings or ministers ; farmers or traders ; rich men or the poor. Sanyasins and Jnanis, all alike, go down before death. There is no difference in respect of death, between men, animals and worms. As a result of one's actions in previous life or lives, one is born as a human being or an animal and as a result of man's desire to enjoy worldly pleasures or attain salvation, one accepts the role of a scholar, devotee or sanyasin. None of them is governed by his own will. All are subject to death. In death all are equal. All are subject to some other's will, like the sheep. Yet, this man, in spite of his dependance, sorrow and shame, prides himself as " I " before the Almighty ! To me this appears as the blunder of blunders, the matchless blunder.

After a difficult ascent, I sat down near the Neela Parbat, at a place where the snow had melted away, by the side of a small lake. I sat there long, resting, and waiting for the other *sadhus* to come up. The lake was covered with ice. The beauty of the sight made me forget all weariness and headache, and

filled me with delight. To reach the top of the Pass I had to climb one more mile. Before 3 p.m., however, all of us and the merchants reached the top of the Pass. How can I describe the splendour and the beauty of that vast sea of snow and ice? At the top of the Pass we came across another frozen lake, ten or twelve furlongs in circumference, called "Devasaras". There are few places in the Himalayas where one can enjoy the beauty of snow and ice as here. At that great height of 18,000 ft., on the shore of that celestial lake, surrounded by never-melting snow on all sides, I entered into a deep *samadhi* induced by natural beauty, forgetting Kailas, forgetting the pilgrimage, forgetting the world and forgetting the body itself. The Vedas and ancient rishis like Vedavyasa, and poets like Kalidasa, have tried to express the sublime, beauty of God's creation in so many words, but all such descriptions have failed miserably to reflect the ineffable beauty. Why wonder! such beauty is beyond the reach of words and every effort to express it is bound to fail. The highest forms of human art are but crude beside such natural grace and magnificence. What can I say about the power and the glory of that *Paramatma*, who creates such numberless scenes with effortless ease, with the ease of shutting and opening one's eyes. O Lord, permit me, this creature of inferior mind to transcend all illusions and know Thee as Thou art, find everlasting joy in Thee and thus fulfil the purpose of this human life!

The two attendants who followed us at a distance, driving before them the animals which carried our provisions, came up with us before long. On their arrival they told us that their animals were completely exhausted and there was no alternative but to pass

the night where we were. They also proceeded to pitch the tent at a spot on the shore of the lake, where there was no snow. Indeed, travellers encamp themselves at such great heights only very rarely. Generally those who start from one side of the mountain rest only on the other side, for fear of extreme cold and frequent snowfall, coupled with the lack of the means to protect themselves against such inclement weather. But, for us, there was no choice. We had to pass the night at the top of the Pass, depending solely on God's mercy. In the hour of danger and difficulty, faith in God makes man strong and bold. Some of the merchants had preceded us ; the rest were with us. As I discussed with them the hardships of passing a night there, they told me that, on such occasions, their custom was to throw themselves completely on the mercy of the Deity who presided over the Pass. The Deity was supposed to reside at a place, about two miles in front of us. Since most of the *sadhus* were lagging behind, only four or five of us found ourselves entrapped at those awe-inspiring heights. Slowly, that lovely ever-memorable night came on. That adventurous resolve to spend the night there appeared to me, who, seated in that silver palace, in that Divine, silvery region, had entered into Divine contemplation, as a blessing in disguise or a stroke of great good luck. For a long time I sat admiring and adoring that indescribable, supermundane beauty of the lake at night. In the lake, deep blue waters and bright white snow appeared side by side. Why should a man whose heart is susceptible to impressions of beauty, wish for a wink of sleep on the shore of that heavenly lake ? A pleasure, far deeper than that of sleep, permeates such a man's mind and leads it

on to an extraordinary state of concentration. I can never forget the supreme, Divine Grace which permitted us to enjoy that manifestation of the glory and power of the Lord. God's mercy emboldens man to face dangers of all kinds. Cowards can achieve nothing worthwhile. "Nothing venture, nothing have."

All the day the sky had been clear and cloudless ; but, as the night descended, patches of clouds began to appear and soon the entire sky was overcast. Snowing started, but before long, by God's grace, the clouds broke up and melted away, saving us from the jaws of Death. As the day dawned, I thanked the Deity of the Pass again and again for our safety and resumed our journey. We had yet to cross six or seven miles of snow-covered region. When we had travelled two miles over snow and bare earth, we arrived at the spot where the Deity of the Pass was supposed to reside. Here it is a heap of stones that is believed to represent the Deity. We sat before the Deity and made offerings of some sweet things which we then accepted back as *prasada* (sanctified offerings). We rested there a considerable time. All the way from Badrinath, thirty-five miles to the top of the Pass, had been one gradual ascent. From here begins the descent. Here is the northern boundary of India. Here India ends and Tibet begins. We got up and started on our journey again.

The snow all round reflected back the dazzling rays of the morning sun. Our eyes grew dim ; tears rolled down our cheeks and nose also began to send forth streams of water. In the circumstances, it grew still more difficult to traverse the snow. The perpetual headache was getting from bad to worse.

Notwithstanding all such discomforts and difficulties we succeeded in crossing the Mana Pass without more ado and reached the plain on the other side by 2 p.m.

The merchants now came forward and congratulated us on our success in negotiating the Pass. They also comforted us saying that it was now as good as having reached Kailas. After all the labours of the ascent and the descent, we rested a whole day there. On the next morning we moved forward along the extensive Tibetan plains, with neither snow nor rocky boulders to obstruct our progress. On the way, at a distance, some of our companions pointed out to us the hoof-marks of the horses of Rama and Lakshmana left on some rocky surface. These marks are regarded as the memorials of Rama's trip to Kailas in the company of his favourite brother. There are innumerable traditions and statements in the *Puranas* suggesting that it was a common custom with the Rajarshis and the Brahmarshis of ancient India to visit Kailas along this route. As we moved onward along those boundless meadows, we were surprised and delighted at the sight of herds of wild horses ranging freely all over the area. One evening we saw also a beautifully shaped tiger, of the class usually known in the region as "Sanku" hunting the horses and the deer, quite close to our place of rest. Activities like eating and sleeping, and feelings like love, hatred and fear, are seen among all creatures and everywhere, whether it is on snow or land or in water or whether it is in *Swarga loka* or *Brahma loka*. Let none think, that those who have reached higher regions or higher status, are completely free from all these. The Bhashyakara says, पञ्चादिभिश्चाविशेषात् । So long as one finds one's self in the body, all men, gods and super-gods, without

any distinctions of the learned or the ignorant, are like animals in this respect. Indeed, wonderful is the plan and organization of this universe, which is never upset by anything.

Thus enjoying the sight of many things which reminds us of the glory of God, we moved forward along extensive plains and on the fourth day after crossing the Pass—that is, on 30th July—we arrived at the famous Thholingamatam. The distance between Badrinath and Thholingamatam is only 75 or 80 miles, approximately. But it took us thirteen days to complete the journey. The rugged nature of the path and other difficulties on the way had slowed down our progress. We established our camp right in front of the lamaseri. We passed four delightful days there taking rest and enjoying the company of the lamas. Everyday we paid our homage to the various idols installed in the lamaseri. Foremost among the idols was, of course, that of Lord Buddha. Around it were grouped the figures of various Hindu gods and goddesses, including that of Kali, the Terrible. The careful study of all religions, past and present, indicates that they are closely akin. Many Hindu deities find a place in Buddhism ; several Buddhistic ideas and traditions have crept into later Hinduism. The lama, who acted as our guide, pointing out the gigantic figure of Lord Buddha, told us that it was Badrinarayan. The lamas of Thholingamatam, as well as the mountain-folk living among the Himalayas, believe that Thholingamatam was the original seat of Badrinarayan and that the temple of Badrinarayan was built at a lower level later on as Thholingam proved to be almost inaccessible to people from the southern plains. To me this view does not seem

cogent but I do not here propose to set forth my reasons why the view is unacceptable, for fear of over elaboration.

A race of gigantic people who live either in caves scooped out of the earth on the mountain side or in small huts at the foot of the mountains, used to visit us almost daily with wonder and curiosity and spend sometime sitting around us. During our stay at Thholingamatam we could not meet the High Lama as he was just then away at a famous health resort called Garthoke where he used to spend his summer. The High Lama, we were told, was possessed of not only great spiritual authority but also vast temporal power. It seems he exercised these powers through his Secretary whom we happened to meet several times during our stay. We were told that the High Lama was a very pious man spending his days mostly in devotion. The lamas of Tibet, dedicated to a life of devotion, are not so easily satisfied as our modern Hindu monks. They spend their lives in strict penance and devotion. They don't claim to have attained liberation ; so they continue their exertion. The Hindu monks, alas ! on the contrary, often waste their lives in total idleness, never engaging themselves whole-heartedly in acts of devotion.

The Hindu *sadhus* may be divided broadly into two classes : (1) The Uneducated who know nothing ; (2) The Educated who know something. Even among the uneducated one may find, though rarely, individuals virtuous and highly devout. But the condition of the rest is really sad and pitiable. They lead altogether aimless lives. Among the educated too, except in the case of a few blessed individuals, the condition is

by no means laudable. Most of them, as soon as they have collected some book-lore and feel capable of writing or saying something philosophical, get conceited and begin professing to have attained the supreme goal. Naturally, they become averse to further spiritual practice. It is as though they have become *Jivanmuktas* in a trice. Whatever be the doubts or waverings in their minds regarding Truth, they conceal everything cleverly and pose like saints who have already realized God. Such hypocrisy obstructs their progress for ever. Think of the deep humility of Sri Suka Brahmarshi—son of Vedavyasa, the perfect *brahmachari* to whom the *Kamandalu* (water pot) and the deer skin descended from heaven at the very moment of birth—the great Treasure House of knowledge effulgent with the inborn light of the Vedas and the Vedangas—a yogi of yogis in possession of all miraculous powers ! Just think, how honest he must have been to confess, in spite of his greatness and accomplishments, that his mind was still clouded with a doubt regarding the Soul ! Subsequently at the behest of his father, he went to Janaka, a Kshatriya and householder, confessed his difficulties to him and sought the solution for them. Verily he had his doubts, he never claimed to be an enlightened one. Think of the story of Sikhidhwaja ! After eighteen years of hard penance he regretfully confesses to Kumbhabala, how he is still an ignorant and sad man, having yet failed to find Truth. He too never pretended that he had realized Truth. Aware of his failure, he continued his spiritual discipline and at last attained his goal. Thus, on a study of the lives of really great men, we find that hypocrisy is not only unworthy of true greatness, it is even an obstacle

in the path of true progress. I have dealt with this subject here rather disproportionately, because I wish that our brother monks may not be misled into false contentment—into silly self-complacency—over a life of idleness and ease and hypocrisy.

MOUNT KAILAS

नहि पश्यामि जीवन्तं लोके कंचिदहिंसया ।

सत्त्वैः सत्वानि जीवन्ति दुर्बलैर्बलवत्तराः ॥

This is what Arjuna said in the course of a discourse. His view that, in the world, no living being can sustain life without doing harm to other creatures, that some animals thrive and fatten themselves at the expense of other animals, that the strong prey upon the weak, is indeed the truth of truths. From times immemorial, great teachers have been insisting upon the strict observance of Ahimsa (Non-violence) yet, consciously or unconsciously, violence continues to be committed. It is an animal instinct to do harm to other creatures. One never fattens oneself except by drinking the life-blood of another. To let one live another has to die. Something has to putrify and decay before it turns into manure for something else. One's joy is built upon another's sorrow. This is regarded as Nature's Law. The more we contemplate the Divine Scheme in which small fishes are created as food for bigger ones on the inviolable principle *Jeevo Jeevasya Jeevanam*, the more wonderful the whole thing appears to us. How could that well-fastened Divine Law be set aside by the teachings of religions preceptors, howsoever full of love? In

defiance of the commandments of those great teachers, this law that dates back to the time of creation, has continued to function to this very day.

It is true, certain modern religions believe that all other animals have been created for the use of Man ; but, Buddhism does not hold such a view. What Buddhism enjoins upon its followers is an absolutely pure life, altogether free from violence. But the great religion of Buddha, in its pristine purity, is now found nowhere in the world. The Buddhism of modern Tibet, especially, is a highly adulterated form of that noble religion. It is an admixture of the tenets of the Buddhist and the Tantrik religions called Lamaism. The Tibetans, though they call themselves Buddhists, do not, therefore, shrink from the idea of killing. The local conditions also encourage the slaughter of animals. In Tibet, sheep and chamari cows abound ; at the same time, grains and vegetables are very, very scarce. The extensive, dry, waterless, barren plains are, by no means, suitable for cultivation. The natives are therefore compelled to live upon meat. On account of those religious and local peculiarities, slaughter of animals goes on without let or hindrance. Naturally, the villages have a repulsive and hideous look, with heaps of bones and hooves of animals scattered everywhere. The suburbs of the villages through which we passed on our way, after leaving Thholingamatam, bore witness to such demoniac, large-scale slaughter of animals. Although the villagers appeared to be demoniac, living upon raw flesh and devoid of all finer feelings, they proved to be full of respect and consideration for saffron-robed sanyasins. Hindu sadhus are known to them as lamas and so they show as much respect to the sadhus as to the

lamas themselves. All along the route, the villagers rendered us various kinds of service.

From Thholingamatam, the way lies directly east. It proceeds along the plain that lies to the north of the highest mountains in the world. The snow covered peaks which emit rays of light are a sight for the gods to see. The track now runs along level ground and so walking is comparatively easy. Yet, powerful gusts of wind and rivers without bridges, cause untold hardships to the wayfarers. To wade across swift-flowing mountain streams in breast-deep water, is a venture as uncomfortable as it is hazardous. The village Dappa is situated about thirty miles from Thholingamatam. It has a Buddhist temple and a fine lamaseri inhabited by a large number of monks. Near Dappa there is a marketing place called Nebru where merchants from India carry on trade with the natives of Tibet. It is possible to purchase all kinds of necessaries at this place. Fifty or fifty-five miles to the north-east of Dappa is a more famous marketing centre named Gyanimamandi. Rich merchants from Johar, a mountain district above Almora, find their way to this place, set up their tents and carry on a very profitable trade. Heavy trading goes on for four or five months from July, every year. Gyanimamandi is regarded as the most important centre of trade in Western Tibet ; between Dappa and Gyanimamandi we had to pass two days in constant dread of highwaymen. One evening a robber chieftain came to our camp evidently to find out what he could about us. The fierce-looking ruffian was armed to the teeth. He had a perfectly roguish look about him. Having arrived near our tents he dismounted and began to examine stealthily the contents of each tent. The

first tent he subjected to his scrutiny was that of a sadhu fashionably dressed in western style, with coat, boots, etc. On entering the tent he asked the sadhu whether he was a householder or a lama, how much money he had with him, what weapons he carried, etc. The questions frightened the cowardly sadhu out of his wits. The next tent the robber visited was mine. At the time of his visit two other sadhus and I were sitting on our seats, dressed in our simple monastic garb. He approached us and offered us his humble salutations. "You are lamas ; the others are not : they are householders" he observed aloud. Immediately I told him, "We are all lamas, living upon alms. We have not much money or extra things with us. What is the meaning of your asking one of us how much money he carries with him ?"

Highwayman.—This year there are over 400 highwaymen moving about the route to Kailas. It won't be possible for you to travel along the route with money and things. That is why I have been enquiring about the amount of money you carry.

I.—Whether we have money with us or not, highwaymen won't attack us. We, lamas, are never ill-treated by highwaymen.

"Of course, you are lamas ; but, the others are not". Repeating these words, he got up and went to the nearest stream. On the bank of the stream he lighted a fire and began to prepare tea. In order to scare him off, one of the sadhus in our company, a fellow remarkable for his physical prowess, took out a revolver and fired into the air. In spite of this display of firearms, when the sun set, the sadhus were in a state of terror. There were about fifteen of us—a few having parted company with us earlier—but

brave souls were rather few in the group. I, however, decided to worm out the robber's plans and therefore ventured to the place where he was sitting. I seated myself by his side and entered into conversation with him. He talked to me with great respect and offered me some gooseberry-sized balls of dried curds. After a few minutes I returned to my tent.

In the night I told my companions : " If he gets up from here and leaves the place, it is certain, his gang will attack us here this night. The gang must be in hiding somewhere near. If, for some reason, either out of regard for our holiness, or out of fear for our numbers, he does not go off to invite his comrades, probably there will be no attack and we shall be safe. Watch, therefore, whether he mounts his horse and gallops away. If, however, the highwaymen do come, the first thing they do, will be to shoot us down or cut us to pieces. On occasions like this, it is their usual custom to spare those whom they regard as true lamas. Whatever that be, if the malefactors are sighted at a distance, the best thing we could do is to run away for our lives, leaving behind everything of value."

The tremulous sadhus passed a sleepless night. They kept careful watch over the movements of the stranger. By the grace of the Lord of Kailas, it so happened, that the fellow, for some inexplicable reason, did not leave the spot and his gang did not attack us. Early in the morning, at 5 a.m. he mounted his horse and galloped away. Immediately, we too resumed our journey, travelling as fast as our legs could carry us. The native attendant, who was leading the *chamaris* that carried our belongings, told us a little later that the robbers would attack us in

the course of the day. Hearing this the sadhus were in great fright once again. Looking anxiously to the right and left, forward and backward, the party moved on, hourly expecting the attack. In such lonely regions as we were now traversing, it needs hardly be said, days are as dreadful as nights.

During my first journey, when I was travelling without any possessions and passing nights on the open plains, I was never subject to such tribulations at the prospect of an attack by highwaymen. But during the second, since the number of sadhus was large and since some of them carried costly and showy things, I too had to put up with distractions patiently. I could very well appreciate the difference between the two journeys—the freedom and the joy of the first standing in sharp contrast to the dependence and fear of the second with its possessions and companions. In places like Kailas, it is better to travel as a penniless mendicant, taking things as they come. During the first pilgrimage, whenever I chanced to meet highwaymen, they used to greet me, providing me with milk, food, etc. Apparently possession is a blessing ; actually, it is a curse !

The panic-stricken sadhus did not halt, even to cook their food that day. On and on they hurried forward as if to save their lives. It was 4 o'clock. Lo ! there appeared three or four small white tents, just a mile before us. As the minds of the sadhus were obsessed with the idea of robbers, they immediately jumped to the conclusion that the tents belonged to highwaymen. The sadhus were now too frightened to take a step forward. When we consulted our native attendant he said that it was not possible to say for certain to whom the tents belonged. Then

I volunteered to go forward and find out the truth. "Now I will go and see who the occupants are. You remain where you are. I am confident no robber would do me any harm." As I started on my mission, another sadhu took heart and came forward to accompany me.

Whatever we see is God. If, out of such firm faith, we are able to permeate all things with love, there will be no room for evil thoughts in our bosom. The less our love, the more the scope for evil thoughts. Like a boy I went merrily forward towards the tents, without a trace of fear. *Chamaris* and horses were grazing near the tents, some people were sitting in a circle in the open, evidently chatting. As soon as I neared the tents, one of the men seated in the circle, jumped up and came running towards me. He prostrated himself before me and embraced me. Overwhelmed by the unexpected pleasure, he began to laugh hysterically. He was, indeed, one of my familiar acquaintances at Rishikesh. He was returning from Kailas in the company of some merchants who resided near Gangotri. The tents were theirs. As I seated myself in their midst the other sadhus came forward uninvited. Taking friends for foes they had got into a terrible fright. It is certainly our own imagination that causes pleasure or pain : nothing created by God is responsible for either. "Mind can make a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell." A woman's body, created by God, does not, by itself, give pleasure or pain to anybody. But when a man fancies it as his wife's it produces pleasurable sensations in him. When a woman looks upon it as that of her husband's paramour, it fills her with anger and hatred. Thus, by the workings of the human mind, the same object

appears as a source of pleasure or pain to different persons and in different contexts. It is quite plain that the God-made world does not by itself cause pleasure or pain. How strange ! Taking friends for highwaymen, the sadhus had suffered terribly.

That night we passed there in pleasant, carefree sleep. Next morning, we set out again. The Mahatma whom we had met there was so unwilling to give up our company—so pleased he was at the unexpected meeting—that he resolved to accompany us to Kailas. In two or three days we reached Gyanima, having crossed several broad rivers and extensive plains. The place presented the appearance of a small but busy town. On a vast plain near the snow-covered mountains, in the full blast of ice-cold breeze, there stood three hundred to four hundred tents. For four months in the year Gyanima becomes a centre of activity. It is then full of life and stir. The wool and such things found in plenty in the region are bartered away for food and clothing, which are scarce. Among the merchants who were camping there, there were many from India, who knew Hindustani quite well. Many of them were devoted to sadhus and at their request we spent a day or two with them, resting in quiet comfort. As the company of a large number of people naturally led to mental unrest and as it was getting rather late (it was late August) I decided to push forward with a chosen company of only three or four.

Sri Kailas is situated about forty miles north-east of Gyanima. Though the way up from Gyanima is the regular haunt of highwaymen, we were never harassed by them. At 7 a.m. on the third day we reached a village called Darchan. It stood in the

valley quite close to Kailas. Even after a day's journey we had been lucky enough to catch glimpses of the silver mountain. For people who approach from Thholingamatam, it is Kailas that first comes into view ; for people who travel by Almora, it is the famous lake, Manasarowar. Twenty-seven miles to the north of Gyanima there is a holy place called Theerthapuri, which is believed to be the place where the notorious Brahmasura was killed. However, we did not visit that place.

Even as there is the *Kumbhamela* at Haridwar, Prayag and such pilgrim centres in India, there is a *Mela* at Kailas once in twelve years. The year in which we paid our visit to the Holy Mount was a year of the *Mela*. We had heard about it even at Badrinath. The desire to participate in the festival was indeed one of the main inducements for deciding to visit Kailas that year itself. On account of the festival several Tibetan lamas and householders had flocked to the valley of Kailas. It was their tents that we had seen even from a distance. We were told that the Minister of the Dalai Lama, ruler of Tibet, also had been encamping there for several days in connection with the *Mela*. Many holy lamas from the distant Lahsa and Mangolia had come to Kailas that year to attend the festival. But as there was no particular day fixed for the celebrations, pilgrims continued to come and go. They would have the *darshan* and the *parikrama* (circumambulation), stay two or three days on the spot and then depart. Because of this there was no crowding on any particular day. Yet, it was not as on the first occasion of my visit. Then the valley looked deserted and solitude reigned over the whole place. Now, there were stirrings of life

around us. Tents stood here and there accommodating a considerable number of the natives.

In my account of the first visit to Kailas, I have given various details regarding the holy peak—that it is 23,000 ft. in height and looks like a lovely tower 28—30 miles in circumference—that it is perpetually covered with snow and appears dazzling white in the sun—that it is the silver mountain famous in the Puranas as the abode of Sri Mahadeva—that it is altogether peerless in its divine beauty, etc., etc., and so I do not propose here to indulge in another description. At Darchan, we too pitched our tents beside those of the natives and camped among them. The sight, from Darchan, of Mt. Kailas and its surroundings, *i.e.*, of the spotlessly white peak on the north, and the vast, circular, deep blue lake, Rakshasathal, to the south, was indeed a most beautiful one. Manasarowar, lying to the east of Rakshasathal, was out of sight. We rested one day at Darchan and next morning, after breakfast, set out for the circumambulation of Mt. Kailas. During my first visit, illness had prevented me from performing that holy act which is regarded as an essential part of a visit to the sacred mountain. The lamas of the place fully believe that those who are able to complete the circumambulation, have fulfilled the purpose of human life.

On the four sides of Kailas are four “gummas” or lamaseris where lamas spend all the twelve months in penance.

We set out on our circumambulation at about 10 a.m. There were several lamas and laminis (women lamas) circumambulating the Holy Mount. Some of them—especially women, were engaged in the severer form of the penance *namaskara pradakshin* (prostration

—cum—circumambulation). They prostrated themselves at full length on the ground, got up, took five or six steps forward and then prostrated themselves again. Thus they proceeded round the foot of the mountain until they had completed a full circle. My heart was stricken with awe at the sight of such a severe penance. To go all round the mountain thus prostrating oneself at every few feet, over earth and stone, over water and snow, in the benumbing cold of Kailas, at a height of 16,000 to 19,000 ft., is no easy task for the common man. In addition to these prostrations, those lamas and laminis go on repeating the holy mantra “*mamepemehum*” quickly and incessantly. One may find not only the lamas, but even the householders in Tibet, repeating their favourite mantras at all times, with deep faith. Another indispensable act of their worship is to rotate by means of the hand a metal disc on which the mantra has been inscribed everywhere. The mantra may often be found scrawled in bold letters on the stones by the wayside, and on the walls of the lamaseris. The fact that the persons engaged in the act of *namaskara pradakshin* depend for their food entirely upon chance, adds still further to the rigour of the penance. They carry no provisions with them. They live upon the *saktu* flour or some such thing, given to them by pilgrims. Wonderful indeed is the power of faith—it has no limits. Intensity of cold and difficulties of terrain make it almost impossible for us even to walk around the mountain. It is under the same conditions that these lamas and laminis perform *namaskara pradakshin*. Amazed at their faith, I humbly bowed down to them.

Proceeding slowly, very slowly, we reached the

western *asram* called Chukku, situated six or seven miles from Darchan. There we paid our homage to the idol of Lord Buddha with the sincerest devotion and rested two or three hours in the company of the lamas. As a nobleman, who was devoted to us and whom the natives of the region call King of Darchan, accompanied us, we were provided with all possible conveniences on the way and we were treated with special consideration at the *asram*. After a spell of rest we started again and before nightfall arrived at the northern lamaseri called "Dirfook", about five miles farther on. Here too, we worshipped Lord Buddha with great devotion and passed the night in the *asram*. In the night there was a heavy rainfall, followed by snowfall. It is from here one gets a close, clear and complete view of Kailas. No other view is so clear or complete. Both in the morning and evening, we had a perfect view of Sri Kailas. It was a thrilling experience. Next morning we resumed our journey. First we had to tackle a steep ascent. The highest point of the climb is called Dolma Pass (19,000 ft.). At this height is situated the beautiful lake called Gourikunda. This is supposed to be the divine lake where Goddess Parvati sports as she bathes. Crossing the heaps of snow with immense difficulty, I reached the shore of the celestial lake where I sat down immersed in its beauty. Big boulders of ice appeared here and there in the water. A glass-like sheet of ice, two or three inches thick had formed over the surface of the lake. The pilgrims who wished to bathe in the lake and perform their ablutions had to break up the film with sticks before they could take a dip in the ice cold water beneath. The third gumma, situated to the east, ten or twelve miles from the second,

is called Sunthul-foolk. Here, too, Lord Buddha is worshipped with elaborate ceremonies. At the lama-*seri* we were supplied with tea. For us who had eaten nothing that day, and marched across the rugged mountain side on empty stomachs, a cup of tea was most welcome. After a short rest we resumed our journey and covering four miles by evening, reached Darchan. To circumambulate Kailas, the abode of Gouri and Sankara, the haven of great rishis and the summit of Nature's beauty, is a feat that can be accomplished only by passing along the banks of mighty streams and threading through narrow gorges between the highest mountains in the world. It is the holiest of *tapasyas* to whose glory no justice can be done even by volumes of description.

It was on the *Krishnashtami* day in the month *Chingom* (August-September) that we completed the circumambulation of Mt. Kailas. The other Indian *sadhus* had finished their pilgrimage during the months of *Midhunam* and *Karkatagom* (15th June—15th August) and returned home. So we came across no Indians near Kailas. We had been rather late as the Badari route that year had become passable only in *Karkatagom*. Compared with the other routes, the Badari route is not only more difficult and more troublesome on account of the snow, it is also longer than some of them. The Nepal route is also long, but the snow along the route presents no obstacle at all. From Rishikesh to Badari the distance is 170 miles ; from Badari to Kailas, about 205 miles. Besides, the route passes over very difficult terrain. Although we met no Hindu *sadhus* in the neighbourhood of Kailas, we met several Buddhist monks in the region. We passed two more days in the Kailas valley.

If one climbs a little over a mile and a half from Darchan, one comes across the fourth (the southern) lamaseri, called Gengta. In the company of another *sadhu* I undertook the ascent and arrived at the monastery. There I was told that there is yet another monastery near it called Silang ; I did not visit it. As I climbed higher and higher up the mountain, my mind was filled more and more with diviner thoughts. To the south spread the famous lake Rakshasathal and the whole landscape appeared to be of not merely rare but of almost supermundane beauty. As soon as the lamas who were engaged in their studies, perceived our approach, they received us warmly with bright smiles and seated us on the raised seats. Usually, laymen, however high their worldly status may be, do not sit on those raised seats reserved for the lamas. The lamas of Tibet, like the sanyasins of India, are regarded as preceptors and are treated with great veneration. The lamas know that the Indian monks in their ochre coloured robes also are lamas and so honour them by sharing their raised seats with them. We worshipped at the shrine of Sri Buddha, etc., and then spent some time agreeably talking with the High Lama. On understanding my desire to examine the rare books kept in the lamaseri, the lamas were good enough to show them to me. The High Lama was a handsome young man of extraordinary brilliance. His complexion too was fair.

ब्राह्मणानां सितो वर्णः क्षत्रियाणान्तु लोहितः ।

वैश्यानां पीतको वर्णः शूद्राणामसितस्तथा ॥

The Brahmin is white in complexion, the Khshatriya is red, the Vaisya is yellow and the Sudra is black.

If this stanza from the Mahabharata is accepted as authoritative, there is nothing wrong in taking the Lama for a Brahmin, since his complexion was remarkably fair, though not without a shade of yellow. By nature he was extremely *Satwic*. Several people spoke to me highly about the purity of his character and the sincerity of his devotion. For the abundance of such *Satwic* qualities too he could be regarded as a true Brahmin. It is true our ancient *Acharyas* have held that only Brahmins are entitled to *sanyasa*. Everybody admits that. But the crux of the problem lies in the answer to the question, who is a Brahmin? If a Brahmin is defined as one in whom *Satwic* qualities are found to perfection, it will easily be seen that only he can have the desire to enter *sanyasa* and lead a divine life and not anybody else. If, out of any selfish motive, one embraces *sanyasa* without the necessary *Satwic* qualities and true spirituality, his cannot be *sanyasa*. Granting this, it must be recognised that all true *sanyasins* are Brahmins as they are predominantly *Satwic* by nature. It follows that *if there are true Mahatmas among Buddhists, Christians or Mussalman they are all true Brahmins*. Though this idea of classifying castes on the criterion of qualities has not been accepted universally either in the past or in the present, there is no doubt it is the only logical and therefore the only enduring principle of division.

The quiet grandeur of the *Asram* located on a wide plateau in the centre of Mount Kailas, far away from the haunts of men, evoked in me feelings of wonder and peace. Though lamas do not generally engage themselves in spiritual discussions or meditation, though their chief activity consists in memorising and repeating holy names, their *asrams* are built in peaceful

solitude. To lead a solitary life, far from worldly pleasures, is their principal duty. Customary practices like living in solitude, are but the surviving signs of a monastic life which prevailed in Tibet in all its stern rigour. History teaches us that at different times, different faiths flourished in different countries.

In Buddhism as well as Hinduism, *sanyasa* and solitary life were treated at one time as most worthy of reverence. Some historians maintain with sound reason, that *sanyasa* gained such firm hold on Hinduism, which was previously devoted to a life of Vedic rites, sacrifices and action, as a result of imitating Buddhist practices and ideas. Even as many educated moderns criticise the renunciation of action, various schools of thought in the distant past also had found fault with *sanyasa* as unscientific and improper. For example there were the *Samuchaya* Vadis* who argued with vehemence that, even conceding knowledge of Brahman to be the means of liberation, such knowledge should go hand in hand with action towards the goal, and that there is nothing essentially irreconcilable between them. The people of this way of thinking were totally opposed to the renunciation of action ; but the advocates of *sanyasa* easily tore their arguments to shreds. In support of their contention, the champions of renunciation pointed out that a mere statement of the fact that “ I am *Brahman* ” is not tantamount to the realization of *Brahman*, that *Brahman* can be realized only through long and arduous discipline of both body and mind, in peaceful solitude ; that, in the case of people immersed day in and day out in the belief that “ I am the body ” it is by no means easy to dispel the perverse notion, by merely repeating

* Integrationists.

occasionally, " I am *Brahman* " and that, therefore, the stage of *sanyasa* wherein there is complete renunciation of desire and total avoidance of excitement, is indispensable to all true seekers of Brahman. *To the enlightened who abide in Brahman, sanyasa is a matter of course.* The truth is, they have already become *Brahman*.

Abidance in *Brahman* is the unbroken flow of mental moulds informed by *Brahman*. When the mind is engaged in a state of *samadhi*, how can the concept of body and other objects extraneous to the *Atman* arise in it ? Concept of the *Atman* and concept of the *non-Atman* cannot exist in the mind at the same moment. How can there be activities connected with the body, etc., in the absence of a strong attachment to such objects ? As the enlightened ones abiding in *Jnana* are beyond the reach of activities, *sanyasa* comes to them quite spontaneously. The advocates of *sanyasa*, therefore, argue that during the stage of preparatory practice, *sanyasa* in the form of the renunciation of action is indispensable ; in the stage of attainment it becomes natural ; that *Karma* and *Jnana* cannot therefore exist in the same person at the same time ; that the Karma of Janaka, Vidura, etc., was merely the reflection of it and that only worldlings obsessed with the idea of sense enjoyment oppose the idea of *sanyasa*.

It is hardly worth stating that Buddhism too insists upon monasticism and solitude as indispensable devices for preventing the perpetual flow of the senses and the mind towards sensuous pleasures and for weening them to the quiet performance of spiritual duties and that the wide prevalence of monasticism in Buddhistic countries like Tibet is the result of such

insistence. Buddhism firmly believes that the householder's life is false and sinful.

Practical-minded men have often asked in the past and still continue to ask, "Of what use to this world full of action, sustained by action and propelled by action, are the *sanyasins* who have renounced the world and its activities to live immersed in *samadhi* and *bhajan*? To this question, the *sanyasins*' answer is quite simple. Their very state of non-action is in itself a mighty blessing to the world. More than all the learned disquisitions of erudite scholars, more than all their profound treatises, the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* of a *sanyasin* touches the heart of humanity and elevates it to a higher plane. Their desireless non-action does greater good to the world than the swiftest and the most frantic activities of the revolutionaries. What is more, *sanyasa* is mightier than armies and is boundless as the sea.

LAKE MANASA—I

दृष्ट्वानुयान्तमृषिमात्मजमप्यनग्रम्
 देव्यो ह्यिया परिदधुर्न सुतस्य चित्रम् ।
 तद्वीक्ष्य पृच्छति मुनौ जगदुस्तवास्ति
 स्त्रीपुंभिदा न तु सुतस्य विविक्तदृष्टेः ॥

This is one of the lucid, dignified and well-known stanzas of Srimad Bhagavata. One day, it seems, Apsara ladies were bathing naked in Lake Manasa. At the time, Suka, followed by Vyasa, happened to pass along the shore of the lake. Suka, who preceded, was all nude ; but the ladies did not feel embarrassed

on seeing him who looked like a picture. On the contrary, when their eyes fell on Vyasa, who was properly clothed, they hurriedly put on their dress. Struck by their strange conduct, Vyasa sought an explanation from them. They then told him, "O, Vyasa, your mind still retains the idea of sex distinction. Your son, on the contrary, has not a trace of such distinction, because his mind is fixed solely on *Brahman*." Were these wisely discriminating Apsara women the native inhabitants of the region? Large numbers of women here have been known to follow the Apsara code of conduct. Among the local people, it is not rare to find, even today, men and women without any sense of *dharma*, revelling in a sensuous life, indulging unrestrained in bouts of drinking, meat-eating, and sexual pleasures. Not only Bhagavatha, but also other Puranas, describe the caves near Kailas and the surrounding areas as the usual haunts of the Yakshas, Kinnaras, Apsaras, Gandharvas, etc. It is nothing strange if the Tibetans of this region, who differ from us Indians in appearance, character and conduct, and who live immersed in the pleasures of the senses, are conceived of as a semi-divine race, outside the pale of humanity. All the Puranas agree that the lands to the north of India, follow none of the rules of *Varnasrama dharma*, and the people of those lands have no sense of religion or *dharma*. If the modern Tibetans have thoughts of a world beyond, if their life is governed by moral principles, it must be regarded as the result of the spread of Buddhism.

This year there was a large concourse of Tibetans—ordinary men and women to the modern eyes, but semi-divine beings in the eyes of the ancients—in the Kailas Valley and on the shores of Lake Manasa, on

account of the *mela*. In the course of the circumambulation of Kailas, while I was resting at the second *gumma* (lamasery) I sat up to midnight in a quiet and beautiful cave, before an image of Buddha, discussing religion and philosophy with the lama, who officiated as the high priest at the temple. Till 10 p.m. men and women continued to arrive for the *darshan* of Buddha, bringing various offerings with them.

A comparatively larger number of devotees circumambulated the lake also that year. On the shore of the lake we happened to meet a very holy lama and his followers from Tibet. As soon as he saw us he greeted us with folded hands and we returned the greetings in the same way. Then we sat down on the level ground and conversed for a long time on religion. At the end of the talk we gave him some sweetmeats which we had with us as a token of our respect for him and our joy at meeting him.

We spent five days near Kailas in circumambulation, etc. Then we started to Manasarowar. During our sojourn in the valley all sorts of natives, good, bad or indifferent, used to come to us and watch us closely. We grew rather suspicious of these visits especially as we knew that the region was haunted by freebooters. Man is, indeed, the strangest among God's creatures. In the case of other animals there is no disparity between inner feelings and external appearances ; the inside and the outside are alike. Whether it is love or hatred, joy or sorrow, their feelings are reflected in the face and there is no mistaking them. The animals do not desire, much less attempt, to hide their true feelings. Not so, in the case of man. He not only disguises his feelings ; he pretends to have the very opposite of his real emotions.

“ A man may smile and smile and yet be a villain ”. Man often hides his love under a veil of indifference ; he conceals his hatred behind a mask of friendliness. The sorrowful man looks happy ; and the angry man looks the very picture of peace. How strange ! Birth in human form is regarded by learned men as superior to birth among animals, birds, etc. ; yet, it will be admitted that the human body offers the most congenial soil for crookedness and unholy hypocrisies to flourish. Enough of this digression ; let us now revert to the subject of discussion. Even though we had come to harbour suspicions against some of our visitors, and had therefore begun to feel excited and uneasy, we were able, by God’s grace to proceed on the journey from Kailas, *via* Manasarowar without any worry, having found some merchants to keep us company.

To Lake Manasarowar, stretching to the south-east of Kailas, the distance is only fifteen miles. On the first day of our march, passing across the vast valley at the foot of Mt. Kailas, and crossing several streams that fall into Lake Rakshasathal, we reached a small village called Varkka. Next morning we moved eastward along the shore of Rakshasathal and in three or four hours arrived at a gumma called Chiyu, in the north-west corner. Chiyu is one of the eight gummas which stand at the eight corners of Lake Manasa. It is situated between Manasa and Rakshasathal. We spent some time in the company of the chief lama of the gumma. From the lamasery we could get a full view of the holy lake, Manasarowar. With my limited powers of expression, how can I hope to impress upon the readers the beauty and the holiness of the lake which have been described so

splendidly by the ancients in the Buddhist and the Hindu scriptures and which still continue to attract enlightened visitors from all parts of the world, year after year ? All that I can say is that it is the most beautiful sight among the very beautiful sights of the earth. The lake lies 16,000 ft. above sea-level. It is surrounded on all sides by bleak, naked, black, granite mountains whose peaks are covered with snow. When winds blow, huge waves roll over the surface of the lake as in the ocean ; but when the winds die down, the lake lies perfectly calm with its deep blue waters.

I don't believe that there is any other sight in the world to match the lake in its beauty. During my second visit also I saw large numbers of small swans, resembling our ducks, disporting themselves on the surface of the lake.

After a spell of rest at the gumma we descended to the lake for bath. We washed ourselves at leisure with great joy in the crystal clear water, near the source of the Satlej, called " Gangachoo ". Compared with the Ganga water at Gangotri, the Mandakini water at Kedar, and the Alakananda water at Badari, the water of Manasa is more warm. That is because the water in the lake stands still and remains exposed to sunlight. It is quite possible to remain in the water for two or three minutes and even dive into its depths. At Gangotri and other places it is a severe penance to remain in the water even for ten or fifteen seconds. After bath, we sat on the shore of the lake for a long time, repeating the holy names of the Lord and worshipping Him. When it was 2 o'clock we climbed back to the place where we had left the merchants. The merchants had already prepared a meal and we now shared it with them. When

we had rested for a while, the merchants suggested that it would be safer to leave the place early enough to avoid the ravages of highwaymen and move forward to an encampment of shepherds a few miles away. Acting on the suggestion we set out at 3 o'clock and marched slowly three or four miles along the western shore of Manasarowar, enjoying the beauty of the lake. We put up our tents for the night on a spacious spot, quite close to the holy lake.

The tranquil beauty of the lake at sunset was such as to raise the minds of the knowers of *Brahman* to a state of Samadhi. The cold was intense, but I sat all alone near the lake in *samadhi* till it was night. Then I returned to my companions for the evening meal. Flocks of swans were sporting in the water raising a weird cry. The night wore on and early at dawn we had a dip in the sacred waters of the lake, in spite of the benumbing cold. Our merchant companions, however, abstained from bathing. Even on the previous day, they had contented themselves with sprinkling a few drops of the holy water on their bodies. The Tibetans, of course, have great faith in the sacredness of the lake, but they are not used to bathing in its waters. Really, they don't like bathing at all. Instead of bathing in the water they drink it with deep faith. Even in that there is one peculiarity. They don't drink cold water. Their custom is to boil it and make tea. They believe firmly that those who have swallowed a drop of water from the lake are for ever free from the dangerous terrors caused by wild animals like the tiger or supernatural beings like ghosts and goblins. The remains of the fishes left behind by the swans on the shores of the lake are accepted by the Tibetans as *prasada* (sanctified offering

conveying Divine grace) and carried home in great veneration. The presence of a bit of these in a house is believed to protect the household from all attacks of wild beasts, ghosts, diseases and other misfortunes.

In the morning, after taking tea with *saktu* flour, we proceeded along the margin of the lake. My desire to pass a few days in one of the *gummas* had to be left unfulfilled on account of my relation to the other sadhus in the company. Some of them were inconvenienced by physical ailments, etc., and I had to accompany them down the mountains in haste. Having proceeded some more distance along the shore of Lake Manasa, we abandoned the route, and turning westward, continued our journey along the shore of Rakshasathal, and then stopped to rest on the way. Though curved in shape, Rakshasathal is as big as Manasarowar and equally beautiful. But, somehow, people do not regard it as so holy or worship it so ardently. At 3 o'clock we resumed our journey across the broad plains and in due course, leaving Rakshasathal behind, reached a small stream, near which we decided to camp for the night. A strong wind had set in, causing great discomfort and it continued to blow. The place was infamous as a rendezvous of marauders, but that night they caused us no trouble ; perhaps they were afraid of our numbers. During my first journey some robbers had actually overtaken me here, but on finding me penniless and unfriended, they had devoutly offered me *saktu* flour, etc., and left me to myself. Indeed, it is to help sanyasins lead a pure, fearless and peaceful life that strict non-possession is enjoined upon them by the sastras. For a man without possession and without attachment, there is no fear anywhere, at any

time. On the contrary, one with possessions or attached to persons with possessions, is subject to fear everywhere and at all times.

Among the lamas camping there, there were some accompanied by women. If women could vanquish the gods themselves—Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara—how easy it will be for them to conquer the poor lamas and sanyasins ! The seductive charms of gold and woman have been well-known in all countries and in all ages. Whether it is near Kailas, in heaven or upon the earth, woman is woman, gold is gold. In our times it is hard to find Hindu sanyasins or Buddhist lamas who could resist the charms of either. That was why the learned Mandana Misra pointed out in derision the incompatibility between sanyasa on the one hand and the age of Kali on the other.

“ Where is sanyasa ? Where is the power of Kali ? ”

Certain ancient lawgivers also have forbidden sanyasa in the Age of Kali. Without deep faith and without the abundance of pure and noble *samskara*, none can have firm abidance in one's own *dharma*. It is certain, that the faithful never fall. It is equally certain that those without faith, however learned or clever they might be, can never escape the fall. In the world of the spirit, cleverness and learning do not mean much. Faith—unswerving faith—alone is the supreme means to the supreme goal. Well, let us now return to our narrative.

We passed the night there quite pleasantly and in the morning set out again with a large number of men, women and children. Some of the women who carried their young ones on their back, in folds

of cloth, were diligently attending to their other duties such as driving horses and donkeys before them or sometimes running after them. They did not seem to hold themselves back from any type of work on account of the burden on their back. Thus God creates some babies to grow up in Tibet, exposed all the twelve months of the year to the piercing cold blasts and benumbing cold, lying on open plateau or on the bare shoulders of their mothers. The same God creates some other children to be brought up on the daintiest food, in the velvet cradles in air-conditioned rooms of luxurious palaces. They smile like the jasmine and grow up like the crescent moon. Yet other children they are, growing up in the dirtiest slums in the most squalid surroundings, in filth and suffering and starvation. Why is this? Why has the All-Merciful Lord ordained such different fates to different children? How can those religions which repudiate the Theory of Rebirth and seek to maintain that every man's enjoyments and sufferings are the result of his own actions in the present life, account for the varying degrees of pleasure and pain in the case of these tender children who have not yet begun to do either good or evil? Of course, attempts can be made to wriggle out of the difficulty by trotting out lame excuses; but until and unless the Theory of Rebirth is accepted unconditionally, no answer satisfying to the critical intellect will be found. That God re-creates his creatures in positions, high or low, in accordance with the merits or demerits earned by them in their previous lives, is an idea acceptable to all just and impartial thinkers.

That very evening we all reached the famous marketing place called Taklacote Mandi. This centre

of trade is about 25 miles to the south of Lake Manasa. Although it is situated on a lower level than Gyanima, it is a very busy place where large numbers of foreign merchants congregate to transact business with the Tibetans. Lamas, too, are found here in large numbers. Climbing a mountain I visited one of their famous lamaseris called "Similing" and met some of them. I met also a local potentate bearing the title "Jungbhang", who wields powers of life and death and is designated by the local population as "King". At his palace I had a talk with him. I rested two days at Taklacote as the honoured guest of the merchants. On leaving the place our plan was to cross the Lippu Pass and proceed to Hrishikesh *via* Almora. The highest point of the Pass (17,000 ft. above sea-level) is situated only seven miles from Taklacote. Once it is crossed, Indian territories and wayside villages come into view. On 24th August, soon after breakfast, we set out from Taklacote in the direction of our beloved motherland, Bharat Varsha. It was on the 18th July that we started from Badrinath on our upward journey. For six or seven days we had travelled over Indian territories and it was on the 25th that we actually set foot on Tibetan soil. Thus, for one full month, from 25th July to 24th August, we had been joyfully moving about that strange land of Tibet, camping wherever we liked and starting again whenever we chose. Now we were affectionately bidding good-bye to Mother Tibet and setting out on our downward journey. Every step took us farther and farther away from her, but my longing, lingering mind still kept returning to her. To me Tibet appeared as the treasure house of beauty, having attained the climax of tranquillity, grandeur

and holiness. To leave her was as painful to me as it is for a child to part from its beloved mother or for a lover to part from his sweetheart. So much was my heart attached to her. But, with all my grief, what could I do? What choice is left to us, petty little creatures, except to follow the will of the Almighty?

It was already *Chingom* (August-September) and the cold season that year had been unattended by heavy rains. Naturally, the Lippu Pass was mostly free from snow and we were saved all the trouble of tackling it at such great heights. During my first journey it was with great difficulty I had crossed the Pass partly on account of physical ailments and partly as a result of heavy rains. On the present occasion we were able to cover 90 miles from Taklacote to Dharchoola in 10 days. Then we rested four days as the guests of the head of a Ramakrishna Mutt. From there to Almora the distance is about 100 miles. Resuming our journey we reached Veninag, a few miles above Almora, in five or six days. During my previous journey, I had taken over a month to reach Almora from Taklacote, because of my illhealth. At Veninag I parted from my companions to let them go direct to Almora and from there take train to Hrishikesh. As for myself, I preferred a journey on foot to a passage by train, because the latter is more *rajasik*, while the former is more *satvik*. I, therefore, followed another route, walking all alone along the mountain side. On the second day I arrived at a holy place called Vageswari, in the Sarayu valley. My solitary journey through the beautiful forests was to be a source of great pleasure. Without distractions of any kind, I moved slowly and joyfully forward

like one swimming in an Ocean of Bliss. I spent a week at the temple of Vageswar, on the bank of the Sarayu. There I came across a large number of sadhus who were passing their days in that holy place in great joy. Thirty miles to the north of Vageswar, is the "Sarayu mula" or the source of the Sarayu. Leaving Vageswar and passing over several beautiful mountains, and through forests and villages I reached, on the ninth day, Karna Prayag, where the Alakananda and the Pindara merge their holy waters. Hrishikesh is about 100 miles down Karna Prayag. As I was familiar with the route, I now moved slowly forward resting for considerable periods at the beautiful places on the way and reaching Hrishikesh temple in the holy month of *Karthika* (October-November). Thus, my second journey to Kailas, quite unexpectedly undertaken at the will of the Lord of Kailas, came to a happy close without my undergoing any serious hardships or sufferings resembling those experienced on the earlier occasion. A pleasant sense of fulfilment pervaded my whole being.

LAKE MANASA—II

मान सरोवर कौन पशें,
विना बादल हिम बर्षें ।

There is such an old and well-known saying in North India. Literally translated, it means, "who can find access to Manasarowar? There it rains down snow without clouds." "To rain down snow without clouds" is as impossible as a child being born without a mother. The figurative statement only emphasizes the idea that there is constant snowfall in the area.

But some people take it as suggesting the remarkable abruptness of snowfall around the lake. A person might have been basking in bright sunshine out of doors ; then he might have retired indoors to have a spell of rest and a little nap. When he comes out again, he might find the same bright light and the same clear sky but the land all round him has undergone a vast change. As far as his eye can reach, the earth is covered with snow. Where has the snow come from ? The man has not seen the clouds gathering ; he has not seen the snow falling or the clouds dispersing. Everything has happened so quickly, so quietly. In the circumstances, one may be tempted to think that here in the holy region of Manasa it requires no clouds to rain down snow. Whichever be the correct interpretation, the lines doubtlessly express the fact that it is a region of snowfall.

This region of snow and ice, lying beyond the snow-clad heights of the Himalayas, was, at one time, totally inaccessible to the common man. It remained the land of the gods and *siddhas*. Ordinary mortals dared not then venture into the region, even in imagination. But in course of time, its inaccessibility ended, and *sadhus* with great physical prowess and powers of endurance, began to embark upon the adventurous journey to Mt. Kailas. It was during the transition from the wholly inaccessible to the hardly accessible stage that I made my first journey to the abode of the gods. During that first journey in 1925 I had to encounter several unavoidable dangers and difficulties. At times I was face to face with Death itself. But during the second pilgrimage in 1930, the difficulties of the journey had become fewer ; food, drink, etc., were now available in places where

they were unavailable before, either gratis or for money. Communication had become easier, and larger numbers of people were on the move in either direction along the route. Now-a-days, along all the routes to Kailas—especially along the Almora route—conveniences are steadily on the increase, and the hardships on the decrease. Compared with the other routes, the Almora route is naturally easier and less taxing. On account of these natural facilities and artificially contrived conveniences, this route is becoming more and more popular as years pass ; yet, even today, a journey to Kailas is no joke. However, it may be predicted with confidence that before long, the route will become less difficult still. Already, travellers imbued with a spirit of exploration and research, have conceived the idea of converting the extensive plain of Varka (or Parka) in the Kailas Valley into one vast ærodrome ! But let us leave all that to the future.

Many lovers of beauty, eastern as well as western, have tried again and again to portray the loveliness of Lake Manasa ; but none of them have been able to do justice to its inexhaustible beauty. On both occasions of my visit, like a thirsty soul, I drank in its loveliness with eager and insatiable desire. Feeling that the purpose of my birth had been accomplished, I congratulated myself on my good fortune. It is by no means easy for man to withdraw his eyes or mind from the rapturous vision, both in the morning and the evening when the bright red rays of the sun are reflected in the deep blue waters of the lake lifting the vast stretch of water into a world of Divine Beauty, rich with a ravishing riot of colours. During both the journeys, my mind had been raised to the height of

samadhi which is the climax of all happiness, by the lovely sights that greeted me, not only on the shores of Lake Manasa, or the Valley of Kailas, but also at various other beautiful spots on the way.

“ I could live and die on this heavenly lake without ever growing weary of the wonderful spectacle always presenting fresh surprises.” So wrote the famous Swedish traveller, Swen Hedin, who travelled over the region in 1907, recording the boundless joy of his wonderful experience. Descriptions in the most flowery language can do no more than touch the fringes of that boundless beauty. Of course, there may be people impervious as trees or children, to all suggestions of beauty. To them, the dirty ditch that breeds leeches and Lake Manasa where the royal swans disport themselves are alike. As an instance of human heartlessness I may cite the queer attempt of certain saffron-robed fellows, who instead of enjoying the divine beauty of Manasarowar, set their heart upon catching, cooking and eating the fat fishes sporting in its waters. Where is Manasarowar, that treasure house of beauty, sublimity, holiness ? Where is the base mentality that prompted those so-called *sadhus* to such devilry ? While the Buddhists and the Hindus worship the fishes of the sacred lake as Divine, some demoniac gluttons look upon them as tasty morsels to fill their paunches with ! What a gulf, alas, divides man and man on account of the differences in their sense of values !

One may change one's dress easily ; but, who can change his heart with the same ease ? Speaking of that, how many people do really want a change of heart ? Lo ! how charming are those outward appearances ? What a fine figure ! What a fine

complexion ! Fine clothes, sacred ashes, sandalwood paste and rosaries—matted hair or clean-shaven crown—and what not ! How splendid ! But heart ? how rotten ! how full of sinful thoughts ! with not a single good impulse ! All thoughts dirty and sinful, everything equally detestable ! It is a matter of utter shame that such black sheep are found in large numbers even in the honoured ranks of the men of God. However, it is a relief to find that among the confessedly worldly people possessing no outward charms, there are some really broadminded, whose impulses are truly noble and generous. On the shore of Manasa, we met some such people. We had lost our way and were in a state of confusion and distress. Then we saw at a distance, dimly but unmistakably, two figures squatting beside a fire. With great difficulty we made our way towards them and as we drew near, we saw to our dismay, two gigantic figures, one of a man and the other of a woman, with terrifying looks and extremely dirty habiliments. They looked like *Rakshasas*. But when I noticed their devotion to the lake, and everything relating to it, for example, the fishes in the lake, its birds, its pebbles, its grass, its sand, etc., and when I realized how kind and generous they were to us, my fear gave way to respect. It is an experience to which I often revert in my talks to illustrate real humaneness. Vis-a-vis such experiences it is hard to approve fully of sayings like “यत्राकृतिस्तत्र गुणा वसन्ति” or “akrithikkoppam gunam” (As the form, so the qualities).

It is very doubtful, whether there is any among all the nations of the world that can compare in the staunchness of its faith with the Tibetan lamas or their subjects who live “far from the madding crowd’s

ignoble strife”, hidden away among the highest mountains of the world, caring little for modern education with its attendant sophistic scepticism. Modern Hindus daily hear it repeated “संशयात्मा विनश्यति” (The Sceptic is lost) but in the performance of religious duties and acts of devotion they are ever wavering. They are wandering listlessly in the forest of Doubt. It is superfluous to point out that this is the result of our new fangled secular education and our association with foreigners who are steeped in the spirit of materialism. The fully educated or the wholly uneducated people entertain no doubts about God and religion ; such people believe firmly in them. It is the half educated who turn into sceptics. “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing” indeed. The sceptics lose this world and the next. Compared with them, even atheists seem better off. “Let us do anything and enjoy the pleasures of the world” think the atheists and they act accordingly. The sceptics doubt the soundness of the atheistic view of life and so they lose worldly pleasure. At the same time they doubt the theist’s view of life, “Let us control our mind and body and perform our duties which will lead us to heaven” and miss the pleasures of the other world too. So they are losers on both fronts. However, the sceptics who consider themselves supremely wise, have not wisdom enough to understand their own pitiable condition. Materialistic things may be perceived through the senses, but not matters relating to the soul or religion. It is impossible to demonstrate to the eye, the ear, etc., that an evil action produces sin (*papa*) or a good action produces merit (*punya*). In the same way it is impossible to make the soul perceptible to the senses apart from the body. In

such matters we have no alternative but to believe the declarations of the great rishis who had attained superhuman wisdom. It is therefore necessary for people who wish to enter upon the spiritual path and go forward, not only to exercise their own mental powers, but also to take on trust the valuable truths discovered by the great rishis of the past. Beware ! Doubt is a terrible enemy who can annihilate all your progress and prosperity. Is it good to do this ? or is it sinful ? Is there a thing called soul within this body ? Even if there is such a thing, how can the knowledge of it lead us to salvation ? Better than carry a burden of such doubts and lead a life in death, throw away all thoughts of sin and merit, of soul and body, and become a total atheist. Perhaps, total atheism is preferable to agnosticism and scepticism.

Another noble characteristic of the Tibetan lamas is their whole-hearted devotion to a life of austerity, without any undue eagerness to propagate their view of life. In our country too, in ancient days, the emphasis was on example and not on mere precept. Even among the great rishis who had attained perfection in practice, only a few, duly qualified for their work, took to a life of preaching and propaganda. The dissemination of ideas like *Jnana* (knowledge), *Bhakti* (love, piety), *Nishkama Karma* (action without any desire for reward), *Vairagya* (dispassion), *Thyaga* (spirit of sacrifice) was undertaken only for the commonweal and not out of any desire for self-aggrandizement. After all, how can they have any selfishness when they are devoted to true knowledge and love of God ? How fine will it be, if people, devoted to true knowledge and governed by the spirit of detachment, propagate *Jnana* and *Vairagya*

among common people ! How fruitful will their propaganda be ! On the contrary, how ridiculous will it look if ignoramuses begin to preach wisdom, and worldlings advocate detachment ? How baneful its consequences will be ! It is a matter for regret among the wise that in our land, in these days, people devote themselves more to preaching than to practising, perhaps as a result of our contact with foreign training and education. In matters spiritual, our *srutis*, *smritis* and *acharyas* advise us, the first thing we have to do before anything else, is to save ourselves. If a man who has not saved himself, attempts to save others, it will be as dangerous as the blind leading the blind.

We are living in an age of propaganda. We know how the credulous public is being treated daily, hourly, to a false and vile propaganda in politics, commerce, etc. Similarly in the field of religion too, shameless hypocrites are not wanting who seek to dupe the common people posing themselves as great *Jnanis*, *Bhaktas* or *Yogis*. It is clear as daylight that their activities are motivated solely by the desire for self-aggrandizement and self-glorification and not by any eagerness for the establishment of the commonweal. If yet they succeed, they owe their success not to the excellence of their wares, but to their glib tongue and their pushing nature. They build up a reputation for *Jnana Yoga* or *Tapasya* not as a result of strict observance and self-discipline or actual experience, but by means of steady, false propaganda. If, after reading a book or two one feels confident of saying or writing something about yoga, or jnana, he has no patience to read more, think or practise, but he rushes straightaway to the press or the platform to propagate his half-baked ideas. It is this wrong

tendency to divorce preaching from practice that has reduced the number of true Mahatmas among the famous men of today. A much larger number of truly religious men engaged in acts of devotion are to be found in our time among those modest men who live unknown, shunning all publicity. Alas, as a result of atheistic education, this glorious land of ours has fallen so low in spiritual life which alone is real and holy and which is founded chiefly on experience. Watching the lamas of Tibet, who were engaged day after day, month after month, year after year, in their acts of firm devotion, caring for no publicity, indulging in no propaganda, and wasting no thought on external things, I was filled with admiration for their holy life. Our educated classes may laugh at them, calling them "uneducated, ignorant, frogs in the well". If there is an atom of truth in these charges, of ignorance, want of education and narrowness of views, I do not want to defend them. I appreciate them only for their faith and their sincere desire to act up to it. Learn well, think well and believe wisely and well. Without doubt and wavering, practise what you believe and realize it, making it part of your personal experience.

As years pass, the difficulties on the route to Manasa get reduced, and larger and larger numbers of educated persons and scientifically minded men, pay visits to the lake. They collect facts and figures with ever-increasing accuracy and we come to know more and more about the region. Swen Hedin was the earliest writer from whom we get an idea of the place howsoever dim. But the explorers of our own time challenge many of his observations and conclusions and it is no wonder. Tibet is still a forbidden

land to foreign explorers. It is unknown and unknowable. Hence it is nothing surprising if there is some divergence of views regarding the geographical and other features of the land. Until it is thrown open to all people for exploration and research we cannot expect any uniformity in geographical and historical information. It is only natural, if, in the present circumstances, enquiries conducted by explorers do not yield tangible or final results. Some people now say that the circumference of Mt. Kailas is thirty-two miles and not twenty-eight as stated by Swen Hedin. To our knowledge, nobody has so far climbed to the top of Kailas and nobody has been permitted to do so by the Tibetans. But it has been said that to scale the mountain is not impossible. Modern explorers have calculated that the circumference of Lake Manasa is 54 miles, not 45 miles as formerly believed. They say that the lake is 16 miles long on the east, 10 on the south, 13 on the west and 15 on the north. In the ancient books and language of the Tibetans, Mt. Kailas is famous as "Kamgrim Poche". Lake Manasa and L. Rakshasathal are designated respectively as "Somawang" and "Lungkso". Around Lake Manasa there are eight gummas Goozel, Chiyu, Cherkip, Lungbona, Punri, Seralung, Yungo and Thugulo. During my first journey I had stayed at Thugulo and Goozel; during the second, I spent a few hours at Chiyu. I was told that there was yet another *lamaseri* called Supgaya, on the western shore of Rakshasathal. During December, 2 to 6 ft. of water on the surface of these lakes, freeze into ice. In May, the ice sheets melt back into water. In Lake Manasa, ice blocks are formed for natural reasons. The surface is broken up and wide

fissures and crevasses appear. One has to be particularly wary in crossing the lake during the season. In Rakshasathal, on the contrary, the surface is comparatively level, and crevasses are few. So, it is said, one can walk freely over the ice surface during the cold season.

It has been reckoned by modern methods that the distance from Lahsa (capital of Tibet) to Kailas is 800 miles, from Khatmandu 525 miles, from Almora 230 miles, from Jyothirmatam (18 miles below Badarinath) 200 miles, from Badarinath 240 miles, from Gangotri 245 miles, from Simla 440 miles and from Srinagar (in Kashmir) 600 miles.

SREE GOMUKHAM—I

“पुष्पवासो विशालाभूस्तदूर्ध्वं मुनिपुङ्गव !
 दिव्यानां बहुपुष्पाणामुद्यानं विद्धि नारद !
 तत्र श्रीगोमुखं स्थानं साक्षाद्गंगावतारभूः
 ऋषिभिर्बहुधा गीतं पुण्यात् पुण्यतरं भुवि
 शैलशृंगैर्महोच्छ्रायैर्वेष्टितं हिमशोभितैः
 द्युलोकनिकटस्थं वै द्युलोकभिरधिष्ठितम्
 तत्र प्रालेयसंघातभूषिते भूविभूषणे
 गोमुखे गोमुखाकारमहातुहिनगह्वरात्
 निर्गच्छति महावेगा गंगा सुरतरंगिणी
 पावनी पावनार्थाय पृथ्वीलोकनिवासिनाम्”

O Narada ! Over it is an extensive plateau. On it grows a wide variety of divine flowers, making it into a lovely garden. There is the site of Sri Gomukha—the place where the sacred Ganga actually emerges into the world. Of all the places on the earth it is the holiest.

It is celebrated in innumerable songs by the great rishis— It is surrounded by high, snow-clad peaks. It stands close to heaven and is occupied by the gods. In that beautiful place, from a huge formation of snow shaped like the mouth of a cow, the Ganga issues forth to purify the world and wash away the sins of the dwellers of the earth.

In these words this *sadhu* has endeavoured to describe Sree Gomukha in his *Sri Gangotharikshetra Mahatmya*. According to old men well acquainted with the region the distance between Gangothri and Gomukham is eighteen miles. But the surveyors of our time have established that it is no more than ten miles. It was in 1932 that I made my first journey to Gomukhi. Since 1936 it has become an unbroken rule with me to visit Gomukhi once a year. Like a lover fascinated by the charms of his mistress I have been loth to leave Gomukhi, having been captivated by its charms. From the beginning of July to the beginning of September the atmosphere here is comparatively warm and so it is the period most suited for one's sojourn in the region. I therefore pay my usual visits during that season. It is impossible to find words to describe the difficulties along the route and the consequent hardships. Here there is no question of a beaten track. All that one can do is to step upwards, slowly and continuously along the bank of the slender Bhagirathi who makes her way downhill. That is the state of affairs at this moment but even now signs are not wanting to suggest that in no distant future a good road will be constructed to connect Gomukhi with the rest of the world.

Gomukha, the famous centre of pilgrimage, is the mouth orifice of the mighty Gangothiri glacier.

It is from this opening that Bhagirathi mother of the three worlds, emerges. She is not visible anywhere above this cave of snow. The stream is believed to be flowing under the extensive snow-cap, imperceptible. Small rills formed by the melting of the snow find their way into the Gangothiri glacier, join together into one stream, and emerge at Gomukham. Not only the local population, but also foreign explorers have come to the conclusion that the Gangothiri glacier is the apparent source of the Bhageerathi. But the ancients had held a different view. They proceeded even beyond Gomukhi in their efforts to trace the origin of the Ganga. To them Sri Ganga was *Vishnupadi* that is, she had her source at the holy feet of Lord Vishnu. From the world of the gods she flowed into the matted hair of Lord Siva and from there plunged into the Earth below. The *Puranic* story of Bhageeratha's penance and the introduction of the Ganga into the world is well known. In our own time we do not find any obvious connection between the Ganga and Kailas or Manasarowar. But the *Puranic* account makes us doubt whether there could not have been some connection at some time. Even the materialistic-minded moderns who regard the *Puranic* story as purely mythical, can have no objection to worshipping Mother Ganga as the Supreme Goddess, for the symbolic worship of God in things grand and noble, is well known in Vedic literature. Every Hindu knows that Lord Vishnu is worshipped in the *salagrama*. The greatness of the Ganga is unparalleled. The beauty and greatness of the place of her origin, are equally unsurpassed. The unique beauty of the Lord shines here in full. What is Nature's beauty except a reflection of God's own ?

Even an atheist's mind cannot fail to enter into the thoughts of God in such a wonderful place. What is wrong in worshipping Mother Ganga who issues out of this sacred spot and fertilises the plain of Hindustan ? Whether she comes from the feet of Vishnu, or whether she issues out of the Gangothiri glacier, she is, for the believers in the holy Goddess, the Mother of the world. It is with these ideas at the back of my mind that I wrote the following stanza in Sri Ganga Stotra :

“ पादांगुष्ठाद्बोदिता देवि विष्णो—
 गंगोत्तर्यां गोमुखीशृंगतो वा,
 गंगा गंगैवात्र बाधो न किञ्चित्
 सर्वेशित्री सर्वदा हि त्वमंब ॥ ”

It matters little, O Mother Ganga, whether you originate at Vishnu's big toe or at Sri Gomukha ; whatever that be, the fact remains Ganga is Ganga. O Mother, thou art the Supreme Mistress of all the world.

It is impossible to express in words with what boundless faith and devotion I used to visit Mother Ganga as her own devotee, year after year. My mind was filled with the supreme sense of elation while I sat in that hardly accessible spot, cooking and offering various food-stuffs to Gomukhi Ganga. After bath and worship, I used to sit, regardless of all danger, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on a broad piece of rock, almost out of the reach of even the gods, quite close to the cave where the Ganga emerges from the snow, looking at the great heap of snow which is the girlish Ganga's mother and the snow-clad mountain peaks surrounding the area. To ordinary

people it might have been a terrifying experience, but to me it was an exhilarating one. Here I may state with joyful satisfaction that I have had the covetable privilege of visiting Gomukham twelve times in twelve years. I have been able to accomplish my task without any strain, though such journeys are necessarily taxing. Even foreigners (who of course, may not believe in the Vedas) and Hindus with advanced views, who do not believe in *theerthas*, pilgrimages, etc., on reaching the spot, cannot but, under the influence of the holy atmosphere, worship Mother Ganga with devotion, sprinkling her holy waters on their heads. If that is so, what wonder if people like me, fully believing in her as the Supreme Goddess, feel overjoyed at the sight of Gomukhi.

In the mind of one standing near Gomukha, under the high, dazzling, snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas, and watching the things all round him with eyes wide open in wonder, there can be no room at all, at least for that duration, for common worldly thoughts, sorrows or memories of past experiences. That is, the mind then reaches a state of concentration, devoid of all distracting thoughts. It is then steeped in ineffable joy at the sight of the snow divinely beautiful in its own right, and led forward into a state of samadhi beyond all doubts and fancies. This experience is common to all, without any distinction of the learned and the ignorant, the pious and the impious, the one who knows the Truth and the one who does not. However, only the sage who has realized God can distinguish his bliss as truly *satvik* and divine. Only he can identify his concentration with the divine trance great *yogis* have claimed to have achieved. *Satvik* joy is something that can be attained

only through long and arduous discipline. At Gomukha one reaches it without effort. The heavenly bliss that one comes to experience in the midst of such natural beauty, is infinitely superior to the common pleasures of the *rajasik* type. How can the *rajasik* pleasure, occasioned by the sight of a flirtatious woman, rival the *Satvik* bliss of visiting a real *mahatma*, who is the very embodiment of peace? Who do not know that the one is the source of never-ending disasters while the other is the fountain-head of untold blessings? There is pleasure when one beholds the beautiful, God-made peaks of the Himalayas; there is pleasure, also, in witnessing a man-made, obscene film. But the differences between them should not be forgotten: the one originates *satvik* joy that leads God-ward, the other produces *rajasik* pleasure, which leads man away from Him.

Tranquillity is truth; truth is beauty; beauty is bliss and bliss is Divinity—this seems to be the lesson loudly preached by each particle of snow, stone, each petal and grass blade as is bound to strike a man of enlightenment. Then it follows inevitably that negation of this transmigratory world consisting of the agent, the means, and the act. When I say that this beauty, at once natural and Divine, is a surer means to enable the mind to rise in repose in the state of boundless tranquillity—speaking from experience—it is possible that men of erudition, proud of their mastery over different sciences and *yogis* proud of their laborious mystic practices may oppose it; nevertheless, it is an unshakable truth. It is my thirst for the nectar of tranquillity that drives me to wrestle with the difficulties of travel in these inaccessible fastnesses and reach that spot every year. It is this

tranquillity, this bliss that adepts seek in the bustle of cities through long processes of meditative practice and the consequent dwindling of the innate tendencies of the mind. Tranquillity is the innate nature of all; it is a self-existent reality. Therefore there need be no striving to produce it. Where is the need for effort to bring into being what IS ? Though it is, in ignorance, referred to as non-existent, though tranquillity is own inborn nature, being wrapped up by agitation, it is not experienced. Abolish this agitation and tranquillity reveals itself. Effort, then, is needed not to generate tranquillity but to banish agitation. The mass of light, the Sun's disc, is concealed by clouds. The clouds only need move away and immediately the solar disc which appeared to be non-existent, reveals itself. Here there is no question of producing the solar disc and making it shine. In the same way, with the cessation of agitation tranquillity rises (like the Sun). But what is the nature of this agitation ?

It is nothing but the transmigratory existence consisting of agency, relation and act or of name, form and act. How ? The real nature of tranquillity is experienced in dreamless slumber even by morons. Later there is waking from that state, that is to say " I, I " asserts itself for the first time as agency. Then desire and so forth begin to operate. Next, the sense organs like the eye, the ear, etc., awake and operate in regard to their objects. Together with that, crop up attitudes, affirmative or negative, and concepts such as happiness, unhappiness, etc. It is the conglomeration of the egoistic sense and so forth and their activities, thus engendered, that is known widely as distraction and that is agitation. This transmigratory existence is nothing but the summation of these discrete

masses and their operations. The physical organism, transmigratory existence, name, form, distraction, pain, agitation—these are but the synonyms denoting one and the same thing. Even so, tranquillity, truth, beauty, bliss, self, God, Brahman—these are but different names of one and the same Thing. The source of this agitation or intranquillity is well-known to be the inner organ which assumes such form as “ I ”, “ this ”, “ knower ”, “ known ”. In brief, agitation is the various fabrications of the inner organ and tranquillity is their cessation.

Let there be a duality, once the fabrications of the mind have been suppressed or let there not be, what is certain is, that is the peerless state of tranquillity. Let a tigress roar terribly in front of a sage merged in profound meditation or let a *houri* sing sweetly before him ; his state of tranquillity is unaffected by them all, because the mind that grasps does not operate in regard to its objects, but remains concentrated and so tranquil. Therefore, though there are external objects they are as good as non-existent and thus no longer promote agitation. Again, that is the reason why certain teachers have laid it down as a rule that by liquidating not the world created by God, but the world created by man, that is, by undermining the fabrications of the mind of man, certain tranquillity is attained. The conclusion of all spiritual sciences and of all great sages is that agitation or transmigratory existence is the summation of all possible relations between subject and object ; while liberation or tranquillity is the cessation of such summations. In the restricted state of the mind the veil, namely, the objective complex, disappears and then, like the sun with the disappearance of the clouds,

the supreme truth of tranquillity shines forth vividly. Though this ultimate truth has been indicated in manifold ways by various philosophers, there is no doubt about its unity. A real difference cannot result from difference of labels or processes of thought. What has been established thus far is that high-souled sages attain that unsurpassed tranquillity which is untainted by association with a variety of names and forms. They do so by attaining the stage of the restricted mind after, through discipline, discarding the distractions of the mind and sense organs and body. Now rises the question what the state of the sages is when the body, senses and the mind function. Is theirs a plight of wretchedness full of agitation, such as that of the ignorant? Never. In the midst of agitation they experience, without a break, internal tranquillity. Since the principle of tranquillity always shines forth in their minds, never is tranquillity hidden from them. How can there be darkness in light? How can there be agitations in tranquillity? Don't ask, how bliss can dwell in pain. When a man stands waist deep in the cool water of a deep pond in summer when all around it is scorching heat, simultaneously half his body feels the heat while the other half coolness. Seetha dwelling under the *asoka* tree in Lanka, surrounded by ogresses, is said to have, at once, experienced the torments of hell and consequent upon her constant recollection of her lord, the quintessence of bliss. Even so, the sages also may find unavoidable the activities of the sense organs and the mind, impelled by past actions as well as the consequent sensations of pain and pleasure. Even in the midst of such deep distraction the great souls who have firmly realized the essence of tranquillity will continue to experience

it without a moment's break for, such tranquillity shines in their mind. When we say the supreme truth manifests itself or tranquillity is experienced we mean the same thing. Famous is the utterance of the teacher (Sankara) 'निमेषाद्यं न तिष्ठन्ति वृत्तिं ब्रह्ममयीं विना ॥' which means "Not for half a moment do the sages remain without the experience of Brahman".

In other words, their mind takes on the form of Brahman which leaves them not even for the briefest time. To say that Brahman shines forth, is the same as that mind assumes the form of Brahman. In the midst of external activities the mind, no doubt, assumes from moment to moment, the forms of objects. Nevertheless, what is extremely difficult for an ordinary type of knower is achieved by eminent sages, namely, to keep unaffected the mental grasp of the truth of Brahman. Just as the body-bound souls never miss the experience of the body even in the midst of the uttermost distractions, so the shining forth of Brahman is experienced without any difficulty by the knowers of Brahman who delight in Brahman and who are non-different from Brahman. The fact is, it is easier for them to do so. It becomes their very nature. For such sages who are hardly less than God Himself, and who habitually find themselves on the summit of such experience, there is concentration of mind both when the mind is restricted and when it operates towards objects. Though, thus, both the states of concentration and distraction are alike to them, it is assumed, from the point of view of duality, that in one state, there is the apprehension of objects while, in the other, there is none of it. Let us, however, leave it at that and come back to our main theme.

It is not surprising if other *sadhus* wonder at

or even envy my good fortune in sojourning at Gomukha every year, enjoying the supermundane pleasure arising out of the beauty of the snow and through it the absolute bliss, originating in the beauty of the soul. To carry food-stuffs, etc., up the difficult route from Gangotri, is indeed a laborious task but I used to manage it quite easily, by the grace of Mother Ganga. Floods in the river render communications easier ; similarly, rising of the tide of love converts rugged lanes into high roads. Two or three *sadhus* and one or two Brahmin youths who officiate as priests of Ganga at Gangotri, were in the habit of passing some time with me every year at Gomukha, out of their devotion to me. It was therefore necessary to provide ourselves not only with some quantity of food, but also a few small tents. Everyone lived by himself so as not to disturb each other's solitude—some in their tents ; others, in the small caves among the rocks.

However, few people, educated or ignorant, venture to pass a couple of days here. Among these good souls that visit Gangotri, only a very few, out of their inordinate desire to amass rare merit, risk the immense hardships on the way, and reach Gomukha. Even they take just one dip in the ice-cold water of the Ganga in its uppermost reaches and immediately embark upon their return journey. How can common people have the courage to pass a night in this unearthly region which, in spite of all its supernatural beauty, strikes terror into their hearts like a fierce battle field ? What provisions can they have here ? Yet, two types of people, do pass days and days in this region—the mountain shepherds, and European explorers. The shepherds may be said to

possess as much power of endurance as their sheep themselves. They bring with them no tents—no provisions—not even the almost indispensable woollen clothing. With no firewood to kindle a fire, they pass their days and nights with their flocks, on the open, snow-covered plains, perpetually exposed to rain and snow. Even the *Digambaras*, renowned for their powers of endurance, will be dismayed at the easy and untroubled way of life among these poor mountain shepherds. On the contrary, the explorers who come to conquer the heights yet unclimbed by man, spend lakhs of rupees to pass a month or two in the region. Regular meals are provided for them ; they get all their favourite dishes ; they eat as much as they like. Living thus in lordly style, they pursue their researches. Compared with such life, the life of the shepherds is simplicity itself. As a rule, we visited the region every year ; so the mountain shepherds were well acquainted with us. Being Hindu Kshatriyas, they used to supply us, in a spirit of deep devotion, plenty of goat's milk, etc. Need I explain what a great help this was to us at such immense heights among the snowy mountains ?

My usual abode there is a beautiful grove of small birch trees, just below Gomukh. Beyond that wood, no kind of firewood is available and so only people who can put up with extreme cold, can survive in the region. In the world, the power of endurance, as well as the powers of physical and mental control, are but relative. Comparatively, one may have it in a higher degree than another, that is all. All powers find their perfection in the Supreme Being alone—so say the *sastras*. Only thoughtful, wise endurance and powers of that type help us in spiritual life. The

endurance of the buffalo and the cheerfulness of the dog are not born of discretion and naturally, they do not contribute to spirituality. A poor man starves, simply because he cannot help it ; another, in the midst of plenty, abstains from food deliberately as an act of austerity : in both cases, there is starvation, but in the latter case alone there is any merit. He alone deserves to be called a *Tapaswi* who puts up with all sufferings in the pursuit of the paths of penance which lead to Divine Grace and spiritual elevation after ascertaining those paths with the help of the *sastras*, *acharyas* or tradition. In view of this truth, we may claim our endurance to be more meritorious than that of the shepherds, though their powers were of a much higher degree than ours.

The little wood where we encamped was like a forest Princess, decorated with multicoloured flowers, climbers, grasses and bowers of rare, celestial loveliness. Perhaps the ancients named this extensive mountain tract near Gomukha as "Pushpa Vasa" because the region is so rich in beautiful flowers at all times. Wandering here and there over the lovely plain I used to enjoy daily the beauty of the flowers as well as the beauty of the snowy landscape. Bears roamed around our camp fearlessly all through night and day like sentinels on duty and rested freely wherever they liked. In that divine region where we enjoyed unbroken bliss both day and night, even ferocious wild animals like bears caused us neither alarm nor sorrow. It may be mentioned in this connexion, that the red bears, found in the region, did not do serious harm to human beings, perhaps because they were unaccustomed to attacking them. Another singular experience also seems worth mentioning. At times, both day

and night, certain voices could be heard above us, but quite close to us, carrying on conversation. Sometimes the sounds were distinct ; sometimes indistinct. The elderly people, in their unquestioning faith, hold that the sounds are the voices of the *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas* and such semi-divine beings who carry on conversation among themselves ; the younger and more critical people explain these voices away as meaningless sounds produced by the winds as they strike against the holes and crevices in the rocks. The view of the elders is not to be laughed away ; it deserves consideration.

Alakapuri, the capital of the *Yakshas* is not far from here : it is close by. If old people believe that the *Yakshas* and *Gandharvas* who can move about through the air freely at will, go about the solitary suburbs of their capital, what is there illogical in it ? The faith of the mountain folk in the Himalayan region, seems to be firm and irrevocable in the existence of *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas*, ghosts, goblins, etc. It is a common experience of the young men of these mountain tribes to be attacked by lustful *Yaksha* damsels, if they happen to meet in solitude. Let those who believe *Yakshas*, etc., to be merely creatures of imagination, continue to hold so. But how can we expect the mountaineers, who see such supernatural beings face to face and deal with them personally, to discard their faith and accept the arguments of the unbelievers ? Let God Himself decide whether there are *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas*, *Devas*, etc. One thing, however, is certain ; people still believe, following old traditions, not only high up among the Himalayas, but also on the plains of India, as well as in other countries, that such beings do exist.

In the neighbourhood of Gomukha, there were thus several objects calculated to strike terror into the hearts of common people—bears, *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas*, overhanging avalanches, masses of snow, etc., etc. But, in spite of them all, we, sanyasins, felt there supremely happy. It is a fact admitted by all wisemen that, for all the ills of life, there is no panacea so effective as the realization. 'सर्वं ब्रह्ममयं जगत्.' Who has not heard those famous words from the Upanishad 'आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान् न बिभेति कुतश्चन' No fear however great, no sorrow however mighty, can upset the everlasting peace of one who has realized Brahman. Those who have seen God see Him everywhere and at all times. The seer is himself God. Then why should he fear himself? How could he be affected by sorrow? There is nothing strange if we, whose minds were continuously occupied with the thought of God and who saw, beyond all doubt, that all movable and immovable beings are but so many forms of God, were not frightened by the objects that terrify the ignorant who identify themselves with their bodies. In short, we were not distracted by the terrors and anxieties which haunt the minds of common people whose love of the body and considerations of personal safety set their imagination feverishly busy. At no time did we experience there anything but cheerfulness. There may be people who wonder how we were able to preserve fearlessness and cheerfulness in the midst of terrors. To them there is this brief reply : Only a bird that flies through the air, knows the nature of flight ; similarly, only a *sanyasin* who travels in the world of spirit, can know the nature of his movement. That is, the materialistic people living in the outer

world can know nothing about the secrets of the inner world. Among wisemen there is a well-known saying, " Only the knower knows the knower ".

There may still be persons who ask, " what is the meaning of saying that those who have obtained the vision of God see him always and everywhere? What is God's shape? What is the form of His vision?" It is impossible to answer such questions at once with words. How can one describe the true form of God in words and make others understand It? Even those who have actually seen It fail to describe It completely. Descriptions, however detailed or extensive, cannot hope to touch all Its aspects. The way to know It, is by actual experience and there is no other way. The *srutis* and learned men have described it in a thousand ways—as the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Supreme Limit of *Aiswarya*, the Creator-preserved-destroyer, the shoreless, honey-like, Ocean of Sweetness, the Light that renders billions of suns dark by comparison, the Inner Being that controls all beings movable and immovable, the Embodiment of Truth-Knowledge-Bliss, the One All-pervading like space, One without sound, touch or form—so on and so forth. Indeed, we may admit that all these descriptions are descriptions of the Supreme Soul and to some extent help to convey the notion of what It is, but all these fall far short of giving men a complete idea ; for It is far above all description. We cannot circumscribe It with words. Like a fruit that floats on the surface of water, the *Paramatma* rises above the floods of eloquence. Howsoever high the water rises, the fruit still floats over it. Similarly, the supreme soul keeps on rising above the swelling words ; It is never submerged.

We have had elaborate descriptions of Lord Vishnu—He has four hands ; He is dark blue like the clouds ; His eyes are like the petals of the lotus, etc., etc. But however much we describe Him, we cannot comprehend His beauty, except by seeing Him with our own eyes. The descriptions are all right. There is nothing wrong with them. Lord Vishnu's hands are four in number, not two, or eight. His complexion is dark blue, not white or red. But how can these pieces of knowledge help man to apprehend the charming beauty of His Divine form ? None, except His sole devotees who have seen Him with their own eyes, can know the celestial splendour of that Divine vision. Similarly, the supreme soul is beyond words ; It is open only to personal experience. If that is so, shall we say that all the varied descriptions of the *Paramatma*, attempted by the *srutis* and *smritis* are in vain ? Certainly not. Who says they are in vain ? If they help towards the realization of Truth, let them do so. I do not deny the help rendered by the discussion of Truth by the *sastras* and learned men. If God is thus beyond description, how can the vision of God be describable ? Since the form of a pot can be described, it is possible to describe, also, the vision of the pot. The vision of an indescribable thing must necessarily be indescribable. What is the instrument with which one may perceive the Supreme Soul ? With our eye we perceive pots, etc. With the mind we perceive desire, anger, etc. But with neither, shall we perceive It which is beyond name and form. The ancient rishis who had realized Truth describe It as beyond words and mind. Like God, the vision of God too is beyond words. When the mind assumes the form of a pot, it becomes the perception of the

pot. Like that, when the mind, rising above name and form, assumes the state of Brahman it is called the perception of Brahman, by the Vedantins. But Brahman has no form. It is formless. Who can perceive the formless Brahman ? How can the limited mind comprehend the formless and unlimited Brahman ? It may be argued that when the mind is free from all its functions of imagination, it intuits Brahman, pure, one without a second, which shines forth in its own splendour without a veil ; then it is futile to maintain that there is a perceiver and a perception of Brahman. It will then follow that the intuition of Brahman has nothing in common with phenomenal perceptions of the objective world, that, in fact, the perception of Brahman is the basic experience of the non-objective. Such are the conclusions of Vedanta. Even as God is, His perception also is surpassingly marvellous and transcendent. Hence it is impossible to grasp either from mere descriptions thereof. On the other hand, both of them have to be immediately intuited. That is the upshot of this context.

While I was, thus, passing a larger number of days at Gomukha, it was my custom to visit the mouth of the cave and bathe in the holy water of the Ganga again and again. It is especially worth mentioning that even a dip here in the ice-cold water is a penance beyond the powers of the common man. The orthodox Hindus believe that even a single dip in the Gomukhi water is sufficient to wash away all one's sins and fulfil the purpose of one's life. It is their firm conviction that a single drop of Ganga water, collected from Prayag or even lower down the river, poured into the mouth of a dying man is enough to save his soul. If that is so, who can estimate the value of a drop of

water from the celestial stream taken from where it first touches the earth, as it courses down from Mt. Kailas ? Who can then measure the merit of bathing in the holy stream of Gomukhi or drinking its sacred waters ? If a single bath is so precious, who can calculate the value of a number of baths ? It is indeed a heroic act to venture into this region, traversing dangerous ups and downs and passing under or over huge boulders of rock at the imminent risk of being buried alive by mighty avalanches coming down from the great glaciers above. But I experienced no fear or hardship in visiting the spot again and again and taking the holy bath, because of the abundance of my faith and devotion. My heart was, on those occasions, filled with eagerness and joy. It was with unflagging faith and devotion that I visited the place over and over again and had my bath and worship. In those years when it was not possible for me to stay on for a number of days, I had to be content with a single bath at Gomukha. Seeing how the Lord, who pays for every act of every person, will be hard put to it to reward adequately even a single bath at the holy place, this sadhu is left to wonder how He is going to reward him who has bathed and worshipped at Gomukha ever so many times during ever so many years !

SREE GOMUKHAM—II

Our far-sighted *acharyas* who lived long, long ago, have enjoined upon the people of *Kaliyuga*, a life of devotion to the best of their ability, perhaps because they foresaw that in this terrible age, characterised by an insatiable thirst for carnal pleasures

and polluted by sensuality, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to practise *Nishkama Karma* or carry on *Dhyana* or *Samadhi* in a strict, scientific way. As is well-known, the repetition of holy names is the easiest step in a life of devotion. Any worldling, any sinner, can cry out “O Siva ! O Krishna ! !” For people engaged in the relentless pursuit of worldly pleasures it is verily impossible to shed all desires or set their minds on God or even make them meditative. So, in this Age, pursuit of *Bhakti* is the easiest as well as the most important means to reach the goal. There can be no difference of opinion on this point. In the early stages, repetition of holy names and prayer, the singing of hymns and listening to religious discourses help the love of God to sprout up and as it grows and flourishes, the uncontrollable craving for sensual pleasures is tamed, and men gradually become introspective. Their minds begin to flow continuously towards the Lord, and experience pleasure in doing so. If the *jnanis* find their joy in meditating upon formless Brahman, the *Bhaktas* revel in the contemplation of the Divine form. Of course there are not two gods, one with form and another without it. God is one and so a *Bhakta* who loves the Divine form intensely to the exclusion of everything else, has nothing more to gain. Let no one be under the illusion that the direct perception of *Parabrahma* who has no form and no attributes, alone leads to salvation, that the *Bhakta* has not attained it, that he is yet to achieve it and that until he does so, the purpose of his life remains unfulfilled. If God has such a form without attributes—a form whose perception alone will lead to salvation—will not He disclose it to His true devotee one day or other and lead him on to the supreme goal ?

The seeker of *moksha* should, therefore, refrain from indulging in wordy quarrels regarding the form or the formlessness of Brahman. If he is a *bhakta* let him concentrate his mind upon the form of the Lord ; if he is a *jnani* let him try to acquire steadfast knowledge of the formless, through earnest study and discipline. The supreme, the ultimate, goal of *Bhakti* and *Jnana* is the same. There is no doubt it is *Nirvana* through the realization of Brahman. Certainly, those people who move slowly, step by step, towards the goal uttering the holy names of God in full faith, are immensely more fortunate than the unqualified persons who tumble down headlong into perdition during their attempts to scale the difficult and dangerous heights of *Brahma-jnana*. The path of *Bhakti* is the royal road to the presence of God. It is open to all types of people, whether learned or ignorant. It is also the easiest to follow. That is why the great seers of God, both inside and outside the Vedic pale, have recommended it whole-heartedly as the noblest route to the great goal, popularised it among the people tortured by the threefold sufferings of life. If there is God, there is no doubt, He must be omniscient, as well as omnipotent. He can assume any form in which his devotee worships Him and bless him, granting him a vision in that particular form. There is nothing illogical or unscientific in the idea. Nor is it contrary to experience. If those who worship the formless Brahman presume to ridicule the *Bhakta* when he cries out “ O Lord of Kailas, O Lord of Vaikunta, save us, save us, O Lord ”, they only make themselves ridiculous.

In philosophy, the cause of love and the cause of knowledge, as well as the form of love and the form

of knowledge are discussed separately, yet the ultimate goal the followers of the seemingly divergent paths reach is one and the same. If that is so, it is those who deride the *Bhaktas* as misled fools that deserve to be laughed at. To abandon all love of worldly pleasures and immerse one's mind completely in the love of God, can be the consummation only of great *punya*. Whatever be the form of God, only a mind which has freed itself totally from worldly entanglements, can be filled with Divine love. For people whose *vasanas* (inborn dispositions) have been washed away by the flood of Divine love, the *advaitic* knowledge cannot be far, if at all they want it. Believe firmly in the existence of God—believe that He is—believe that He is the Father of the Universe who preserves everything—then, it does not matter in what form you worship Him, on what pedestal, or in what world you place Him : then, there is no doubt, the Omniscient One, immanent in everything and everywhere, will bestow His grace upon you. When a *Bhakta*, filled with the longing to see his Beloved, cries out as if his heart would break, “ My Lord, My Lord, O *Paramatma*, when shall I behold Thy lovely form with these eyes of mine ? ” only people who have tasted the Divine sweetness of that intense love, can understand it. Seeing that *Bhakti* and *Jnana* are equally good, wise ones should never waste their precious time arguing excitedly about the superiority of the one or the other. What wise men ought to do is to adopt one of these according to their qualifications and inclinations, pursue it steadily, see God and thus fulfil the purpose of this invaluable human birth.

Those who possess such love of God, love such solitary places as Gomukha, whichever proclaim the

glory of the Lord. Parted from her lover, his beloved sits in the corner of her lonely chamber where everything reminds her of him, thinking of him in secret. To her even the sound of a single foot-step seems intolerable. She hates every distraction which disturbs the contemplation of her lord. Even so, the *bhakta* hates all interruptions to his prayers, and all distractions which break up his continuous contemplation of God whom he loves most intensely. For such *bhaktas*, can there be a place more congenial than the solitary, peaceful Gomukha? There is nothing here which does not help the enjoyment of contemplation and prayer. What is here to hinder it? This solitary place is extremely suitable to people who see God, who love God or who meditate upon God, for they require no external assistance in their activities, but a cultured mind. Solitude serves them best to perfect their discipline. This Gomukha region is unrivalled not only in its perpetual solitude but also its clear, pure, spiritual atmosphere and so it aids the *bhakta* as well as the *jnani* to reach easily the state of *samadhi* which is the culmination of *jnana*, *bhakti* and *dhyana*. But, for the *karma yogi* who is trying to perform his duties as acts of devotion, without any desire for reward, this place is not suited so well. He can bathe here devoutly, gain God's grace and thereby destroy sins and acquire mental purity. He can reinforce his faith in God by observing the glory of the Creator which manifests itself everywhere in this Divine land, but unlike the other three types of *yogis* he cannot afford to stay on in this region and at the same time carry on his duties as a *karma yogi* for a *karma yogi* has to depend necessarily upon external objects for his activities. In the view of ancient

acharyas, *karma yoga* means the performance of the duties like *Agnihotra* enjoined by the *srutis* and *smritis* according to the rules of *Varna ashrama dharma*. Such actions must be undertaken in a spirit of dedication, without any desire for reward. The educated moderns, however, interpret *karma yoga* differently. They say, it was all right that in ancient days, when the struggle for existence was by no means so keen as it is today, when all were good and prosperous and life was like a song, our forefathers worshipped the gods with *yajnas* (sacrifices) and thereby purified their minds. But our Age is different from theirs ; the population is going up by leaps and bounds ; the struggle for existence is getting keener and keener everyday. Now it is the visible, miserable fellowmen who deserve our attention and demand our service, more than the invisible gods. So, the *Karma yoga* of today is the all round, selfless service of humanity directed towards their common good and not the performance of the useless and out moded *yajnas* of the Antediluvian Vedic type. Such arguments are not to be laughed away. Though the worship of God is essentially the same at all times and in all places, the modes and materials of worship may differ from place to place and from time to time. We cannot reject, as something quixotic, the idea that in the *karma yoga* which consists in the worship of God by good deeds, the acts may vary according to time and place. Their contention, that even as God's grace is not affected by the difference in flowers and offerings used for worship, *karma yoga* will not be vitiated and Divine Grace will not be withheld on account of changes in the acts of worship, appears to be quite reasonable. The belief in the eternal character of

the rules of *Varna ashrama dharma* and even of the Vedas from which these rules are supposed to be deduced, has almost disappeared even from the very birth place of *Varna ashrama dharma*. This has happened mainly because the modern Hindus are educated to value intellect more than faith and tradition. The orthodox view, that birth determines *varna*, (caste) that it is a sin to adopt the duties assigned to other *varnas*, and that one should for ever confine oneself to such duties as are prescribed by his *varna*, is now pooh-poohed by the educated people all over modern India. Nowadays, it is impossible to find among educated Indians, people who will patiently listen to such outmoded ideas as that Bharata alone is the land of *karma*, only the Brahmins and other *Varna-ashramis* of this country are entitled to *karma*, that the *Yavanas*, *Hunas*, *Mlechas* and other foreign peoples have no right at all to follow the path of *karma*, etc., etc. The moderns hold that every person is entitled to follow any course of life he or she likes, selfishly or selflessly, according to one's own liking, whatever be one's *Varna* and whichever be one's birth place. On the contrary, if the rules of *Sanatana dharma* are strictly observed, only a Kshatriya is entitled to govern ; only a Brahmin can pursue higher knowledge ; the Sudra can only serve. In that case, to what are the unfortunate *Yavanas*, *Hunas* (Europeans) and *Mlechas* (Non-Hindus), who are all beyond the pale of Hinduism, entitled ? Their lot must be pitiable indeed ! It is no wonder if the educated, liberty-loving people of our generation refuse even to listen to such views. The general rule of our Age is that every one is entitled to do any kind of work. Every man (or woman) has equal right to perform what

appears to him (her) as good for himself (herself) and good for the world. Only, he must have acquired the necessary skill to do his work well. The one principle accepted by the people of our time, whether they are *dharmikas*, or *adharmikas* is that the possibility of material benefit and the possession of the necessary skill are the sole criteria in determining one's profession and not the accident of birth. By the word *dharmika*, here, I mean one who believes in the existence of God, and performs one's duties selflessly as acts of worship under the conviction that the attainment of Brahman is man's supreme object in life ; by *Adharmika* on the contrary, I denote one who does not believe in God or in the attainment of Brahman or even in the existence of another world beyond the present—one who thinks that the enjoyment of worldly pleasures is the *summum bonum* of life and makes sacrifices and undergoes sufferings, unselfishly, working always for the material progress of mankind. These *adharmikas* are atheists and so, in spite of their ceaseless labours in their humanitarian undertakings according to their own lights, they do not deserve to be designated by the holy name ' *Karma yogis* '. In this context, however, I do not propose to discuss such people (who are nowadays on the increase) or their tragedy. The other two groups, *i.e.*, those who follow *Karma yoga* in the orthodox sense, and those who serve the world selflessly in accordance with the modern conception, are both theists and *Karma yogis*. Though these groups differ in their views on one's duty and one's qualifications for the performance of it, they share a firm belief in the existence of a Supreme Being who is the source of all creation and who metes out rewards and punishments according to individual

deservings. They worship Him incessantly with their work and it is to be trusted that they will reach Him at last, having gradually purified their minds. Of course, it may be argued that *agnihotra* and other orthodox acts of worship may not be particularly helpful in bringing about world welfare, but the orthodox, too, are behind nobody in their faith, and in their love and adoration of God. They too must, therefore, be entitled, not to a tragic but a happy end. The blind nature of one's faith, narrowness of thought, feebleness of *dharmik* sense, failure of one's action to compass universal good, or their limitations—these may retard the progress of a *Karma yogi* but he cannot end tragically like the atheist who trusts solely to the world here below. Enough of this digression ; let us return to the subject proper.

As all types of *Karma yogis* have to depend on numerous external things for the performance of their duties, Sri Gomukha is by no means fitted for them. For lack of wealth and absence of men, etc., it is impossible to perform the *panchayajnas* and other daily and incidental rites, or engage in modern activities like the spread of education, work of Government, agriculture and commerce and the encouragement of arts—activities which are supposed to increase the sum-total of human happiness. Naturally, persons who love a life of action, with or without the desire for its fruits, and people who hanker after the pleasures of the senses, are scared at the thought of this place, perpetually quiet like the state of *Advaita* without either action or the accessories of action. 'द्वितियाद्वै भयं भवति' (From the second, fear originates) runs the Vedic saying : fear originates in duality. Oneness puts fear out of the question. Although it is the dual

conception and the consequent activities of the senses that produce fear and sorrow, and though the place where there are no sense objects and sense activities ought to produce, not fear but fearlessness, the devotees of *Karma yoga* experience, where they ought to enjoy supreme pleasure through fearlessness, only fear-born distraction and sorrow, even as Sree Gaudapadacharya derisively observed, 'अभये भयदर्शनं' (Finding fear where there is no room for fear). In them such fear is not unreasonable, since they are not, at the moment, qualified to enjoy the eternal peace which consists in freedom from all activity. It has been quite usual with both Indians and Foreigners, noted for vast erudition and leadership, to discuss with me (who lead a life of 'non-action' at Gangotri or Gomukhi) questions like the nature of non-action and its advantages, often in a critical spirit, but not without faith. I have been able to satisfy them fully with appropriate answers, since I have been long accustomed to answering similar questions after analysing them critically.

The dualism of action, cause and effect is itself *Samsara*. Freedom from it is freedom from *Samsara*. If action is *Samsara*, non-action is the cessation of *Samsara*. So even the uneducated can easily perceive that the states of waking and dreaming which involve action, cause and effect, are *Samsara* whereas the state of deep slumber (*sushupti*) is the cessation of *Samsara*. If a man, out of his love for action (even if he has no desire for the fruit thereof) does not long for the everlasting peace of non-action in this life itself, out of that love, may wish for a fresh lease of life after the fall of the present body. How can one suppose that a seeker after Truth, who knows

that this worldly life of birth, disabling old age and death is misery, that the escape from it is *Moksha* and that *Moksha* is the same as *Brahman* (which is homogeneous at all times, immovable and eternally peaceful) and who having known It, sticks resolutely to It, or endeavours to stick to It, will find delight in the continuance of the dualistic view and the tension of conflicting action resulting from it, while fearing the eternal peace of non-action ? If what he prefers is *Karma*, which consists in the activities of the mind and the senses, can he really long for *Moksha* which means the cessation of all action ? Is it not more probable that he would prefer entering new bodies for further action ? If he does not desire for a state unfettered by the body, why should he undertake the Herculean labours required for the acquisition of the Knowledge of Truth, for the destruction of inborn tendencies and the annihilation of *Karma* ? That means, a region of non-action like Gomukha, though a source of terror to people of action, becomes a dear refuge to lovers of supreme peace, whose *vasanas* have been uprooted and whose minds have attained quiescence, even like Brahman Itself. If some who had attained the state of Brahman (that state of non-action) had yet laboured in the cause of universal happiness, it is not for any one to approve or disapprove of it. Who can overcome one's own nature ? What I mean is only this : even a *jnani* will have to experience pleasures and pains according to the measure of his engagement in action ; the experience of such pleasures and pains is itself *Samsara* ; and that the state of supreme peace, the state of *Moksha*, is altogether untouched by *Samsara*.

Two miles above Gomukha, between the two

glaciers, Meru and Gangotri, there extends a great plain called "Thapovanam". It is an extremely beautiful spot that captivates the mind by its natural charms. On several occasions, while I was staying near Gomukha I used to visit the place and sit there for hours together enjoying the splendid spectacle. My heart was filled with wonder and pleasure as I sat watching the golden-hued, rocky peaks called Sivalinga and Bhageerathi Parvat, rising on either bank, close by, the long ranges of snow-clad mountains on both sides, dazzling in their silver radiance, the extensive plain named "Nandanavanam", opposite Thapovanam and the famous glacier, "Chathurangi" along whose bank runs the route to Badrinath. It was with the utmost reluctance that I left the wonderful landscape with its heaps of snow and snow-covered peaks glittering on all sides like mountains of gold and silver and returned to my abode, consoling the mind with the assurance that I would return to the Sivalinga *maidan* next year, to enjoy the landscape again. A little beyond Thapovanam stretches a long and deep-blue lake. If the day was sunny, I enjoyed a leisurely bath in its pellucid waters and then had a hearty meal which had been previously prepared and brought with me. On such occasions my mind was so full of joy that I was completely oblivious of this world as well as the other. Of course, there are several such lakes along the Gangotri glacier, but as they are in the middle of the stream, they are neither easily accessible nor quite so suitable for bathing, etc. On occasions, I proceeded still farther and reached the bank of the beautiful glacier known as Keerthi. There I spent hours, appreciating the sights all around, forgetting even the passage of time. Along the Keerthi

glacier, the distance to peak Kedarnath is only five miles but who can cross that dangerous terrain filled with masses of snow? In 1947, a body of Swiss mountain climbers made an attempt to negotiate the passage and with great difficulty proceeded three or four miles; but then they were compelled to turn back and retrace their steps in despair. The famous Mt. Sumeru is only seven miles from here, along the broad Gangotri glacier. Some of the modern geographers believe that Mahameru, the legendary Mountain of Gold, is identical with Sumeru, and advance several arguments in support of their view. Once, during my sojourn at Gomukha, I crossed the broad and dangerous Gangotri glacier and reached the confluence of the Chathurangi glacier on the other side; sitting there, for a long time, I enjoyed the Divine, reddish glow of the snow around. Enterprising people from here can reach Badrinath in two or three days, after a laborious march along the Chathurangi glacier.

During my visits to Gomukha, I some times spent several days in the birch forests just below the place on the banks of the Bhrigupatha glacier which shone with a reddish radiance. The neighbouring forests are notorious as the sporting ground of fierce bears. But overlooking such terrors, I often climbed up to the masses of snow and roamed all over the place alone in the evening, forgetting myself in the enjoyment of the wonderful loveliness. It is perhaps because the seeds are scattered here by God's own hand, watered and nursed by Him, that in these forests there flourish strange herbs and shrubs, creepers and climbers, and trees found nowhere else in the world. It was a pleasant pastime of mine during evening

rambles to pluck many wonderful small flowers and bind them together into bouquets. Perhaps, Devendra himself may be longing to wander in these forests among these glaciers ; and to pluck these rare, divinely beautiful flowers and enjoy them holding them in his own hand. But, how can Indra have that good luck, in spite of his being singularly fortunate, in spite of his being Lord of Heaven ? Here I may make special mention of the fact that I never forgot, whatever else I might forget, to take with me on my return to Gangotri a large quantity of rare flowers, some big like the *Brahma Kamalam* (a large sized land-lotus of the shape of the ordinary lotus, growing high up among the Himalayas) and some small, like the musk-flower.

Once, in August 1941, while I was staying at Gomukhi, one of my zealous devotees, Sree Vallabha Rama Sarma—a learned Gujarati Brahmin, a skilled physician, a thorough Vedantin, and publisher of my Sanskrit books—with a party of highly educated young friends, made his appearance there, quite unexpectedly. They came just to meet me. On their arrival, my mind as well as theirs, was filled with wonder and pleasure. Till now they had only heard about my way of life among the great and solitary heights of the Himalayas and my fondness for them ; now they saw it with their own eyes and were satisfied and pleased. My visitors were products of modern English education but were not without faith in God and high-souled men. So they humbly requested me to give them a message as advice to the common people, as if for publication in newspapers. Accordingly I put down some of my thoughts in the form of a message. I pointed out that only a very

few people in the world have the great good fortune to enjoy supreme happiness in this grief-stricken world, through a life like mine ; that the common people, whose minds are dragged along by innate tendencies and weighed down by the burden of worldly cares, are not entitled to taste even a drop of this great peace ; that, even as it is impossible to enjoy royal luxuries by desire alone without the necessary means such as wealth and position, for common people without the necessary devotion to truth, eradication of inborn tendencies, attainment of quiescence, etc., it is impossible to attain the highest spiritual peace by desire alone ; the first duty of the common people therefore is, not to throw up their duties and take to a life of solitude, but to lead a life of *Nishkama Karma* for the purification of their minds. On getting this message and taking the holy bath at Gomukha, my visitors hurriedly departed, as if they were aware of their disqualification too well to stay on.

On several occasions when I had taken no tent with me and had found no rock-caves or other accommodation, I passed my days merrily under the shade of birch trees. From personal experience I can record here that on those occasions the shades of trees afforded me far more comfort than well-furnished houses. How can that be ? When disagreeableness ends, that is itself agreeableness. That disagreeable feeling is sorrow and agreeable feeling pleasure, is a well-known scientific fact. That means, the end of adverse sorrow is the beginning of pleasure. The greater the sorrow, the greater is the pleasure on its elimination. In the rainy season, the rain pours down. The cold near the masses of snow gets unbearable in the rain. At such moments, in that

forbidding region, shades of the trees appear more comfortable than luxurious mansions. Travellers, groping their way in the heavy rain, shivering with cold as in a fit of ague, gather dry twigs and light a fire in the shade, sitting close round it, to warm themselves. The pleasure they feel at such moments is beyond the reach even of a King of Kings resting on a bed-stead of gold in his magnificent palace. The reason is, in the total absence of adverse circumstances, the feeling of pleasure does not attain extraordinary proportions. The denser the darkness, the greater is the brilliance of the light that destroys it. My mind often recollects with gratitude the help thus rendered to me by the birch trees, at such great heights. On the Himalayan slopes, beyond the heights where birch trees appear, no other trees flourish, that is, the birch is the first tree, growing just below the snow cap. Beyond the belt of birch trees there may appear shrubs and herbs for a short distance. Then even these disappear. The bare, treeless, snow-covered, high altitude region begins. This is the strangest, the most beautiful and divine and the least accessible part of the Himalayas. It is well-known that the birch is a wonderful and holy tree that does not flourish at lower levels. Its bark is used as cloth ; talismans are made out of it ; like paper or palmyra leaf it is also used for writing purposes. There is no limit to my loyalty to and regard for that wonderful tree. As soon as my eyes alighted on one of them along the route, I greeted it with great love. My devotion to that tree has been depicted in one of the stanzas of that short poem, "Gomukhi-yatra"—a poem consisting of only ten stanzas, composed soon after my first journey to Gomukha.

“ भ्रातर्भूजर्ज ! नमस्कृतिस्तव पदे पुण्यातिपुण्यात्मन-
 स्त्वां निन्दन्ति कपूययोनिरितिये धिक्तान् सुधीमानिनः
 स्थावर्यं तव गांगनीरलहरीसंघट्टितांगस्य य-
 द्दन्यं धन्यमतीव धन्यममरेन्द्राद्यैश्च संप्रार्थितम् ”

“ O brother Birch, thou art the holiest among the holiest. I bow to thy feet in humble salutation. Foolish indeed are those wiseacres who have insulted thee classifying thee among the immovables, for they know not that thy immovability which keeps thy body in perpetual contact with the gentle ripples of the Ganga, is the holiest of privileges coveted and ardently prayed for even by the gods beginning with Devendra.”

Let me now bring this account of my rambles in the Himalayas to a close. I do not want to make it longer. In the composition of this book my object has not been to proclaim the greatness of my austerity which might be apparent in my adventures ; this treatise is intended to bring home to the minds of Malayali* readers, however imperfectly, the natural, historical and spiritual greatness of the Himalayas. But a description of the greatness of the Himalayas does not end in itself ; that is, such description has been undertaken in this book, not for its own sake, but for the conveyance of spiritual knowledge whose attainment is the highest purpose of human life. That being so, it follows that the book may be deemed to have fulfilled its purpose only if it serves that end. How is that ? How can it be said that, between the attainment of spiritual knowledge, and the description

* The original is in Malayalam. Hence the particular mention “ Malayali readers ”—*Ed.*

of the glory of the Himalayas, there is an end-means relationship? It is a fact that not only among the Hindus but even among the followers of other religions, there are but few without faith in and reverence for the all round greatness of the Divine Himalayas. As soon as people hear its name uttered, out of reverence, they salute it bending down their heads and folding their hands. Those devotees who have been able to understand and enjoy eagerly the unique greatness of the Himalayas, in all its detail, through this book, will be able to gain easily a knowledge of the difficult spiritual truths with pleasure. In character the book is descriptive of the holy spots which proclaim the greatness of the Himalayas; but even the description of the common and trivial incidents of the journey are interspersed with deep and hidden spiritual truths expressed in clear and simple language. Philosophical discussions have been given here a place as important as, if not more important than, the description of the holy spots and the journeys. When a reader goes through these descriptions with interest and pleasure, he will also absorb several spiritual truths, without effort or difficulty. Thus there is nothing illogical if a peculiar and remote end-means relationship comes into being here between the understanding of Truth and the description of the glory of the Himalayas.

With a view to draw the attention of the seekers after perfection to the main conclusions from among the many we have set forth above, we shall briefly discuss them here. The main theme of this work is that the free principle of the *atman* or Self, referred to by the term "I", dwelling in 'the cavity of the heart' of all, one with the principle known as God, *Brahman*, etc., is the cause of the existence, sustentation,

and retraction of the universe. Not only of this work, it is the theme of all the Upanishads too. Apart from the spiritual principle of the Self there is no other God. Those who know the Self know God too. Other than the principle of the Self, there is neither a witnessing God or some sort of a sovereign, manifesting Himself in a definite form, reigning supreme in some far away world. "Not this which people worship" 'नेदं यदिदमुपासते' sentences like this found in our Upanishads, refuted, thousands of years ago, once and for all, the theory of a witnessing God. This non-dual reality alone is true. All other entities are subject to change and so are perishable. Hence follows also that they are unreal. This Self, this *Brahman*, unlimited by time, space and other entities, without suffering any diminution of its immutability, projects the Universe from ether downwards. How? How can there be projection without the cause suffering any alteration? A specific power that resides in Brahman projects this world without altering its substratum in the least. Hence Brahman eternally remains in itself homogeneous, unchanging. This power is designated *maya*, as it produces extraordinary variety, *prakriti* as it is the material cause of the Universe. It has also several other names. This variegated power, rather Brahman in conjunction with this variegated power, assumes the form of the universe. If so, it follows, that the world which appears to consist of the five elements is none other than Brahman. Since spirit is one only and never two, what affirms itself as 'I' 'I' in each of the living bodies and in fact is the spiritual *jiva*, must also be non-different from Brahman. There is no reason to imagine that spirit differs with the bodies in which

it dwells. If the inert world even is not different from Brahman, how can the *jiva* which is spiritual differ from It? Thus both the world and *jiva* are non-different from the spiritual, unitary Brahman, which though immutable, is said to change due to the operations of its power. That the world and the *jiva* are not independent entities is the main conclusion of Badarayana, the author of the Vedanta Philosophy, and of Sankara and others who follow him. Brahman, then, is the Truth of all truths. The knowledge of Brahman is the immediate perception of non-difference between Brahman on the one hand and oneself and the universe on the other. An uninterrupted revelling in this non-dual Brahman realized as the quintessence of the world is the supreme goal of life. What has been attempted in this book is to present in an easily intelligible manner, the truth of the identity between *jiva* and Brahman. This timeless truth, *viz.*, the non-duality (of reality) has been set forth here along with the means and the auxiliaries that promote the experience of this truth.

Different schools of philosophy, ancient and modern, oriental and occidental, have appeared in the world. Yet it is doubtless that they are all imperfect in various respects. A school of philosophy that solves all the riddles of life to the satisfaction and delight of everybody, has not yet appeared in the world. That is universally admitted. But it is equally doubtful if a great school of philosophy complete in itself and universally acceptable, will ever appear at all. Even then it is absolutely necessary that learned men should strive hard in that direction, since there are many philosophical aspects still to be improved. Unfortunately however, for some inexplicable

reason, introspective scholars who love philosophical thought and are well-versed in thinking, like the rishis of old, are very very few in our Age. It is a lamentable misfortune affecting all humanity—a sad fact that cannot but be regretted. All known systems of philosophy are imperfect. But however imperfect they may be, they contain varying degrees of Truth and so they ought not to be rejected altogether. I am one of those who believe that, compared with other systems, the *Vedanta* or *Advaita* philosophy, well-known as the Sankara system, in spite of the defects and imperfections scholars have discovered in it, contains far more truth than any other system and therefore it is the best of all. Out of that belief my mind has been finding unwavering delight in that Whole and Perfect Object, dealt with in Vedanta, at all times, whether in the state of *samadhi* or in a state of distraction, and it is needless to state that it is such a man's experiences and thoughts that are set forth here in this book. Whether it is on the peaks of the Himalayas, on Mt. Kailas or on the shores of Manasarowar, I find the same Perfect Being. I find the same self-luminous thing at all places, at all times, in all objects and in all states. I find only that object of Truth and nothing else. I hear nothing else. I touch nothing else. I taste nothing else—I smell nothing else. I am not thinking of anything else. I do not find my joy in any object other than that Object of Bliss.

In conclusion, I pray all my fellow-men who possess enough intelligence and some purity of mind to work for the realization of Brahman, which alone fulfils the purpose of human birth. There is nothing wrong if a householder, residing in his own house,

tries to realize Brahman, even as a *sanyasin* does in his forest home. People of all *Varnas* and *Asramas*, in short, all human beings are entitled to the enjoyment of spiritual bliss. It is their birthright. Spiritual realization is not impracticable even in the vortex of worldly activities, provided, one has the necessary mental strength. The present writer is a *sanyasin*, who has, after the acceptance of *Sanyasa*, made the Himalayas his abode—a great lover of solitude, engaged unintermittently in the contemplation of the *Paramatma*—a firm believer in *Sanyasa*, not only as a desirable stage in human life, but as the holiest part of it—one who looks upon *Sanyasa* as a miraculous means of converting worldly existence, which is generally regarded as sad and melancholy, into something full of bliss. He concedes, also, that for certain people the very thought of the soul is impossible until they have totally abandoned all distracting activities. That is all true. But, in spite of all this, the writer of this book does not believe that householders and other *Asramites* are disqualified to lead a spiritual life or that, for people in other *Asrams* it is impossible to meditate upon the Soul. I have expressed this opinion elsewhere, but I am repeating it here to stress that view over again. In the midst of action, think of the Soul. Surrounded by wife, children and grandchildren, still think of the *Paramatma* with devout love. Think, constantly, of the power that activates your hands, legs, etc. Always use them to do things good and desirable. Allow not yourself to be tempted by the intoxicating wine. On the contrary, drink, drink your fill of the Nectar of Life for ever more and find everlasting BLISS !

Om Santi ! Santi !! Santi !!!