

Last Moments of a Legendary Life

"The majority of the people are like birds flying in the sky leaving behind no trace of their footprints. But, one in a billion, bestrides the worldly stage like a Colossus leaving indelible marks of his sacred sojourn on the earth. Swami Dayanandaji was indeed such a Spiritual Giant!"

Swami Suddhananda Saraswatiji narrated to me the moving story of the last moments of Swami Dayanandaji. I am relating that touching tale below for the benefit of all.

Swami Suddhanandaji said: "I reached Rishikesh on 9th December, 1962 but could not find a place for my stay. Finally, I was able to secure a shelter in the Andhra Ashram where Swami Gopalanandaji was the Manager. He was kind enough to accommodate me in a room where a cement bench was only available to lie on for sleep. I was, however, lucky enough to get a blanket with two holes in it to serve as my bed. I folded the blanket to hide the holes and used it cover the upper part of my body in that chilly weather. I slept in that manner for some time and then changed the torn blanket to cover my lower part of my body to sleep for some more time. The ways of Providence are inscrutable! I take this experience as God's way of giving me practical training in *titiksha!* (the spirit of stoic endurance). In the year 1963, when I was the manager of Andhra Ashram, Swami Dayanandaji arrived and I was blessed enough to offer accommodation to

him – to him who was a Brahmanishta fully contented with having the sky for his roof and the quarters for his enclosure. Swamiji was an epitome of simplicity. His demeanour and deportment unmistakably revealed the innate divinity and glory of a Mahatma. He always sported an enchanting smile. Our joint Spiritual Voyage that was to last for many decades to come commenced then in right earnest.

One day Swamiji decided to leave the Andhra Ashram and shift his place of stay to the banks of the sacred Ganga. He disclosed his decision to me and invited me to go with him and stay there with him. I readily acceded to his request. Myself, Swami Gopalanandaji decided to join him and distributed 20 Acres of land of Andhra Ashram which was in our custody to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam. I consider this episode as a test by Swamiji to gauge the intensity of my devotion to him. We stayed together on the banks of the Ganga. Sublime memories of my stay with him and willing performance of my daily chores like cooking etc. and taking care of other matters in that place are still green in my mind. Later in the year 1967, Swamiji left for the Chinmaya Mission in deference to the instructions of his Guru Swami Chinmayanandaji. The place which was an island continued to serve as his accommodation in spite of his inner desire to hand it over to the Chinmaya Mission. Such was the good luck of that place in

unshakably retaining a Mahatma! I named the place Swami Dayanandaji Ashram and continued to develop it to its present state. I also was with puja swamiji in Sandeepani Sadhanalya, Mumbai, taking care of Building construction and purchase of the ashram.

There are many sweet experiences I had with Swamiji. I had always seen that his "VAK TAPAS" had a great value. Pujya Swamiji once indicated to me that the Andhra Ashram will not survive in the hands of the current management. At that point of time I was the manager of the Ashram. To my wonder I saw how the ashram had not survived the current management and had gone to the Government of Andhra Pradesh. One more incident which I would like to recall is, once Pujya Swamiji was visited by a devotee and who offered Rs-1500/- in cash. At that time I was requiring Rs-1500/- to run this place for a month. Pujya swamiji handed over that money to me. Later on the same day one Mahatma who was staying at Rishikesh had gone to Pujya swamiji and asked some help of Rs-1500/-. Those were difficult times when ashram had no money at all. Pujya Swamiji called me and asked me to hand over that Rs-1500/- to this Mahatma. I was little hesitant to give but at the same time it was GURU VAKYA. I gave the money and ran to puja swamiji to ask him how do I manage this place now. Swamiji said "Suddhananda, we should be thankful to GOD that the Mahatma asked just what we had. If he had asked more I would had been put into a situation to say no." He also said when you give you will get back. To my surprise, in the evening I received an invitation to attend a Sadhu Bhandara in

Baba Kali Kambaliwala where blankets, groceries as well as some Dakshina in cash was distributed by someone. It was more than enough for a month to run the show. There were many such occasions which I could recall, however, I wish to recount now the last moments of my interaction with him.

I visited Pujya Swamiji at Annaikatti before he left for the US and had long and constructive dialogues with him. I had always sought his guidance regarding the arrangements to be put in place for the continuance of the Ashram because of advancing years of both of us. It was then when he spoke to me about the Will he had written and asked me to read it later. He then left for the US. And I returned to Rishikesh. He gave me instructions that Swami Tattvavidanandaji should be made a Trustee and be appointed, after his period, a Teacher to give lessons to the annual retreats. He also gave instructions that Swami Santatmanandaji would continue his 3 years course and start a new course at its end. In deference to Pujya Swamiji's command, Swami Tattvavidanandaji was made a Trustee of the Ashram. I had also requested swamiji to give two courses in March 2016. Swami Santatmananda will also be starting another course after the end of the current course.

In a few days, I received the tragic news that Pujya Swami's health was not too well and that he wanted to return to Rishikesh. He arrived in an air ambulance and upon seeing me he said, "I am clutching at my breath with tenacity and I am now back here". He was looking so weak and fragile. But, I felt that he would somehow live

much longer than he thought as Rishikesh was so dear to his heart that he would not brook any separation from it but resist with all his tremendous will-power any threat of tearing him away from the sacred spot. As I expected, he survived for 27 days. During those days, he spoke about various matters with his wonted liveliness. He spoke of what needed to be done in the aftermath of the shuffling of his mortal coils. Never for a moment did he lose sight Vedanta in which he was fully immersed. I could not imagine how he applied himself to the exacting task of the editing a part of Brahmasutra Bhasya even at that critical stage. He made necessary corrections when the treatise was read to him. I was astonished by his enormous love to Vedanta and his unflagging intellectual vigour.

He delivered a few lectures but his voice was low and feeble. One day he even said, "I want to breathe my last in the Ashram". He spoke about the Sodasi and Samadhi to be erected. He spoke about a few other matters pertaining to that arrangement. Evidently, omniscient Swamiji must have had a premonition of the approaching end to the thrilling saga of his spiritual ministration.

Suddenly, one morning, Swamiji had to be admitted into the hospital as he was gasping for breath. Ominous silence reigned supreme in the Ashram. We were all waiting for the day of his complete recovery. But, it seemed that the day to honour his wish was fast approaching. I would be failing in my duty if I do not express my gratitude to one and all who served Swamiji at the hospital with exemplary love and dedication. Suresh and the team of doctors attending on Swamiji

spent many sleepless nights. Sheelaji left abruptly all things at home and stayed at the Ashram for more than 17 days. There were also others like Smt. Nirmal Guptaji etc. Arrangements were put in place for the service of dialysis to be provided for Swamiji.

When Pujya Swamiji was brought to the Ashram on the banks of the holy Ganga in accordance with his wish, people had gathered around him in large numbers to chant hymns and the divine name of "Om Nama Sivaaya" Finally, at 10.18, Pujya Swamiji discarded his mortal frame and merged into Supreme Brahman, even as he listened to the loud chants of students and devotees. It was a peaceful end to an epoch-making life. Unable to control my emotions, I broke down and sobbed inconsolably. Pujya Swamiji was a pillar of strength for me all along. Suddenly, I experienced an utter void with none to guide me. I felt lonely and concerned that I had to do everything on my own. He had left a rich legacy. An Era had come to a close.

His body had to be kept for two days to enable the devotees to offer their devoirs to him. It was decided to keep the body in an ice box at the Lecture Hall for two days. Mahatmas and devotees poured in from various places. Around 2500 people offered their worship to the body of the departed soul. I was blessed to perform the obsequies.

Guided devotedly by Swami Paramarthanandaji and assisted ably by Swami Santatmanandaji, the last rites were performed in accordance with the tradition. Students and devotees supported their

might to make the event grand. It was all over now and all the students and devotees who had thronged the place had their mangala snaanam in the Ganges. Now, the only rite left to be completed was the the Sodasi Bhandara for Pujya Swamiji.

We had to invite 16 Mahatmas-Mandaleshwars from Haridwar and Rishikesh for the purpose. Though we needed only 16 Mahatmas-Mandaleshwars, eighteen of them turned up as if to confirm and proclaim the inherent divinity of Pujya Swamiji. After the departure of the Mahatmas, 3000 Sadhus from Haridwar and Rishikesh were invited for Samashti Bhandara. All the devotees and students had their lunch only after the last Sadhu had his bhiksha. By then, it was 3.30 PM.

Pujas and prayers are conducted daily at the Samadhi Mandir. This spot has become a shrine due to the Living Presence of the Spirit of Pujya Swamiji. A Samadhi Mandir at an estimated cost of Rs.65 lakhs, is coming up according to the plan shown in the picture. The Mandir can accommodate 50 people at a time and its doors are open to all students and devotees at all times.

The Will of Pujya Swamiji was read a few days after the Samadhi. According to the Will, Pujya Swamiji entrusted to me the onerous responsibilities of being the Chairman of the Trust as well as the Managing Trustee of the Ashram. I shall certainly fulfil the faith reposed in me by Pujya Swamiji. This sacred place will be a sacrosanct Temple and a tranquil Sanctuary for the students and the devotees as ever before.

I earnestly request you all to willingly support me in this arduous task of efficiently administering this divine Ashram by extending, as before, your unstinted cooperation and efforts”

The poignant story of the last moments of Pujya Swamiji, as narrated by Swami Suddhananadaji, evokes in our minds mixed feelings of deep sorrow at the irreparable loss suffered by us, the steely determination to fulfil the lofty ideals of Pujya Swamiji and profound devotion for the Divine Personage that Pujya Swamiji ever is.

*Swami Santatmananda Saraswati
Acharya, Swami Dayananda Ashram.*

NEW APPOINTMENTS IN THE TRUST: Sri Santaram, Chairman of **Sruti Seva Trust**, announced the induction of Swami Sadatmananda as Paramount Trustee, Swami Sankarananda as Paramount Executive Trustee and Sri S. Pathi of Lakshmi Mills as Trustee.

SWAMI TATTVAVIDANANDA is inducted as a trustee of **Sri Gangadhareswar Trust**, Swami Dayananda Ashram, Rishikesh.