

Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya
as
I Knew Him



...Memoirs of a Civil Servant

By

J. C. Pant

Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya As I Knew Him

.....An interesting story of how a biographical piece on the **Guru** who demanded **“the full report”** every time the **shishya** met him, became in addition.....gradually an autobiographical account of the disciple. Do all genuine biographies have an element of the author’s autobiography?

By J. C. Pant

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to

REACHA

Gurudakshina To GURUDEV

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Foreword

Sudarshan Agarwal

Former Governor, Uttarakhand & Sikkim

Mentor, Him Jyoti School

I write these few lines with unpretentious humility about this book of great depth and vision on Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya, an enlightened spiritual soul, who devoted his entire life in the moral, social and spiritual upliftment of the people of India. But more than a biography of Pandit Sriram Sharma, it is an autobiography of Shri Jagdish Chandra Pant, the writer of the book, a bureaucrat of exemplary moral standard, who is equally a great spiritual soul completely dedicated to bring about fundamental social change in the country in a most non-violent manner through the power of love and compassion, hard work and personal example. Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya was his Guru and a divine presence in him and also the guiding spirit in his life.

Shri Pant as a civil servant served the country in different capacities and used his each and every assignment to serve the country and its people and bring about creative change in the society.

The book presents very interestingly, on the one side, the philosophy of life of his Guru, Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya, a holy person of prophetic dimensions and explores the hand that guided, encouraged and protected the writer at every critical juncture of his life and describes in detail the overflowing compassion which was the most prominent streak in the personality of Acharya ji. Religion for Acharya ji was one of the basic inner urges of every human being and a force for bringing peace and tranquility to every sphere of life. Renunciation was not giving up or leaving the mundane world but was transcendence of earlier attractions in life. Hardships for one self and comforts for others was a true sign of simplicity and self-abnegation was what he advocated. Acharya ji believed that poverty is our ornament; it is wretchedness which is our enemy. He was against vulgar display of wealth.

On the other side it is a life story of an upright civil servant with high moral commitment and devotion, who worked ceaselessly for the sake of public good with exceptional spiritual zeal. All his governmental and non-governmental projects were planned and executed within the

parameters of the Constitution of our country primarily for social and spiritual awareness of the people and for their welfare and also for inculcating values of Indian heritage and peaceful coexistence among people of different regions, castes and creeds. He took pains to describe the story of progressive mis-governance in India which, according to him, is of our own making and failure. But Shri Pant is a man full of optimism whose life mission is to find a way to success through all failures and obstacles. This could be possible because of his spiritual strength and moral integrity and faith in hard work or the theory of Karma and the divine guidance of his Guru, Shri Acharya ji.

This is a book worth reading by every public servant, social activist and conscientious citizen of India.



August 29, 2009

Sudarshan Agarwal

From The Author

I had never entertained any idea about writing an autobiography even when a few friends prodded me to do so. I always felt it would be too much of an ego trip and hardly worthy of attention and certainly not worth the trouble. Meeting Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya on March 6, 1979 accidentally changed my life completely and led to a great deal of a sense of fulfillment within me, and I came to adopt **Yug Nirman** as my life's goal, something which **Gurudev** as I called him, had bequeathed unto me. **Yug Nirman** implied “मनुष्य में देवत्व का उदय एवं धरती पर स्वर्ग का अवतरण” — expressed in roman script “*manushya main devatva ka udaya aivam dharti par swarg ka avataran*” ie, meaning “**Igniting the spark of the Divine within humans and the descent of the Suprament on Earth**”; and I felt that I and my entire family would strive to bring this about, within our own life times if possible, and through succeeding generations and our later lives, God willing.

This resolve took the shape of founding a voluntary agency **REACHA** standing for Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture & Agro-forestry in New Delhi in March, 1992 and dedicating our house at Dehradun – “**Shraddha Kunj**” to evolve into “**REACHA PRAGYA SANSTHAN**” “ऋचा प्रज्ञा संस्थान” in good time, a name given by Shail ji of Shanti Kunj.

In the year 2007 while I was in the process of winding up my work as Chairman, Administrative Reforms Commission of Uttarakhand, an idea occurred to me that I must tell the whole world in the English language about **Gurudev** as I saw him and knew him and as I thought he really was, because his life had an eternal message for all, which had fulfilled my life and had made it worth living to the full. There was plenty of material on him in Hindi in addition to his voluminous writings and his authoritative biography by Dr. Pranav Pandya, reading which was mostly confined to the **parijans** of the Mission.

My wife Abha and our sons Lalit and Nikhil too wanted me to come out with my experiences with **Gurudev** for they too were wonder-struck with the essential persona of **Acharyasri**. That is how this book was born, and lo and behold, the thumbnail of a biographical sketch of Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya gradually became a narration of how he demanded “**the full report**” whenever I met him as well as how he had influenced me and what he made of me. I later felt that

this was, perhaps **Gurudev's** way of prodding me on to write my autobiography, knowing full well that I would never dream of doing so, left to myself. He may have felt that such an account had some message of worth for other seekers of truth and may be who knows, for other civil servants who too may be seekers of truth and may feel for India the same way as I do.

It must however, be borne in mind that this is an autobiography with a difference, in as much as through it I am only attempting to narrate those parts of my life, which I am able to interpret as having been influenced by **Acharyasri** or those events which had a bearing with some extraordinary experience that could be related, may be to his influence before I met him in March 1979. I must thank Abha who was patient enough to read through what I was scribbling from time to time and was discreetly making her own suggestions to fill in the gaps in my memory as she was part of a great deal of the events covered in this book. I was also seeking her views and opinions on many a matters relating to the interpretation I was giving to many of the events relating to **Acharyasri**.

I have tried to be as objective as it is possible in trying to interpret my relationship with **Acharyasri** who was not open to any questioning of a personal category. Chapter I was read with interest by Shri Sushil Chandra Dobhal, Nikhil and Ruchi and I am thankful to them for they all seemed to encourage me to go on and thus, half reluctant and half enthused I plodded on with the manuscript for over a year. Ruchi even felt that she often experiences a similar dilemma in going about her job as a Senior Manager in Bharat Electronics Ltd. (BEL) referring to some of my observations in the book. Shri Kapil Kumar Parasher, who was with me in the Administrative Reform Commission's work from June 2006 to December 2007, was good enough to convert my scribbled manuscript into a computer printout and I cannot be thankful enough to him.

The first draft of the book was read by Abha, Lalit, Nikhil, Vibha and Ruchi and I am grateful to them for their valuable feedback. Nikhil was instrumental in preparing the numerous copies of the first draft manuscript with spiral binding, which were circulated to my close friends for their comments and suggestions. The final page-making and press-markings were enthusiastically done by Lalit in spite of his myriad engagements and the colour, black and white pictures were taken by him from existing photographs and paintings with great precision. Ruchi and Vibha were gracious enough to scan all the pages of the book for a spell-check. I bless them all from the bottom of my heart.

My eternal thanks are to Dr. Sohan Lal Seth, my erstwhile colleague in Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi who carefully read the first draft of the book and gave me his valuable and unusually perceptive insights on Indian history, which greatly helped me to correct my own perspective of the same. **That there was much more in common between us, than what met the eye in Krishi Bhawan would become clearer to the reader, as I proceed with my story in these pages.** While I had begun the enterprise of writing this book with the intention of highlighting the true picture of **Gurudev** as I perceived it, I did begin to have grave doubts about getting it published since I realized that it was also becoming an ego trip which I have always abhorred.

When I voiced these doubts to Dr. Seth, he was categorical in his emphasis that I must get the book published. **He felt that the non-conformists in the governmental system today were on the verge of extinction and direly need to know that it is possible to succeed in their careers, without compromising on their oath to the Indian Constitution.** This has definitely emboldened my initial resolve to publish the book as soon as it is completed. I thank Dr. Seth also for a very valuable piece of advice regarding the use of italics and bold prints. I have used bold italics for unfamiliar words in the English language but now becoming common in Indian English as well as the spoken Hindi sentences, normally written in **Dev Nagari** script and repeated in Roman script in the book. The uncommon Sanskrit words too have been italicized in bold. Bold print only has been used for elaborating the meaning of the Hindi sentences or Sanskrit phrases and also some key ideas. The use of italics gets reduced gradually after Chapter III.

Dr. Seth wished that I should record my conclusions in life for the facility of posterity somewhere in the book, preferably towards the end. I was very hesitant to do so initially, but on second thoughts I have now included them in the concluding pages of Chapter VIII relating to secular aspects and in the concluding pages of Chapter IX relating to spiritual aspects. I must thank Shri Nirmal Kumar IAS (Retd.) himself, a writer of repute both in Hindi and English, who gave me valuable tips in writing a book of this kind and also gave his valuable and generous comments which find place at the end of the book. His comments reflect his deep understanding of the travails of a fellow civil servant as well as matters spiritual of which he himself is an acknowledged master. I am thankful to Nikhil for his perceptive comments on Shri Nirmal Kumar's comments.

I am also thankful to Professor Dr. DC Thapliyal, formerly Professor & Head Department of VPH, GB Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar and retired Registrar of the newly set up Doon University in Dehradun for his generous and unusually perceptive comments as a

distinguished and great teacher that he was, which too find place at the end of the book. My special thanks are for Shrimati Daya ji and Shri BC Pandey, a retired senior officer of the Uttarakhand state government settled in Haldwani for their extremely perceptive comments **particularly in Hindi**, a language I have loved to use so far in my **little known writings**, capturing the whole spirit of the book admirably. I do not know how to thank my very dear friend Ram Updesh Singh IAS (Retd.) from Patna – who rushed in his very thoughtful, learned, and profound comments almost before the final moments of the printing of the book.

Towards the end of Chapter IX I have included some of my recent articles which encapsulate a great deal of my thinking on some important current issues and which are relevant to the contents of this book too as well as for the future activities of REACHA. I have been an ardent advocate of Hindi all my working life, but realizing that the majority of highly educated Indians today are not familiar with their own language, I decided to write this book for them in order to let them know that such a **ONE** lived and walked upon the Earth amidst us for eighty long years in the twentieth century, whom they completely missed out.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Shri Sudarshan Agarwal, the former Governor of Sikkim and erstwhile Governor of Uttarakhand for encouraging me in all enterprises that he was assigning to me from time to time ever since he stepped into Uttaranchal as the state was known when he assumed charge of Shri Rajyapal in 2003. He also encouraged me to persist in my writing of this book when he heard that I was doing so.

He is indeed, a remarkable human being who has never hesitated to do whatever good he could deliver **in spite of the high constitutional office he held**. He was an inspiration to many a persons who came in touch with him and to me he was a towering source of strength. The two boons in the shape of the Himjyoti Foundation which gives scholarships to meritorious students of poor families and the Himalayan School Society which is running the Himjyoti School, Dehradun for meritorious girls of poor families in Uttarakhand, given by him to the new state are priceless gifts to poor families, for which he will be remembered for ever. Before he left the state he installed me as the President of both the Foundation and the Himalayan School Society, thus casting the near impossible responsibility of carrying on his noble mission on my weak shoulders.

His arrival in Uttaranchal in January 2003, proved to be a blessing for me and I interpreted these events as perhaps, **Gurudev's** way to push me on to newer levels of achievements and not let me fade into oblivion. I am deeply indebted to Sudarshan ji for his thoughtful FOREWORD to

the book as well as for the letter he wrote to me while sending it to me. The closing words of this **“This is a book worth reading by every public servant, social activist and conscientious citizen of India”** gratified me no ends. This letter and the letter he wrote to me when I demitted office of President of the Foundation and the Himalayan School Society on 24th October 2009 too find place at the end in this book.

Ramnaumi : March 24, 2010

J.C. Pant

Chapter I – The First Encounter

My first meeting with Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya at Shanti Kunj on 6th March 1979 when I called on him had been fixed by some common friends in Lucknow over a week earlier. The occasion in Lucknow was the evening assembly of those people who were curious about the **Gayatri mantra**, as a follow up of a **Gayatri yagya** performed every morning at the very same location for the past few days. During the assembly the name of **Acharyasri** was mentioned, a number of times in the context of 24 **Gayatri Mahapurashcharans** performed by **Acharyasri** in twenty four years from 1926 to 1953 and the strict norms of **tapasya** or penance observed by him during these years. One **Gayatri Mahapurashcharan** implies recitation or jap of **Gayatri mantra** 24 lakhs times, and doing one of these in one year implies meditation for over six hours every day.

This is what was done by **Acharyasri** for 24 years. It was also mentioned that this form of **tapasya** had been performed only once by any one after the **Mahabharata** War and that was by **Acharyasri** only. I naturally became curious and expressed a desire to see him, where upon I was told that **Acharyasri** had in fact invited me to see him at Haridwar. Incidentally I was also scheduled to visit Haridwar on the due date. This is how my first meeting with **Acharyasri** came about. I have often wondered whether it was an accident or it was pre-ordained.

I had been posted as District Magistrate in district Saharanpur, between September 1970 to July 1973 during which time **Acharyasri** along with **Vandaniya Mataji** had already left Mathura and had arrived in Haridwar, then known by the name of Hardwar, a part of district Saharanpur in those days. During my stay in Saharanpur I was visiting Haridwar once every month to take a dip in the Ganga at **Har-ki-Pairi**. Long after I had left Saharanpur, I discovered from my old papers a booklet about **Shanti Kunj**, apparently delivered to me at my official residence in Saharanpur of which I had taken no notice. How did I miss **Acharyasri** then and now that I was face to face with him, what did all this mean? Was my meeting him now pre-ordained or missing him earlier an accident? Or was I not spiritually prepared and receptive enough earlier? Of course, I was not at all conscious of this line of thought at that time while I faced him that forenoon.

*

The time of the meeting was nearly 12 noon and after exchange of a few pleasantries **Acharyasri** offered me a cup of tea and enquired whether I would like to stay for lunch. He, in fact spoke to **Vandaniya Mataji** over the intercom whether food would be available and only on my insistence that I was scheduled to have lunch at Dehradun that he relented. My first impression of **Acharyasri** was that of a family elder, certainly not as one who had performed something unique only once after the **Mahabharata** War. I do not remember having touched his feet and my greetings to him were a formal Namaskar. He enquired how I happened to be in Haridwar and what all I was up to in Lucknow. Answering these questions was like telling him all that I was doing in my official capacity, which was as follows. It is now that I realize that, this must have been the trigger for this account to become autobiographical most un-obtrusively while I began writing about him.

*

I was appointed Secretary to the government of UP in the Department of Labour and Excise in February 1978 which was my first posting in the super time scale of IAS. This implied that I could either be posted as divisional commissioner in any one of the dozen divisions within the state or as Secretary to the state government in any department in the State Secretariat. As Secretary Labour I was the custodian of 50 odd labour laws legislated since independence for the welfare of the organized labour force in the various industries in the state of UP. Going through all these laws was an exhilarating experience in the sense that civil society had taken every precaution to prevent exploitation of the labour force which was supposed to be subjected to the commanding directions of their employers through an army of supervisors, who could well be unjust in their supervision.

The Department of Excise was primarily to implement the Excise laws legislated to regulate the use of alcohol for various industrial purposes as well as including consumption of liquor by humans. Ironically, the main objective was to implement the Constitutional Directive Principle of State Policy regarding prohibition of the use of liquor. This hypocrisy of the State in India after independence was a big shock to me and was also a laughing matter, but the saving grace was that with Shri Morarji Bhai Desai as Prime Minister of India, a policy decision had been taken at the Union government level to introduce prohibition of liquor in one district in every state to begin with and then to increase the number of districts every year, till the whole country was ultimately brought under this policy.

This had been one of the major planks of the freedom movement from the British days, with the logic that unless this was done, the poor masses of India would just drink liquor to forget their misery, only to swell the coffers of the alien rulers who were raising revenues from its sales and were hell bent to extend their rule over India for ever. The state governments of the day were just doing that to raise revenues at the cost of the health of the poor and the Union government was turning a blind eye. Was this justified?

*

When I took over as Secretary, department of Excise the district of Lucknow and the then five districts of UP hills were already notified as prohibition districts and a government notification to introduce prohibition in the remaining districts of Lucknow Division as well as the districts bordering the five hill districts of the state was issued to take effect from 1st April 1978. The Minister of State In-charge for Labour and Excise was Shri Ganesh Datt Bajpai and he was a well known labour leader as well. Along with that he was also keen on making a success of the Prohibition Policy. I was raw as a secretary to the state government and he was an accomplished minister. He was a brilliant parliamentarian as well as a master of all the labour laws.

This assignment, thus, turned out to be a wonderful opportunity for me to learn on my job and as it were, I did not disappoint the Minister. We had developed a clear understanding about our respective roles, he as minister and me as Secretary to the state government. I made it clear to him that I would express my views as a professional civil servant as fairly and frankly as possible and he was fully authorized to over-rule my views whenever and wherever he thought fit with clear logical and valid reasons. He was more than satisfied with this approach and throughout my association with him for about a year and a half there was never an occasion when we differed. He had a wonderful sense of humour and one of his favourite quotes was the definition of **BUDDHI-JEEWI**, which normally means an intellectual. "One who makes a living relying on his **BUDDHI** is a **BUDDHI-JEEWI**. A pick-pocket is the best example". In fact with hind-sight I can say that he was the only professional minister with whom I had occasion to work during my entire career of 35 and a half years out of which I was to be Secretary to the state government of UP for twelve years and Secretary to the Government of India for about four years.

*

Shri Ganesh Datt Bajpai as the Minister of State In-charge for Excise Department and me as Secretary to the state government began to work together so furiously in the propagation and

implementation of the Prohibition Policy that the earth beneath us veritably began to shake. The powerful liquor lobby was at its wits end and began to manoeuvre political strings to oust Shri Bajpai from the State Cabinet. They finally succeeded by the fall of the year 1979, when Shri Bajpai was dropped from the Cabinet and Shri Rama Shankar Kaushik was made the Minister In-charge of the portfolio of Labour & Excise.

It was now the turn of the Minister to be raw and me as Secretary to the state government to be at my professional best. My stint with Shri Bajpai had steeled me and my commitment to the Policy of Prohibition was by now fierce. Soon the portfolio of Labour and Excise was split, the Labour Portfolio going to Shri Kranti Kumar from Bijnore district. Shri Kranti Kumar was a polished minister and had ministerial experience in the past. Professionally I did my job with aplomb with both the ministers, though Shri Rama Shankar Kaushik's commitment to the Prohibition Policy was as dilute as could be, which he however never had the courage to express on my face, knowing my own commitment to it and the Prime Minister's resolve in this regard.

*

Right from the beginning of my assignment as Secretary to the state government I was actually aware of the pitfalls of the Prohibition Policy and the manner of its implementation. I was fully conscious that unless it became a peoples' movement our success would be ephemeral, whenever or however we may appear to succeed. I thus, began to look for allies in society at large and began to explore the commitment of the Sarvodayites, the Arya Samajis, the Rashtriya Sewak Sangh, the Vishva Hindu Parishad and a host of other fledgling social movements.

This was my first experience of rousing a social awareness campaign which hopefully would, according to my expectations graduate into a social movement in support of the state Prohibition Policy. Every strategy to reach out to people in general was thought of and resorted to. Even a monthly news-letter was initiated. I was deeply disappointed and heartily upset with the so-called voluntary agencies outwardly professing prohibition but hand in gloves with the liquor lobby which was generous with the funds it made available to such organizations as well as to the politicians in power. It was this search for allies, who could be depended upon that took me to Shanti Kunj on that blessed day, the 6th of March 1979, the day etched in my memory as the day of deliverance.

*

Before I elaborate on my first meeting with **Acharyasri**, I must make a mention of my own development in the realm of **sadhana** or spiritual discipline that I pursued moderately or seriously from time to time according to availability of time from my official preoccupations. I gave up eating meat and eggs by the year 1977, which I was taking on medical advice in moderation since 1965 when I lay seriously ill with dry pleurisy for over a month and had to be under medication for about a year while I was posted in Joshimath. This was to make up for protein deficiency in my diet as suggested by the doctors. Morning and evening **sandhyas** were a regular routine since childhood. This apart, regular reading of articles and books on spiritual subjects was quite normal. I had a natural curiosity about the Absolute Self, the ultimate reality and the esoteric world and how they impinged on our daily mundane lives.

After hearing me out on my official preoccupations and my quest for dependable allies in support of prohibition, **Acharyasri** described how the **Yug Nirman** Mission had propagated abstention from intoxicants through **Gayatri yagyas** over the last quarter of a century. He did seem to admire my passion for prohibition and the need for a social movement in its support and offered that the Mission could be counted upon as an ally in this cause through **social awareness**. He then gave me half a dozen booklets on **Gayatri sadhana** and **Gayatri yagya** and gave an open invitation to me to visit Shanti Kunj as often as I could.

I was, indeed, very impressed with **Acharyasri** and his warmth had overpowered me with affection and I kept wondering whether I had at last met someone I was looking for, a man almost totally out of the world and yet with feet planted firmly on the ground beneath him. I think, while taking leave of him I touched his feet and promised to keep visiting Shanti Kunj as often as possible from Lucknow.

During the meeting with **Acharyasri** which may have been for about an hour I seemed to be completely oblivious of the passage of time. I was experiencing a strange kind of elation mixed with disbelief whether what I was going through was real. The sense of elation seemed to be due to a subtle awareness that I had finally reached my destination, and the disbelief was due to a feeling that how could I possibly be so lucky as to be face to face with someone I could look up to as my master, my **Guru**. I was clearly overwhelmed by his presence without being over awed and whatever I was experiencing was very pleasant and subtle. This awareness of his benevolent presence was to be my constant companion at all times and is so to this day. The intensity of this

awareness does vary from intense during the morning and evening **sandhyas** and mild at other times. I can perceive his guidance and directions in every situation I am confronted with, all along since that day of 6th March, 1979.

*

As I sat on the hind seat of the Ambassador car which was speeding on its way to Dehradun, I read through all the booklets and resolved that both our sons Lalit and Nikhil should receive their sacred thread – **yagyopaveet** from Shanti Kunj at the earliest. So, on returning to Lucknow I wrote to **Acharyasri** about my intention, thanking him profusely for his graciousness when I met him. Prompt came the reply from Shanti Kunj through a letter signed by **Vandaniya Mataji**. I came to know later that **Acharyasri** had withdrawn from the secular duties relating to the **Yug Nirman** Mission and that he had fully authorized **Mataji** to perform all the duties of the head of the Mission. **Mataji's** letter was very encouraging to me in the sense that she had conveyed **Acharyasri's** own feelings during our first meeting in very warm terms. The invitation to bring the whole family to Shanti Kunj at the earliest was also extended, including the consent for the **yagyopaveet sanskar** of Lalit and Nikhil.

We were able to visit Shanti Kunj for the **Gayatri Jayanti** or **Ganga Dashera** which fell on 6th June, 1979 and both Lalit and Nikhil along with my younger brother Kailash and another boy of about the same age as our sons received the sacred thread and **diksha** or **initiation** from **Acharyasri** in person. This proved to be a unique blessing to both Lalit and Nikhil as well as to Kailash but we were not quite aware of its significance then. When we went for this ceremony to Haridwar we stayed in the Dam Inspection House in Haridwar and went to Shanti Kunj from there only. My father and mother along with Kailash and Nimmi had come down from Mussoorie to join us on this occasion. Raghubar **dajyu** (elder brother), Shri RD Joshi whom I addressed by that appellation, his wife and son Manoj also attended the ceremony after driving from Dehradun where they lived. Abha's sister Poonam, her husband Jagdish Joshi and their sons Sonu (Ashish) and Monu (Abhishek) were also present.

This was the first time our whole family came in touch with Shanti Kunj. Shanti Kunj in those days was still growing and was not more than ten percent of its size now. The **yagyopaveet yagya** was performed in the space in front of the Gayatri Temple Complex and **Gurudev** came down from

his room after the **yagya** was over and the **diksha** had to be given by him. Every one fully appreciated the **yagyopaveet sanskar** and my father was particularly impressed. After having our meal in presence of **Vandaniya Mataji** we took leave of Shanti Kunj and returned to Mussoorie. The whole party was deeply influenced by the ambience of Shanti Kunj and by the affection every one experienced at the hands of **Acharyasri** and **Mataji**.

The whole event was memorable in every way and seemed to confirm my own conviction which I experienced on the previous occasion during my first visit. The two boys and Kailash seemed particularly elated as if some thing great had happened to them. While taking leave of **Acharyasri** in his room on the top floor of Shanti Kunj, he specially advised Abha that my guidance to Lalit and Nikhil regarding how they should conduct themselves hence forth should not be interfered with. Both Lalit and Nikhil were told to follow my advice regarding the morning and evening **sandhyas**.

Thereafter, both of them and I performed our morning and evening **sandhyas** very meticulously for over six months or so. However, later on the boys began to relax and I alone carried on as usual but with greater regularity. But those six months of regular **sandhya** and routine made a great change in the boys and also improved their physical and mental growth. In fact, a firm foundation had been laid for their bright and prosperous future. Both the boys did well in school and were quite popular with their friends and teachers. They were playing games as well and generally made a very good impression wherever and whenever they accompanied us. In those days I used to plan long outings to coincide with their school holidays while I did my official touring. Abha had also taken up a job as Medical Officer In-charge of Family Welfare in one of the local government hospitals sometime in August 1976. So our outings had to accommodate her holidays and the boys' school holidays as well.

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I began visiting Haridwar once in a while and I used to stay in one of the government rest houses to avoid any bother to people at Shanti Kunj. From there I would go to Shanti Kunj to see **Gurudev**, as by then I had begun to address **Acharyasri** as my chosen **Guru**. He would protest and asked me to start staying in Shanti Kunj whenever I visited Haridwar. I told him that a lot of riff-raff normally came to see me and I would not like them to pollute the **Ashram**. He said that I need not harbour such apprehensions and that Shanti Kunj could cope with all types of visitors and their

polluted thoughts. **My meetings with him would last for over an hour and he would expect me to narrate all that happened to and with me or all that I did since my last meeting with him.** During one of such occasion, I happened to show him the portrait of his painted by Kala Niketan, Mussoorie and he remarked that it looked much better than him, while Mata ji remarked that his hair are not standing in it. This is the first colour print inside this book.

These session were indeed, very relaxing as he would also interject useful advice to help me out from tricky situations in which I willy-nilly would get stuck in, from time to time due to my own rigidity which I took for my firmness. I remember that once we discussed the plight of people who do not have access to clean proper toilets. The open defecators are an undisciplined lot otherwise, what Mahatma Gandhi had evolved as the **Wardha model** would have gained currency. The Wardha model was essentially a series of trenches at suitable distances to ensure privacy if the same is not protected by temporary screens etc. In the early days and years of community development these were propagated by the Block development people but soon we stopped hearing of them. The open defecator is a lone ranger who sets out on a minor expedition to find a suitable place to deposit his contribution on Mother Earth. **Gurudev** wanted a sharp handle to jut out from the water carrier so that the person concerned could dig out some soil after the event and cover the valuable contribution with the soil, thereby facilitating its composting. He called it the '**Sunehari khad**', the **golden manure**.

How to attract a prospective investor to manufacture such a product? This was a concern then and is still so. I am sure Shanti Kunj is not going to lay claim on this patent. Back in Lucknow, by the end of 1979 and beginning of 1980 things began to hot up on the prohibition front as Shri Rama Shankar Kaushik was playing a double game. In one of my visits to Shanti Kunj I asked **Gurudev** whether he could help. His reply was quite unexpected. He asked me whether I was making that request in my official capacity as representative of the state government. My reply was in the negative because I knew that the Minister's heart was not for it. He therefore, consoled me and advised that I should take it easy.

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By the middle of 1980 the labour front also began to hot up. The Chief Minister Shri Benarsi Das wanted some state intervention in a labour dispute relating to Modinagar which to my mind was totally unwarranted. The Chief Minister was not the kind of politician, who could take such a stand from the Labour Secretary and I was promptly transferred as Administrator, Sharda Sahayak

Command Area Development Authority, which was not too much of an inconvenience as its head quarters were located in Jawahar Bhawan in Lucknow. The change was like a balm to my bruised ego and I lost no time in moving out of the State Secretariat. My transfer did rouse lot of comments from lot of people who were sure that I was in the right. But these incidents made no impression on Shri Benarsi Das.

Before my transfer I had deputed Shri Man Singh Chaudhary the State Prohibition Officer to visit Shanti Kunj with a letter to **Gurudev** describing the stale-mate over the prohibition front with the minister playing hide and seek in contravention of the state government's declared policy on the subject. **Gurudev** spoke about me in glowing terms to Shri Man Singh Chaudhary and gave him a hand written letter in his own hand which was a departure from his usual practice in Shanti Kunj. He had stopped writing letters to people for over a decade and this was a rare compliment to me that he had made an exception.

I was pleasantly surprised and his letter was, indeed a great consolation in the crisis of conscience that I seemed to be facing. He expressed his own appreciation of my commitment to public welfare and compared me to late Shri Rafi Ahmad Kidwai in the sense that he observed that I was on the one hand able to identify with grass root workers and on the other I was a capable administrator who could take decisions in public interest etc like Rafi Sahib. I had, of course, heard a great deal about Rafi Sahib.

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One poignant and tragic episode related to the time when India became independent and communal riots broke out all over North India, and Mussoorie was no exception. Rafi Sahib's brother who was Executive Officer of the Mussoorie Municipal Board was very popular because of his accessibility and competence. He used to walk on the Mall Road very often to inspect the state of the civic affairs and also walked to his residence near Charleville Hotel (now the LBSNAA). While he was near the then Riviera Hotel (Now Fire Station) one fine evening on his way back home from office he was waylaid by some Sikh refugees who had just suffered tragic losses to their families in the riots of west Punjab. These refugees were seething with the spirit of revenge and vengeance and were killing Muslims indiscriminately wherever they found them. Rafi Sahib's brother had been suitably warned to stop walking on the Mall Road but he was a fearless man who said he had no enemies. That was his undoing and he was stabbed to death that evening. Rafi Sahib apparently loved his brother greatly and later on while he wept the whole night he would not let that affect

his attention to responsibilities of a minister in Nehru's Cabinet in day time. There were a number of such incidents which made Rafi Sahib stand out as an outstanding administrator politician while retaining his touch at the grass-roots level, and at the same time he stood out as a great human being.

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I was quite taken aback to read Gurudev's letter and could not quite believe what he had written. It did set me thinking and did divert my mind from the immediate crisis that I was facing due to the stalemate with Rama Shankar Kaushik. At the same time there was a spate of writ petitions before the Allahabad High Court against the notifications that we were issuing from time to time to plug the loopholes in the Excise laws etc. I was spending a great deal of time drafting notifications after notifications and counter affidavit after counter affidavit to contest these writ petitions in the Allahabad High Court.

A regular session with the Law Secretary almost every day became a routine and so was our dialogue with the Advocate General also who held the brief on the state's behalf in the High Court of Allahabad. Shri Kazmi an assistant in the Excise Section was the main draftsman and we burnt midnight oil to see that the Prohibition Policy was not allowed to fail in the High Court. A simultaneous herculean effort for social mobilization was also going on. So while this letter from Gurudev did little to give us relief and solace on this front, his advice however to take it easy became the obvious course of action to cope with the mounting pressures. This pressure was finally and suddenly released on my transfer out of the Secretariat.

It was a big shock to the prohibition team in the Secretariat as well as all others in the field, but that was what had to be. I cannot say that our effort at social education and social mobilization was really of any consequence and most of the social organizations I came across disappointed me. The level of society's capacity to stand up for what is good for them happens to be very poor to this day and it was much more so a quarter of century ago. Also, two hundred years of British rule and another eight hundred years of subjugation prior to that had taken its toll, not to forget the preceding five hundred years or so of social upheavals even before that.

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My first brush with a people's movement, so to say or even to call it one was over. While I ruminated on what went wrong, I could not help taking stock of what all it takes to generate a

people's movement. **Gurudev** who had been at it in the Yug Nirman movement since 1953 was a far wiser person on this question how to go about one such a movement and I began to earnestly study the techniques of mass-mobilization employed by him. Such an opportunity presented itself on my next visit to Shanti Kunj. He presented me a set of volumes comprising of the four **Vedas** – **Rig, Yajur, Sam** and **Atharva**, three volumes of **Gayatri Maha Vigyan** and some more literature relating to the Yug Nirman Mission.

By now I had begun staying in Shanti Kunj whenever I visited Haridwar. I would send intimation of my programme of arrival by train and one of the parijans would be there at the station to locate me and take me to Tripada 3 or 4 in Gayatri Nagar, then the southern most part of the Shanti Kunj premises. **Gurudev** extracted a promise from me that I would read a page a day of all those books, which I readily agreed. I of course read more than one page a day in the midst of my own official engagements, which, once I was outside the Secretariat were not that exacting. By now, I had also taken to doing my morning and evening **sandhyas** more meticulously which involved more regular **Gayatri mantra** recitation, **jap** – morning and evening.

By this time the whole family had turned vegetarian. We also began holding **Gayatri yagya** in the house once in a month on a convenient Sunday or Saturday. By the **Ashwin** month of the year 1979 I began observing the nine days **navratra anushthan** which implied **Gayatri mantra** recitation at least four hours a day to complete 24000 **japas** in eight days followed by **Gayatri yagya** on the ninth day the **navmi**, a day prior to **Dashehra**. I resolved to do this for the next ten years, twice a year in **Chaitra navratras** and then in **Ashwin** to complete one **Mahapurashcharan** of twenty four lakh **Gayatri Japas**. When I completed this phase of my **sadhana** I sought Gurudev's instructions as to what all I should be doing in future in the shape of **sadhana**. His answer was revealing- 'do not bother about numbers in relation to **Gayatri sadhana**; concentrate on the **QUALITY**'. He emphasized the English word quality. I have followed that advice to the letter and spirit to this day.

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This discipline in routine of the entire family was a great boon to Lalit and Nikhil, who took to enjoying a disciplined life as a matter of routine without any special effort on our part. Work-wise I was changing my job according to the whims of those who were in power. By the time I completed three months in the Sharda Sahayak I had shaken the entire set up so vigorously that my transfer

was being talked about. Shri Benarsi Das the Chief Minister was always looking for such opportunities to destabilize any good work that could be going on anywhere in the state.

My vigorous checking of the work done in the Sharda Sahayak since inception had disturbed a lot of dovecots who had been benefiting from the sub-standard construction work in the Sharda Sahayak Command Area and who had full political backing. But fate intervened and President's Rule was imposed before the Chief Minister could transfer me. So I went ahead with the field checking of all the work done through a number of well coordinated checking parties comprising of all disciplines who documented the checking done meticulously in well drafted formats. The result of a week long checking drive was that all such fake construction activities of the past were exposed and charge sheets began to get drafted against a number of officers and engineers. This process also helped the command headquarters to draft a meticulous manual to prevent such fake construction activities in future. All this was completed in about another three months time, when again I began hearing rumours of my transfer out of the Command Area.

The Chief Secretary rang me up telling me that the Governor would like to see me. He had cautioned me that this was part of the process to ease me out of the Command Area. The Governor who was the executive head during the President's Rule had the power to transfer officers just as in normal times the Chief Minister had them. Shri CPN Singh, the Governor was a seasoned and senior politician in the Congress party and he did seem to be wondering what kind of an officer I must be that transferring me within six months in this case had become such an important political issue for some important politician. So he showered praise on me on the work I had done in Sharda Sahayak but said that an officer of my dynamism was required elsewhere.

I pleaded with him that my job in Sharda Sahayak was still incomplete and I would love to continue, particularly because it was considered a low profile job which no civil servant worth his salt looked forward to. But Shri CPN Singh was adamant and consoled me to be prepared to move out soon. I received my orders of transfer within a few days to join as Secretary, Harijan and Social Welfare. Harijan and Social Welfare seemed to be the favourite area of interest to the Governor for reasons best known to him. I was again shortly thereafter to be summoned to the Raj Bhawan to get my briefing for the new job from the Governor himself. With hind sight, I can say that this assignment was a great education to me such that I soon came to understand the complexities of dalit politics as well as caste politics.

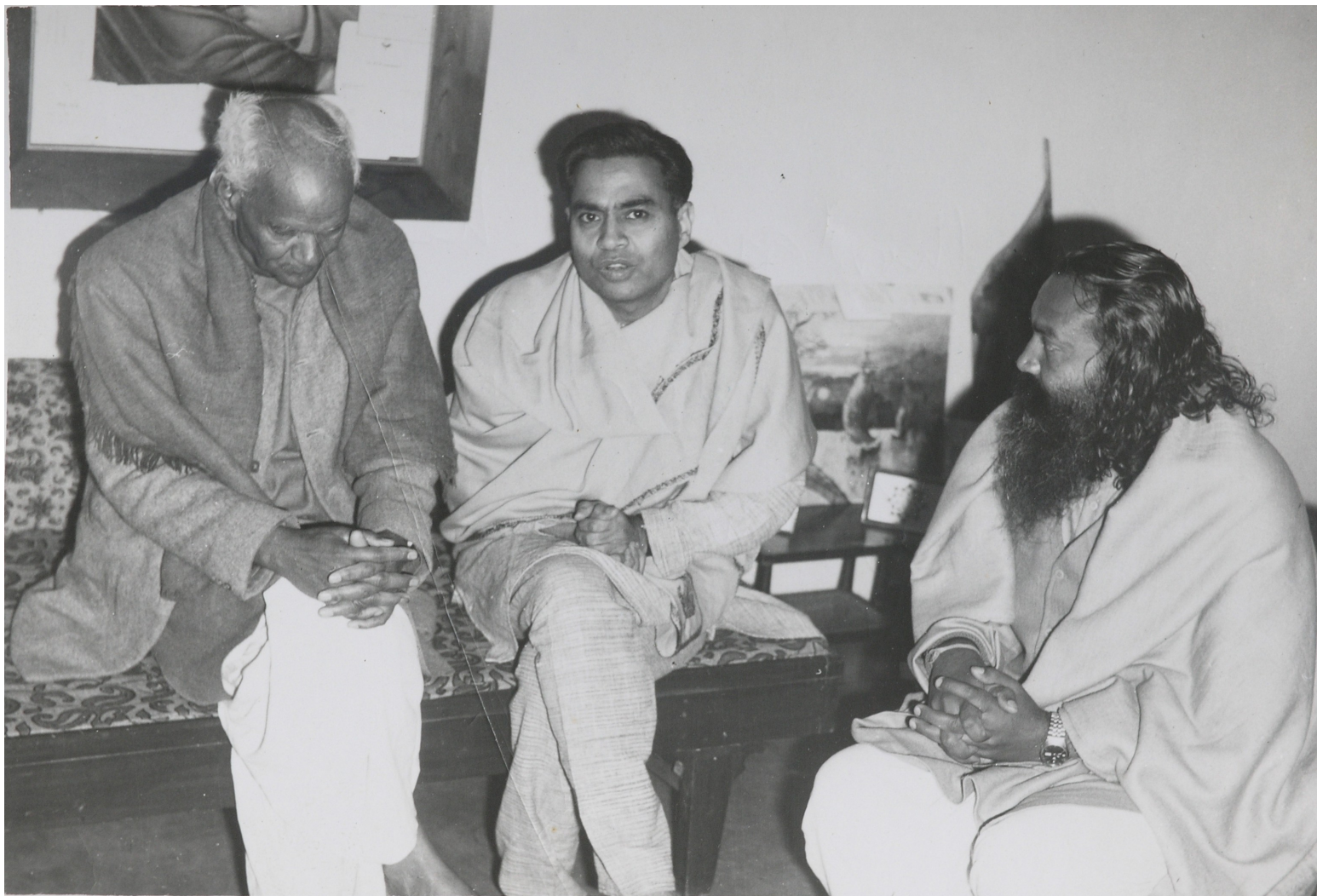
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In the mean while, **Gurudev** had in the early months of the year 1980 given a country-wide call to set up 24 **Gayatri shaktipeeths**, wherein each **shaktipeeth** was to be a centre of activities such as were carried out from Shanti Kunj. He seemed to be foreseeing a need to decentralize the functioning of the Yug Nirman Mission. He himself under-took a country-wide hurricane tour performing **pran pratishtha** of such **shaktipeeths** wherever he went. During the course of his touring he visited Lucknow on his way back from Sultanpur and came straight to our residence at B-6 Dilkusha Colony accompanied by a number of prominent parijans notably Dr. Pranav Pandya, Sant Pragyanand, Dr OP Sharma, Dr Gayatri Sharma and a few more.

They all had lunch at our residence. Not knowing how **Gurudev** took his meals we set up table for six of them together when Sant Pragyanand mentioned that **Gurudev** would not sit on a chair to have his meals but arrangement should be made for him on the floor with the meal served on a **chowki**. There was a great deal of excitement in the house as **Gurudev's** visit to our residence was a rarest of rare privilege. So our marriage **chowki** was ferreted out from some where in the house and it happened to have **aipan** of the Kumoan hills as a sign of warm welcome painted on it, done by Abha sometime in the past. **Gurudev** appreciated the **aipan** and complimented Abha for it as well as for the food. Having taken his frugal meal **Gurudev** asked us to take him to our bed-room where he wanted to stretch out after the meal.

While **Gurudev** was retiring for a while we asked the rest of the party to have their meals on the dining table. Babuji, **Ija** my mother, Kailash and Nimmi were with us having arrived from Mussoorie only a few days earlier to spend the winter months in Lucknow. They were mighty happy that **Gurudev** was visiting the family and that they too happened to be in Lucknow at that very same time. In the afternoon, we had called fifty odd select persons in Lucknow whom we wished **Gurudev** to meet. After an hour or so of talk by **Gurudev** and other formalities the party left to meet a larger audience in the Town Hall of Lucknow Corporation. The hall proved inadequate and **Gurudev** was reported to have felt suffocated; however it was a memorable day for all of us from the **Gayatri pariwar** in Lucknow.

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Author giving 'his report'
to Gurudev in Dilkusha
Colony (Lucknow,
1981).



A section of the audience
before the arrival of
Gurudev on the Dais
(Lucknow, 1981).



Gurudev arrives on the Dais
(Lucknow, 1981).



Gurudev with Abha and
the author (Lucknow,
1981).

A few months later again **Gurudev** was to pass through Lucknow by road on his way to east UP. The programme was for him to break journey for a few hours somewhere en route to Sitapur to have a bite to be arranged by us. That was **Gurudev's** way to oblige those whom he cared for. We chose the Chinhat rest house, a semi-dilapidated one belonging to the Irrigation Department of UP government, as there was no other suitable place. We got the place cleaned up and carried the tiffin for **Gurudev** and some bed-sheets and pillows etc. for him to relax after the meal. He came at the exact appointed time and we did the rest to make him comfortable. After he had had his meal and a nap **Gurudev** proceeded by road to east UP accompanied by a companion. It was a very brief meeting with **Gurudev** and such meetings had their own significance to those who had come close to him.

In those early days of my association with the Mission I was devoting the Sunday forenoon to participate in some **Gayatri yagya** or the other at different locations of Lucknow. Realizing my seriousness about the Mission's work as well as my official position in the state government **Gurudev** advised me during one of my visits to Shanti Kunj that I need not waste my energy on such events every Sunday. He had a great sense of protocol and always stressed upon all in Shanti Kunj that "**Pant ji**" was a very special person, not to be trifled with. I think the context was my desire to quit service and join Shanti Kunj permanently. **Gurudev** discouraged me saying once I came to Shanti Kunj I would only be doing what others in the Mission were doing, and that in any case was already being done. What was needed was persons like me to be in government to supervise and steer its activities and policies etc, considering that there were very few right type of people in the civil bureaucracy. In one of the earliest occasions of my visit to Shanti Kunj he had welcomed me on the Dias and had made some opening remarks to the effect "**Pant ji ka matlab hota hai Bharat ka Grih Mantri**".

He was acutely conscious of my struggle in the governmental set up and always advised me to avoid confrontation. In fact, I can now say with hind sight that my effectiveness in government work increased many folds after I adopted this style of functioning. My tenures also became more stable and my overall output materially increased as I became more and more circumspect and considerate and began to become a good listener as well as my capacity to suffer fools also improved all along. I began to explore the areas of agreement with all concerned before setting out to chalk out a programme of action, and only after I was able to evolve a consensus on it would I venture upon its implementation. This method systematically eliminated any possibility of conflict even remotely, with any of the stake-holders and success was more than assured.

Chapter II – A Peep into the Indian Society of the Day

Taking over charge of the department of Harijan & Social Welfare as Secretary to the state government was like peeping into the whole of Indian society of the day, with all the aberrations of caste, social inequalities and disabilities. The plight of women, the dalits and the disabled persons began to pour in onto my desk every day, day in and day out. The structure of the two government departments of Harijan Welfare and Social Welfare and the separate financial corporations for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively, had to be studied to take stock of their effectiveness in dealing with the problems of the most sensitive sections of our society. By now I had evolved a style of working which would take into account the transience of my tenure in a given department. I would devote the first three months of my tenure to studying the weaknesses and strengths of the department or departments and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). If I was transferred by then, I would still be wise regarding the specialities of my portfolio.

The next three months would be devoted to preparing my plans for the next six months to set the systems right. If I was to be transferred in six months, then I would be in a position to pass on the necessary tips to my successor in office. The next six months would then be devoted to implementing the plan worked out in the previous three months. The entire office and directorate team would be galvanized and black sheep would be isolated. If I survived the first year I would set about to reforming the black sheep. By and by they would begin to fall in line, but there would still be a few die-hard ones who would resist with all their might. I would try and identify the most vulnerable of these and would place him under suspension and duly charge-sheet him.

This was normally enough to send the right signal to all concerned in the departments involved. During the second spell of six months I would also begin planning for the next year along with making the budgetary provisions simultaneously, while implementing the plan for those six months with the available budgetary provisions. This style had enabled me to contribute a manual in six months in my previous posting as Administrator, Command Area Development Authority (CADA) for Sharda Sahayak. This manual was to become the standard for the other two CADAs of the state of UP ie, Ramganga and Gandak.

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I set about to work furiously in my new assignment. The Governor had asked me to develop a housing scheme for the Scheduled Castes in rural area. Quite sometime was devoted to preparing the site plans for one such quarter and then a whole group of houses in a rural setting. A new corporation was set up for building such houses – HARIVAS; finding the right type of engineers and staff for this Corporation was a tricky proposition. I was staking my reputation on the quality of work that HARIVAS was expected to deliver.

It is a matter of great solace to me that to this day HARIVAS or whatever is the name of the successor PSU, is reputed to be a sound construction agency. When some such quarters were ready in a village close to Lucknow I visited, I enquired from a few of the prospective beneficiaries what they thought of them. They seemed to hesitate to come out with their opinion. I encouraged them to be frank, and they said- 'Our buffaloes can not enter this house.' I told them that the house was for their family. They said 'the buffaloes were part of their family'. This was a real revelation for me and people like me who are outsiders. Such schemes can succeed only if beneficiaries participate in the planning process and I learnt this lesson for my future reference.

There was a financial corporation also relating to dalits which had to be bolstered. The three PSUs in the department were gradually built up to do their tasks efficiently. In the mean time, PS Krishnan, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs had issued special instructions for a Special Component Plan for the Scheduled Castes which implied apportioning a certain percentage of the plan funds, commensurate to the population of the Scheduled Castes in a given area and ensuring targeted application of these funds for schemes to benefit the Scheduled Castes. These instructions had in reality been issued a few years ago but UP had not even started doing so. Krishnan, therefore, was paying special attention to UP and I happened to be the Secretary to the state government in-charge of this programme.

The programme appealed to me as well and I began to do my bit. In about eight months time we had brought UP to a level where Krishnan began to say that UP is now amongst the best few in the country. My reputation as a crusader for the Schedule Castes in the state began to disturb the peace of mind of the Scheduled Caste political leaders, and they began to gun for me saying that how can a Brahmin possibly be a friend of the Scheduled Castes. Suddenly, I was dubbed as Harijan **Virodhi**. This has been the tragedy of dalit politics that dalit leaders do not want other caste people, however well intentioned to come to the aid of the dalits. It is now only in the name of

social engineering that an alliance of a socio-politico nature has emerged between the dalits and the Brahmins, something like the earliest Congress party formula of a similar alliance, because the dalits realized that political power is going to elude them for ever if this was not done.

Gurudev was visiting Kanpur in the early months of the year 1981 and I went to see him. I mentioned my dilemma to him. He heard me out very gravely and muttered some words derogatory to the politicians, which in fact surprised me. But that was his way of sympathizing with me and my likes who were trying to do their bit against adversities. Soon thereafter, **Gurudev** was to address an assembly of **Gayatri parijans** and other people interested in the **Gayatri mantra** and he asked me to accompany him. I was invited by him to sit on the Dias close to him. Dr. Pranav Pandya was also there at the back and he asked him to come forward and sit in the front row with him and me as well as the main organizers of that function. I was asked to speak which I did with considerable hesitation. I had no intentions to be in the front line of the **parijans** in the Yug Nirman movement and preferred to keep a low profile and at the same time tried to do my bit in whatever way I was doing which in my judgment would be in conformity with the broad vision of **Gurudev** as I understood it. To me **Gurudev's** ideas and work were very much akin to the broad social, cultural values, ideals and reforms projected by the Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in the Indian Constitution. These reforms had been made non-justiciable in the Constitution itself, perhaps to leave the urgency of adopting reforms to the good sense of the future generations of India.

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Soon enough, I received my orders of transfer and was posted as Secretary Power as well as Secretary for Science and Technology. PS Krishnan was sorry to loose me. He would often say – **Pant ji, apne kya akkal payee hai** – आपने क्या अक्ल पाई है!! The new posting brought me headlong into a position of authority amongst the power engineers of the UP State Electricity Board (UPSEB). I began in my usual style of getting educated about my portfolio both in the State Electricity Board as well as in the Council for Science and Technology. Both were areas of great interest to me and in about three months time I was sufficiently educated to start thinking of doing something. The first thing I chose was to issue orders regarding stock checking of all the UPSEB stores to ascertain the level of inventory that was being maintained by the Board. This sent a wave of alarm amongst all concerned and I was promptly transferred. Such was the hold of the power engineers over the political bosses.

The separate story of the UPSEB's downhill march began in the early years of the decade of seventies, about ten years before this time. The power engineers strike which took place in January 1973 lasted for about a week and the back of the strikers had nearly been broken, with power generation and distribution touching a peak during the strike period. It was then that the then Power Minister in UP decided to intervene on behalf of the strikers and the state government capitulated, transferring the Chairman, UPSEB Shri RK Trivedi and the Member Secretary Shri M Varadarajan who had seen to it that the state did not suffer due to the irresponsible and illegal strike of the power engineers. Thereafter, the power engineers always dictated their terms and the state government watched on helplessly and went on conceding demands upon their demands whenever they threatened a strike. This adverse turn around in the power sector had a chain reaction and the very idea of disciplining the power engineers even by means, such as the Power Sector Reforms attempted much later in the decade of nineties, has not brought about the desired results to this day.

Power sector today is a sick sector with not a glimmer of hope that it would ever become a vibrant, cost effective sector. This is one clear example of how an unwarranted ham-handed political solution to a technical problem brought untold loss to the country in terms of precious revenue as well as many multiplier benefits which would have flown out of an efficient power sector. There were such many more examples of mis-governance in India due to unwarranted political interference in the years after independence, especially after 1975.

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This was a mere aside to demonstrate how the state government of UP had begun to take decisions in those days. The downward slide in governance of UP had already commenced and was to continue unabated with progressive acceleration. **A few of us were putting up such resistance as was possible within the limits of our oath to the Indian Constitution, but it was a losing battle in the final analysis.** This would have been unthinkable even till the beginning of the decade of seventies, when proper administrative norms were still adhered to in taking decisions and UP was then reputed to be the best administered state in the Indian Union.

This change in my posting now as Secretary Forests brought me in touch with a sector which was to become my favorite in many ways. My early association with the hills since childhood and my love of the mountains and forests, all made this posting a great reward for me. The cool breeze of the forests could be felt, even as I got down to get educated in the first three months of

my new posting. The Indian Forest Service which was supposed to be the custodian of the forests of India were a very professional group of officers and it was a great pleasure for me to associate with them. I plunged headlong into studying forestry and the other issues involved in protecting our forests. This included studying the problems of the personnel, who were the custodians of the forests, right from top to bottom. This was to turn out into one of the best postings I have had during my service career for over thirty five years. I even began having premonitions on receiving this posting order, of the great time I was to get to enjoy as Forest Secretary for a period of two years hence forth.

During my tenure as Secretary Forest I was again working at my furious best. Social Forestry was yet another area which was opening up and implied that farmers may take up farming tree crops. Eucalyptus and Poplar were two varieties which were attractive to the farmers. While the former could grow anywhere with enough soil moisture, the latter variety was choosy and could grow only above a certain latitude north of Bareilly. We set a target of planting 10 crore trees during my second year as Forest Secretary in the whole state. This implied that we should have so many saplings which would need a very much larger area under the forest nurseries. I immediately issued instructions that every development block in the state, numbering over 900 would have to develop a two-hectare nursery within six months. Thus, within six months over 1800 hectares were brought under forest nurseries, nearly more than doubling the total area within the state, under forest nurseries making availability of plants much easier.

During the rainy season of the year 1983 the whole state of UP was agog with the slogan '**per lagao desh bachao**' "पेड़ लगाओ देश बचाओ". The whole task was not merely planting 10 crore saplings but also to ensure that they survived. Thus every block was asked to name the forest nursery as "**Van Chetna Kendra**" to be a meeting point for all and sundry to collect plants for planting and to become aware of the importance of trees for human survival. To propagate concern for the wild life of the state a slogan '**jeewan hai hi jeev va wan**' "जीवन है ही जीव व वन" was set afloat. A monthly newsletter '**Aranyak**' "आरण्यक" was also started. In other words unprecedented forestry activities took place during those two years.



Author (3rd from left)
with Nikhil, Lalit, and
Abha – inspecting
agro-forestry in Gujarat
(1983) as Forest
Secretary, UP.

By the latter part of my second year as Forest Secretary Shri Sanjay Singh became the Forest Minister who happened to be close to the then rising politician Shri Rajiv Gandhi MP (Member of Parliament). There were quite a few senior forest officers of the IFS who were not above board in their dealings and official work and whom I had kept under fairly rigorous watchful regime. They began to warm up to the new minister and would oblige him in various ways. One thing was to lead to another, and events gradually were so manipulated by these elements that Shri Sanjay Singh began to press for my transfer from the Forest Department. Shri VP Singh who was then the Chief Minister and was also related to Shri Sanjay Singh, however did not yield to this pressure for quite some time.

In the mean time in my capacity as Chief Electoral Officer of the state I had occasion to take a tough stand with the state government in regard to the parliamentary election of Garhwal in which Shri Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna had contested. Shri VP Singh did not relish my stand in this matter and as a rebuff to me I was transferred out of the Forest Department and was posted as Secretary PWD. However, it speaks volumes for the character of Shri VP Singh that six months later I got a call from the Chief Secretary Shri Tribhuvan Prashad, to tell me that the Chief Minister had expressed his appreciation for the stand taken by me in relation to the bye-election in Garhwal parliamentary election.

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One of the distinguishing features of my tenure in Forest Department was **Gurudev's** keen interest in forestry development issues particularly in the hills of Uttarakhand. He would talk of building temples for the various rishis who had done their **tapasya** in different locations which would have nurseries of useful plants for people to take with them as **Prasad**. I was delighted recently to learn from Napalchyal, Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand in 2009-'10 that there is a temple in Pithoragarh district dedicated to **Maharshi Vyas**, situated in the Vyas Valley and remembered **Gurudev's** wish.

In fact, the concept of **Van Chetna Kendra** emerged out of these discussions and was widely utilized by me in naming the forest nurseries all over the state of UP. It was during my posting as Secretary Forests that TS Ramana Subramanian (TSR) who retired as Union Cabinet Secretary in 1997-'98 and whom we called Raman for short, his wife Lalita, their daughter Bharati and son Shankar accompanied by Raman's mother and another relation made a programme of visit to Kedarnath and Badrinath. My father, mother, Kailash and Nimmi and our old **Nani** (mother's

mother) from Almora also were in the party. On our way up we broke journey in Shanti Kunj to call on Gurudev and Mataji. Raman's mother had lived in the **Ashram** of **Ramana Maharshi** and Raman too had childhood recollections of that **Ashram**. He told me later that the vibrations he experienced in Shanti Kunj reminded him of **Ramana Ashram**. Bharati was in tears when she met Mataji, so overwhelmed was she by her affection. When **Gurudev** asked Shankar his name, Shankar rattled out the **Vedic** method of introducing oneself starting from the village where he hailed from; **Gurudev** was mighty pleased.

A hilarious episode during our stay in Badrinath for the night preceding the morning we were to leave comes to mind. That evening Avadash Kaushal, who was then the Coordinator, Nehru Yuvak Kendra in Dehradun and was handling the logistics of the large party as a gesture of his friendship, arranged to get tasty **puris** prepared for dinner with plenty of cooking soda laced with the **atta** (ground wheat as flour). These **puris** were eaten with a rare gusto by all including Avadash to the point of over eating. The party left for Joshimath early next morning but by the time we reached Joshimath every one was desperate to rush to the toilet to answer the call of loose motions which cooking soda induces. There were a few public toilets in those days on the roadside and every one was rushing to them. Raman could spy the attached toilet door of a private house which was open, plump by the side of one of the bylanes and he lost no time to rush in to bolt the door from both entries, including the inlet from the house. I rushed to the PWD Inspection House and managed to save the day. When we all returned from our respective adventures to the waiting bus, Avadash with a twinkle in his eyes was red faced and all of us including the author of the practical joke laughed our guts out. The previous night's **puris** were the subject of discussion for the rest of our journey to Rishikesh and Haridwar.

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My association with Shanti Kunj was in the mean time growing more and more intense. My **sadhana** also was beginning to acquire greater depth and my readings of the **Vedas** and **Gayatri Maha Vigyan** had begun to broaden my general understanding of many events which keep happening around us all the time. Both in the newsletter of my previous department "**Madyanishedh**" as well as in the newsletter "**Aranyak**" of the Forest Department I was arranging the dissemination of articles written by **Gurudev** under his name, after he had so desired instead of "With the courtesy of **YUG NIRMAN YOJNA**", which was the way I had begun to acknowledge his articles. A problem seemed to have cropped up with the establishment of the **Brahmvarchas**

Shodh Sansthan on the banks of the Ganga in June 1979, since the only path which connected this new establishment with Shanti Kunj, happened to pass through **Saptrishi Ashram**.

While initially there was no problem, of late **Saptrishi Ashram** inmates began to object to the **Gayatri parijans** using their premises as a thoroughfare. The only solution was to get a road constructed which would connect the road going past Shanti Kunj with the road going past **Brahmvarchas Shodh Sansthan**. This was a project which only the PWD could carry through via acquisition of the land which came in the way. The process of acquisition was started as early as 1980 but the progress was very slow. My posting as Secretary PWD, thus came in very handy and within six months of my posting the metalled road in question was constructed. The credit for this was given to me by **Gurudev** but in reality it was his own scheme of things that was getting materialized.

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I began my tenure in the Public Works Department (PWD) in the usual style of devoting the first three months to getting educated on my job. The next three months were then devoted to planning the reform process. The working manuals of the UP Nirman Nigam and UP Bridge Corporation were scrutinized and updated to become professional and the staff matters as well as promotion matters of the engineers were streamlined. Departmental Promotion Committees were organized and all back-log of promotions was cleared. Even the ultimate test which had failed with the power engineers was unleashed. The civil engineers were still a more disciplined lot. All the stocks of PWD stores and materials issued to contractors and Junior Engineers (JEs) were checked and updated. JEs were given strict instructions that when transferred, they should hand over the stocks meticulously to the next incumbent. All these measures were appreciated widely by the staff as even till then, the PWD was the most professional of the many engineering departments of the state government.

I can say that my two years as Secretary PWD were again professionally nearly one of the most satisfying of my tenures during my service. I found a pleasing devotion to ethical behavior amongst the top engineers of the PWD in those days and my firmness had many takers in the top echelons of their hierarchy. The PWD engineers to this day sing praises of the reform measures taken up in those two years. The two PSUs UP Nirman Nigam and UP Bridge Corporation too proved professionally earnest and earned laurels all over the country as well as even abroad. I can say with professional pride that I left the department after two years in the best possible shape for

my successor Shri SN Shukla. He too happened to be a crusader for official rectitude and he valiantly carried on the good work started during my tenure in UP PWD.

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As Secretary PWD it fell upon me to complete the linking up of the Gangotri Temple with the main road up to Lanka which involved construction of an all weather sturdy bridge there. When we visited Gangotri in 1976 we had to walk the ten kilometers from Lanka to Gangotri because the bridge at Lanka had not then been constructed. During the many departmental reviews, I once asked about this bridge and was told that the PSU of the Railway Board IRCON had not completed this project in the last ten years. I said that I would like to see this project through as early as possible and in fact gave a date six months ahead that I would be visiting Gangotri then to see the progress of this bridge.

This galvanized the department immediately and when I reached this spot by road after six months on the appointed date the bridge was ready and I was the first senior ranking officer to the state government to drive over it. We halted at Gangotri that night in October 1984. We had planned to take a small party from New Delhi led by my friend PV Venkatakrishnan with tents and other essentials to camp at Tapovan at an altitude of above 14,000 feet above sea level, which we did after a tiring and steep trek from Gangotri to Bhujwasa and after a night's halt there and on to Gaumukh and up the Gangotri Glacier to Tapovan. When I negotiated the steep climb up to the level ground before Tapovan, I was dead tired and so sat on a rock resting my rucksack suitably. I immediately lost consciousness and when I regained my senses after may be ten minutes I felt utterly fresh and young and full of energy. I recollected that some divine presence had given a cool & utterly blissful touch to both my eyes, simultaneously before I became unconscious. The sensation of soft and blissful touch in both the eyes simultaneously, was so real, that its blissful memory lingers to this day.

This was a totally new experience never to be repeated precisely and for the next twenty four hours that we spent at Tapovan I was totally intoxicated with this feeling of blessedness, of ***"divya drishti"*** meaning a **divine perspective** which I have never again experienced but which I remember very vividly. I even felt the cold much less and went about my daily chores nonchalantly. I now choose to call this experience as a special boon given to me by **Dada Guru, Gurudev** to my **Gurudev** Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya. The photographs of Shivaling Parbat that were taken by a

friend at 5 am and 8 am the next morning, still adorn our drawing room in Shraddha Kunj, Dehradun.

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It was the month of March 1985 that I decided to stay in Shanti Kunj for six days during the **Chaitra Navratras** and with the special permission of **Gurudev** I was permitted to complete the **anusthan** of 24,000 **Gayatri** recitation – **jap** in these six days and I performed the **puṇahuti agnihotra** on the seventh day in the morning. These six days of my stay in Shanti Kunj along with as many nights was a unique spiritual experience of total inner peace and such was the overpowering intensity of this experience that the thought of returning to Lucknow to rejoin my family was not as welcome as it normally would be. In fact, I felt that I seemed to belong to Shanti Kunj more than I seemed to belong to my own family.

Right at the beginning of the six days, **Gurudev** sent for me at about 8 am and gave me the necessary tips for the **sadhana** and **Gayatri jap** as well a rosary of tulsi beads, which I cherish even now as a valuable possession. Touching the rosary every time I use it for **Gayatri jap** even now, sends an electric thrill through my whole body and helps me in meditating while I do the **jap**. He also asked me to report every morning to see him at 8 am and narrate whatever I had felt during the previous day and night. This routine for six days with a meal of **amritashan**, plain boiled **khichdi** with plenty of seasonal vegetables without salt at about 11 am every day was a strict enough regime combined with waking up at 3.30 am, followed by the morning rituals of getting ready with the help of a cup of tea, sweeping the floor of the quarters that I occupied, taking a quick cold water bath, performing the morning **sandhya** followed by the daily **agnihotra**.

Almost six hours had to be devoted daily to perform the over 4000 **Gayatri jap** every day so that the full dose of 24,000 **Gayatri jap** may be completed in six days. Day in and day out in Shanti Kunj was like staying in a spiritual sanatorium, where one realized that every thought and movement was under scrutiny of a divine presence around you and distortions in ones persona were being rectified in a subtle un-obtrusive manner. It was, indeed, an unforgettable experience to be cherished for ever.

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It was time to leave and I bade goodbye to **Gurudev** and **Vandaniya Mataji** with a heavy heart. In the mean time I had received news of my transfer as Education Secretary. **Gurudev** was

happy that my new assignment would enable me to contribute substantially to the education sector as well as would enable the lofty vision of the Yug Nirman Mission to permeate into the ethos of the state Education Department. My own feelings were of a mixed kind in the sense that I was apprehensive whether the powerful teachers' lobby in the state would really let me function as a genuine Secretary Education.

Shri Sayyed Sibte Razi happened to be the Education Minister and I lost no time in calling on him on my return to Lucknow after taking over charge from the previous incumbent Shri RC Tripathi. Shri Tripathi had been a successful Education Secretary for over three years after he had succeeded a senior service officer who also hailed from our common Alma Mater, the University of Allahabad, the late Shri Gopi Krishna Arora. So both my predecessors were illustrious officers and I was naturally full of trepidations when I called on Shri Sibte Razi. To my delight I found him to be a very polished gentleman who assured me that he would fully back me on any worthwhile scheme in the Education Department which I may bring forth for his approval. I assured him that I would always first discuss any new idea with him to seek his guidance on the proposed parameters before formally submitting such schemes for his approval.

My stay in the Education Department for the next three and a half years was to be the most taxing as well as one of the most creative tenures I have had during my service. In Shri Sibte Razi I found a minister who was extremely conscientious of his public duties and was never casual in dealing with issues of public importance and throughout my association with him for three and a half years in the education department I had no problem in doing my best to his satisfaction. We have retained the good relations thereafter too and I even got a call from him from Ranchi the state capital of Jharkhand, where he presided as Sri Rajyapal for a term of five years, recalling the great time we had together in the UP Education Department over two decades ago.

Chapter III – The Persona of Gurudev

Visiting Shanti Kunj regularly, at an interval of about two months had by now become a routine and correspondingly my own world view also began to change very subtly. This was not so easy to begin with as the pressures of official duties had to be taken into account. But gradually I became an adept at it and I was able to adjust my official programme suitably to enable a visit to Haridwar. I had read a book by the great German philosopher Dr. Albert Schweitzer long ago in which he had observed the life-negating aspects of the ancient Indian philosophy at the expense of life affirmative aspects and had been severely critical of it. He had argued that these life-negating aspects had led the Indian genius to neglect the details of good living thereby leading to the country sinking into poverty and backwardness and slavery as well.

The validity of this thesis could be argued both ways and I could read some of this in my understanding of the despair of Swami Vivekananda while he walked the length and breadth of India after the passing away of his Master Paramhans Shri Rama Krishna Dev. The history of India for the last fifteen hundred years bore ample evidence of what Dr. Schweitzer was pointing out and to me **Gurudev** was the right mix of life affirmation and life negation. In fact, his world view appeared to be almost aggressively life affirmative and the life negating aspects were deftly woven into the process of self improvement suitably interspersed to add spice and beauty to the whole process of living.

Expressed in his own very precise and exact words “पात्रता विकास के बिना न संसार में कोई रिश्ता है और न इसके बिना अध्यात्म क्षेत्र में कोई रास्ता है”, expressed in roman script ***‘patrata vikas ke bina na sansar main koi rishta hai or na iske bina adhyatma kshetra main koi rasta hai’*** and again “सफलता का सबसे पहला रहस्य है हर परिस्थिति के लिये तैयार रहना”, expressed in roman script ***‘safalta ka sabse pahla rahasya hai har paristhiti ke liye tayar rehana’***. The meaning of the first quotation is **‘No relationship in life can survive unless one develops one’s own capabilities and there is no way forward in the realm of spiritual growth unless this is done,’** while the second quotation means **‘the first secret of success is to be prepared for every eventuality’**. The first one can be summarized briefly to imply, **“capacity development”** as a form

of practical spiritual **sadhana** to get on in life. What can be more life-affirmative than this practical approach through positive thinking and living?

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Sriram was born and brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family and received his early education in his village **pathshala** (school) in Anwalkhera in district Agra situated in the then United Provinces of Agra and Awadh. His father was a very learned Pandit who owned a large zamindari but who led a simple life and narrated the **Bhagwat**, the story of Shri Krishna as an adept **kathawachak**, a story-teller making it his vocation. The child Sriram accompanied his father on his **katha** itinerary and soon became an adept himself in the lore of Shri Krishna.

His father was a friend of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and he sent Sriram to Malviyaji to receive the sacred thread, “**yagyopaveet**” at an early age. Sriram had his first tiff with the family when he began to nurse the village sweepress Chhapko who was critically ill. How could a Brahmin boy of high birth serve an outcast? But Sriram defied the family as well as the whole village and nursed the poor old woman to full health after a prolonged spell of nursing. She blessed him profusely and Sriram always attributed his success in his life’s mission to her blessings. This overflowing compassion in his heart was the most prominent streak in the personality of **Gurudev**. His compassion knew no bounds and his urge to help any one in need at the earliest was a hallmark of his life’s work.

Vedmurti Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya – as **Gurudev** came to be known when I met him had the only formal schooling of his life in his village **pathshala** (school) and thereafter was entirely a self-educated – self made man. Though he attributed all his achievements to the blessings of his own **Gurudev** Swami Sarveshwarananda who wandered about in the Himalayas or was in perpetual meditation in the heart of the Central Himalayas described as the **Kedar Khand** in the **Skand Purana**, this could not have been possible without his own innate ability to grasp the best from whatever came his way.

He has written somewhere that he read over 36 lakh (3.6 million) pages of various books all of which he remembered, as if his mind was an on-line library of encyclopedic proportions. He is supposed to have met over five crore (50 million) persons during his life time and who ever he set his eyes upon was blessed by his benign vision, affecting that person in some subtle way which would propel that person in the direction best suited to that person. With all these divine attributes he was like a flame of inspiration which was constantly burning for the alleviation of

misery, which he would notice anywhere in the world, twenty four hours a day, 365 days in a year. I once described **Gurudev** to **Mataji** as a factory of inspiring thoughts which were constantly radiating out of him in all directions to be picked up by any and every receptive soul. He has written somewhere that he did not waste a single second during his whole life time. The only other comparable claim I am aware of was the one made by the great Hindi writer Maha Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan that he did not waste a single minute in his life time. Such was the rough sketch of Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya as I began to grapple with his persona.

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It was one of the many visits I was making to Shanti Kunj, but this time I was not alone. Abha, Lalit and Nikhil were also with me. As usual after our arrival at Shanti Kunj and after we had washed and got ready, we were summoned in **Gurudev's** presence. After making his usual enquiries which comprised of my presenting a full report since I last met him to the present moment, Abha's version of what was going on in the family, affectionate pat for Lalit and Nikhil, he invited all of us to his inner room where he performed his daily meditations. He formally introduced us to his **Gurudev** Swami Sarveshwarananda whose photograph, which was the largest and most lively I had seen, hung on the western wall of the small meditation room as if he was physically present. We felt deeply honoured and were literally awe struck and speechless.

I felt as if I was bathing in the effulgent light of the aura of the living presence of **Dada Guru** as we called Swami Sarveshwarananda. **Gurudev** told us that **Dada Guru** was over 700 years old and that he had himself taken that photograph when he first met him on his first visit to the Himalayas in order to carry with him some evidence of his existence as well as of his meeting with him. This would have been sometime after 1926 when **Dada Guru** appeared before young Sriram for the first time in astral form in the early hours of the spring festival **Vasant Panchami**, while he was doing his routine morning **sandhya** at his home in Anwalkhera.

This first meeting has been described by **Gurudev** very vividly in his writings and he told us as much that day. **Gurudev** had a profound reverence for the Himalayas and addressed them as **Devatma Himalay** reminiscent of the great poet Kalidas who called them '**Devatatma Himalay**' in the first verse of his famous epic "**Kumar Sambhav**". **Gurudev** put us at ease and then told me that this kind of relationship which I and my family had with him was not something which had originated a few years ago but implied that we had been associated with him in our previous births as well. I was too much under the spell of his over powering affection to ask any questions about

the particulars of those past births, but much as I came to know him later he would have parried these questions as irrelevant. Whenever I would ask him about his supernatural powers he would parry my questions as being below his expectations from me and would say that he expected me to assess, his & the Mission's work as critically as possible.

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Once on my visit to Shanti Kunj I was sitting in Gurudev's presence when he rose to show me how he wore his **dhoti** and how he made the pleats look neat. So I also stood up to face him and to see how he did it. Then suddenly he lurched towards me as if he had tripped and I came forward to hold him in my arms. I was astounded to put my arms around him as I felt that I was literally holding a pillar of steel. He quickly regained his standing position and after sitting down on his chair carried on with the conversation as if nothing had happened. My own consternation knew no bounds and I kept looking at him with wide eyes. For the first time I realized that Gurudev was not the old doddering man that he appeared to be but was made of a special and harder mettle which could hardly be called less than super human.

Yet on another occasion when I touched his feet I felt that the other end of the man whose feet I was touching had his head somewhere in deep space, high above the whole world and may be even where the Sun was burning bright. Apparently, Gurudev was letting me know bit by bit about himself without in any way attempting to change me and my way of thinking and behaving. In other words he was allowing me to change myself the way I thought was best for me, yet guiding me very subtly.

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On the command of **Dada Guru, Acharyasri** became an ardent activist in the cause of India's freedom struggle and was arrested a number of times for many years. In jail he would associate with all and sundry and would take up classes to educate the illiterate amongst them. Many of the stalwarts of the freedom movement like Shri Motilal Nehru, Mrs Swaruprani Nehru and Shri Rafi Ammed Kidwai were with him in jail. When India became free he chose to keep aloof from the politics of the day and instead chose to devote himself on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi, to the resurrection of the **Dharma Tantra** as he called the religious fabric and framework in India, mainly comprising of the religions and sects which had emanated from the Indian soil.

His main work in this field seemed to have brought about a great deal of mutual understanding between the **Sanatan Dharma** and the **Arya Samaj** and today these two sects are not as antagonistic as they were fifty years ago. In addition, all the other sects too have been influenced and there is less acrimony amongst the various sects and religions. His whole world view in relation to religion was that each religion was unique which laid down a specific path and a way of life which suited that group of persons and there was no real reason for groups of different religions and sects to assert their respective superiority over the others. The best elements of each religion and sect could have a discourse with each other to remove their respective mutual apprehensions and co-exist in a spirit of **“live and let live”**. For him each religion was a beautiful flower in the garden of humanity with a distinct fragrance and hue of its own, and no flower need fear another flower in the process of blooming to its full potential. For him religion was one of the basic inner urges of every human being and should really be a force for peace and tranquility all around.

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He was generally critical of the so called **sadhu babas** roaming around or building huge **ashrams** for their own comforts, neglecting the essential duty of every such person to serve the needy. He would say that if the 36 lakh **Babas** could distribute themselves 5 to 6 each among the six and a half lakh villages in India, then **Ramrajya** could be ushered in India in a matter of a few years. This number of **babas** in India now may be estimated to be nearer one crore. One of his interesting and penetrating comments on the orthodox elements in Indian society was – “When Mahamud of Ghazni was invading India, the **purohits** meaning the priests instead of organizing the people of India to resist him, were debating on which side to place their water carrier while sitting on their haunches to relieve their natural calls in the morning hours before sunrise, as a remedy to Ghazni’s invasion”.

For him the degeneration of the **PUROHIT**, the traditional priest in the Indian society of the **Vedic** traditions was the prime reason for its degeneration after the sixth century AD. **“AHAM RASHTREY JAGRAYAMAH PUROHITAH”**, meaning **“we are priests who awaken the nation”** became his clarion call for the YUG NIRMAN YOJANA. He believed that a Brahmin by birth alone, but not in deeds cannot be a real **purohit**. He advocated that imposter **purohits**, the priests moving amongst people only to make a living should be boycotted. Any one, irrespective of his birth and parentage, who has the qualities of a **BRAHMIN**, is by his very life style a **purohit**, because that

person makes every one around him to change for the better all his life quite naturally. This brought the orthodox priestly elements in Indian society up in arms against him and the Mission in Mathura soon after he began his work in 1953.

By 1953 Gurudev had disposed off all the compensation bonds that he had received for the zamindari of his father which had been abolished in UP by the UP Zamindari Abolition Act of 1950. With the funds so made available he set up the **Gayatri Tapobhumi** in Mathura in that year on **Gayatri Jayanti** day. This was to be the head quarters of the Yug Nirman Yojana hence forth, which was aimed at bringing about a total transformation of the whole of humanity by rousing the DIVINE in every human being, **“MANUSHYA MAIN DEVATVA KA UDAY”** – “मनुष्य में देवत्व का उदय” and thus enabling the descent of “Heaven on Earth” ie **“DHARTI PAR SWARG KA AVATARAN”** – “धरती पर स्वर्ग का अवतरण”.

This was reminiscent of the concept of **“Descent of the Supramental”** propounded by Shri Aurobindo in his Integral Yog **“PURNADVAIT”** from Pondicherry. This would be achieved by every human being becoming a better person – **Vyakti Nirman** – व्यक्ति निर्माण, every family becoming a better family – **Pariwar Nirman** – परिवार निर्माण – and this process gradually leading to **Yug Nirman** – युग निर्माण – building a new era in human existence. Such was the simple but magnificent world view that Gurudev projected through his YUG NIRMAN YOJANA (YNY) – युग निर्माण योजना. Revolution in THOUGHTS and thinking, **Vichar Kranti Abhiyan** – विचार क्रांति अभियान through the new **purohits** – पुरोहित, the **PARIJANS** – परिजन he was preparing and training was meant to change the thinking processes and perverted self-centered way people thought nowadays – only about themselves and their families. This was done by disseminating positive ideas by word of mouth and print, in order to create an environment and thinking such that unless the whole of society became better, an individual could not even hope to survive today by merely being more and more self centered.

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“Improving oneself was the greatest good an individual could do to this world” was one of the punch lines of the Yug Nirman Mission. **“Hum Badlenge Yug Badlega”, “Hum Sudharenge Yug**

Sudharega” – “हम बदलेंगे युग बदलेगा”, “हम सुधरेंगे युग सुधरेगा” became prominent slogans of the Mission stressing on self-improvement. This was in sharp contrast to the political parties and orthodox elements of the day which would go to any lengths in attempting to change others by any means in order to bring about social change of their choosing. This had a familiar ring of what Jesus Christ of Bethlehem taught people two millenniums ago before he was crucified on the cross – “Love thy neighbour like thy self” and “The Kingdom of Heaven is within thee”.

Along with these outward trappings of a social movement, intensive training camps began to be organized at ***Gayatri Tapobhumi*** Mathura week after week, month after month, year after year. The ***Akhand Jyoti*** Magazine started as early as 1937 had by then acquired considerable readership and each number was written by ***Gurudev*** himself only, packing them with his choicest writings. No advertisements were invited for this magazine and only the bare cost of the paper and printing was the subscription for it. A band of dedicated workers began to get attracted to Mathura and each of them was taken care of by ***Vandaniya Mataji*** and ***Gurudev*** as their own kith and kin. Young Sriram would himself receive and duly see off every visitor at the railway station and ***Mataji*** would cook for all those who were there in ***Gayatri Tapobhumi***. This concern for each and every volunteer to be known as parijan – a member of the family, the ***Gayatri Parivar*** was the hall mark of both ***Gurudev*** and ***Mataji*** right till the last day of their sojourn on earth. Young Sriram would tour all over the Northern and central parts of India, on foot, by bus or by third class in the railways or by any other means, wherever he was invited to visit and the intensity of these tours increased day by day month by month, year by year.

In 1956 a ***Sahasra Kundi Gayatri Mahayagya*** was organized at Mathura which attracted over a lakh volunteers who later resolved to dedicate their lives for Yug Nirman Yojana. Apart from organizing training camps to prepare the parijans ***Acharyasri*** was also writing a great deal. He undertook the difficult task of re-interpreting the ***Vedas***, the ***Upanishads*** and the ***Puranas*** to divest them of spurious and retrograde ideas which according to him had been injected by vested interests during the last five thousand years. The re-interpreted scriptures were also to become the basis of social reforms which he intended to bring about in the Indian way of life.

Scientific, reasonable and sensible interpretation of all these great books of learning was intended to remove cob-webs of superstitions, retrograde thinking and practices in different parts of India in the name of religion and hallowed traditions. He left Mathura in 1968, never to return and was away to the Himalayas for about three years to be with his ***Gurudev Swami***

Sarveshwarananda on his command. In the mean time **Vandaniya Mataji** also moved out of Mathura to come to Haridwar where Shanti Kunj was to be set up by the year 1970. From then to 1990 when **Acharyasri** left his mortal frame on **Gayatri Jayanti** day on 2nd June, he stayed on in Shanti Kunj to be survived by **Vandaniya Mataji** who shed her mortal frame in September 1994. The history of the growth of Yug Nirman Mission during **Gurudev's** life time and till the passing away of **Mataji** is a story of well nigh impossible achievements and land marks and cannot merely be the subject matter of a brief chapter of this book.

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Drawing a rough sketch of the phenomena by the name of Sriram Sharma at this juncture in this narration is relevant to appreciate that I, JC Pant, a civil servant of the Indian Administrative Service of nearly twenty years of gruelling service behind him was swept off his feet when he confronted him, initially to seek support for a government policy being implemented half heartedly. Later I realized that what I had stumbled upon was no less than reaching my **Gurusatta** (गुरुसत्ता) in physical form, literally my destination, which I was consciously or sub-consciously seeking all these years of my public and private life. On top of that, being told that this relationship with **Gurudev** was not of a recent origin but began many births ago was a thought which was most bewildering to comprehend. Was there any contact between us prior to my meeting him in physical form in March 1979 during this life of mine? And if so, in what form and manner? I have not given up exploring and searching this question even now.

During his lifetime **Gurudev** was writing prodigiously and giving guidance to thousands and thousands of visitors to Mathura in the early days and later to Shanti Kunj, day after day, month after month and year after year. The work and achievements that were packed within the duration of 80 years of his life on earth were such that would normally take an ordinary individual 800 years and are almost impossible to narrate and one is compelled to conclude that here was a giant of a man, so humble, so gentle, so strong, so tall that to call him merely human sounds inappropriate. He has been described as **YUG RISHI** but it would be appropriate to call him **MAHA MANAV** too, for such was his attachment for each and every **parijan** that he could never be really detached as a **rishi**.

While talking to him I often felt that he was spanning hundreds of years in his conversations and one was left dumb found when confronted with his searching eyes. In short, he and **Mataji** were incomparable super human beings yet essentially human. When I once asked him, what was I

expected to do, he replied without even batting an eyelid that he wanted me to prepare two persons like myself. I began searching for such two persons from amongst my colleagues in thirty five years of service but failed to find them. It then struck me that was he perhaps, referring to my two sons, Lalit and Nikhil whom he wanted me to groom into individuals like myself?

Vandaniya Mataji was an epitome of affection and caring, and the minutest details of ones comforts did not escape her attention. The meticulous manner in which Shanti Kunj was managed during **Gurudev's** and her lifetime is a matter of wonder – the whole **Ashram** seemed totally regulated by an unseen hand which seems to be so managed, even now so many years after their departure. Scores of parijans who came to Shanti Kunj were attended to as if they were members of the larger family which later began to be called **Gayatri Pariwar** and each one had access to **Mataji** at least once before they left the ashram. They would pour their hearts out to **Mataji** who had a word of comfort, of cheer, of consolation for every one of them.

The bonds of affection that were forged by **Gurudev** and **Mataji** with countless individuals are such that each one cherishes them even now, years after the passing away of this great couple. In fact, dwelling on those bonds occasionally even now seems to bring tears of nostalgia and affection and these tears revive all those persons who ever came in contact with them, into fresh surge of creative activities in aid of Yug Nirman in their own chosen field of activity.

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For Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya renunciation was not giving up or leaving this or that but transcending what ever attracted you earlier. The best example is a young mother who is prepared to forgo her comforts for the sake of her new born child. The concern for the baby is what propels the mother to renounce her comforts. If one is beholden to a larger than life cause then the creature comforts of life become meaningless. Expressed in his own words, “वैराग्य का बीज पलायन में नहीं आत्म मस्ती में अंकुरित होने दें। वैराग्य तो विशिष्ट अनुभूति है। आत्मा की सरलता सहजता से वह निकला झरना है। वैराग्य तो समभाव और वात्सल्य भाव से लिपटा होना चाहिए। यह केवल एक ही मार्ग है जिससे त्याग की भावना का साक्षात्कार किया जा सकता है”.

Expressed in roman script “**Vairagya ka beej palayan main nahi atma-masti main ankurit hone dain. Vairagya to vishisht anubhuti hai. Atma ki saralta sahajta se wah nikla jharna hai. Vairagya to sambhaav or vaatsalya bhaav se lipta hona chahiye. Yah kewal aik hi marg hai jisase tyag ki bhaavana ka saakshatkar kiya ja sakta hai**”. Translated into English this can be expressed as “**Let the seed of renunciation be allowed to germinate in the blissfulness and gay abandon of the Self.**

Renunciation is a special realisation. It is the spring which bursts forth from the simplicity and serenity of the Self. Renunciation should be steeped in equanimity and loving care. This is the only way to realize the feelings of natural self-abnegation". If the creator of this Universe is maintaining a semblance of order in it, then it is the duty of every human being to contribute in this process by not being self-centered and destructive but by being creative and positive.

"Do unto others only that you would have done unto yourself" is the basis of moral behaviour amongst humans in society. Caring for the welfare of others too is the only way to promote mutual welfare and such is the complexity of modern day living that collectively a lot can be done, while nothing can be achieved single handedly. The concept of Yug Nirman implied that every one does his or her bit and in the process the whole of society benefits.

If the positively disposed off persons in society, could come together on a common platform the scoundrels therein could be kept at bay. After all, in no society worth its name do scoundrels number more than the good people. Only a handful of daring rogues hold the whole of the passive society to ransom. ***Gayatri parivar*** was to be that platform which would enable the positive and creative elements in society to get together in order to work collaboratively for the common good in all walks of life. One always had to look for a ray of hope in a given situation and gradually build on it. "यह ना पूछो अकेली किरन क्या करेगी, तिमिर में अकेली किरन ही बहुत है". Expressed in roman script this would be ***'Yah na poochho akeli kiran kya karegi, timir main akeli kiran hi bahut hai'***. Translated this would read **"Do not ask what a single ray of light can do; in darkness a ray of hope is more than enough"**.

If one had to choose between tradition and sensibility, then being reasonable was what was indicated not a blind devotion to past superstitions. ***Gayatri pariwar*** was to be a family of such well meaning and positive social activists of all faiths, who would one day swell their ranks to engulf the whole of society, slowly and steadily in the beginning and later would adopt non-violent means of over powering the negative forces of society.

In other words, the Yug Nirman Yojana was a war on the destructive forces that have been unleashed by science and technology in the hands of selfish power seeking politicians the world over. A small minority of self-centered persons could not be allowed to hold the whole of society to ransom. It was time now for science and spirituality to collaborate and take human society forward. This would imply that the more evolved members of society would have to resist evil non-violently in the beginning and if that fails then other means could also be explored.

Like Gandhi ji, **Acharyasri** preferred violence to cowardice, though he never advocated violence but always stressed on finding common ground between adversaries in the spirit of give and take. He did not even pursue the criminal assailant who had set upon him in Shanti Kunj to assassinate him in the year 1986. Such was his spirit of forgiveness. While the police took note of this incident and prosecuted the assailant, he did not respond to the summons issued by the trial court for his evidence. Such was his sense of compassion, personal forbearance and bravery. For him hardships for oneself and comforts for others was the true sign of courtesy.

He himself shunned all comforts and luxuries all his life. **“Garibi hamara abhushan hai, daridrata hamara shatru hai”** – “गरीबी हमारा आभूषण है, दरिद्रता हमारा शत्रु है”, meaning **“Voluntary poverty is our ornament, it is wretchedness which is our enemy”** thereby suggesting that vulgar display of wealth had to be shunned. Voluntary poverty expressed through a life-style of simplicity was what he advocated. He always put off the ceiling fan in summer after the visitors left him after meeting him in his study. That is why he was called **“taponisht”** – “तपोनिष्ठ”.

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In one of his intimate conversations **Gurudev** had once told me that he had modelled Shanti Kunj on the lines of Sabarmati Ashram, in Ahmadabad, Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry and Pawnsar Ashram near Nagpur. He had visited each of these and had carefully studied all that made them special. There is no doubt that Shanti Kunj was like a cantonment of the foot soldiers of the Yug Nirman forces. The entire functioning of Shanti Kunj is enabled by volunteers who devote their time and resources for ensuring that the **ashram** is run meticulously 24 hours a day, 30 days a month and 12 months a year, year after year.

It is definitely an **ashram** with a difference and it is hard to believe that such an **ashram** can really exist. The discipline observed in Shanti Kunj and the regularity of the time table of events etc were indeed totally self-regulated in the days of **Gurudev** and **Mataji**. Every 1st day 11th day and 21st day of each month was the commencement of a nine days session of **sadhana** for the **parijans** who were prepared to devote time for the Mission’s work. Each of these sessions accommodated up to 200 **parijans** who would be of varying capabilities and aptitude. These were carefully observed during the nine days to pick out a handful of more active and capable parijans, who were then given specific responsibilities in Shanti Kunj or from wherever they hailed according to their respective inclinations and capabilities.

The term **parijan** itself implied that **Gayatri Pariwar** itself was to be managed as a family and in turn the whole of society too needed management as a larger family irrespective of caste or creed, able or disabled, rich or poor, with the well off members of society nursing a special concern for the weakest and the lowliest on their own. The weak and the lowly were not to feel inferior while the strong were expected to be concerned about their less fortunate brethren. This was to be akin to **Ramrajya** of which Mahatma Gandhi had spoken so much. It was **Vichar Kranti Abhiyan**, the **movement of revolutionary change in thinking** that would compel all concerned to reverse their perverse thinking and do their best to serve the common weal.

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I must at this juncture briefly mention the meaning **Gurudev** gave to the **Gayatri mantra** in the **Gayatri Maha Vigyan** as I understood it, which has been for ages shrouded in mystery. **The whole mantra reads as 'OM BHUR BHUVAH SWAHA TAT SAWITUR VARENYAM BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI DHIYO YONAH PRACHODAYAT' – 'ओम भूर्भुवः स्वः तत् सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्'.** **Om** symbolizes God, the cosmic sound or **NAD**, the **Param Brahm** and is usually recited before any and every **mantra** that is to be recited. It is supposed to be the sound vibrations that broke forth when the **Param Brahm** as **Ishwar**, **Sat-Chit-Anand** or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss initiated creation through His **Maya** (the power of manifesting ie, the power of creating and the power of veiling) and consciousness came into contact with matter ie, His (the **Param Brahm's**) **para** or higher conscious **prakriti** came in contact with His lower or **apara** inert **prakriti**, matter.

This is a continuous process as creation and the reverse process are taking place all the time and this sound vibration of **Om** is resonating in the whole Universe all the time (and can be heard by a discerning ear), and is literally the prime moving energy which is powering all the activities that are taking place in the Universe since creation burst forth. This **NAD**, the prime moving energy would keep doing so for eternity or till creation merges again in **Param Brahm**. The next three words '**Bhu(r): Bhuvah Swaha**' respectively stand for the physical world or the physical body-**sthul sharir**; the world of thoughts and ideas or the astral body-**sukshma sharir**; and the world of feelings, desires and passions, the causal body-**karan sharir**, the self or ego which is the assertive not-Self as well as the forgotten Self in each one of us.

These three words cover the entire creation which becomes the backdrop every time the **Gayatri mantra** is recited. '**Tat**' refers to **that** God almighty to whom the prayer is addressed; '**Sawita(ur)**': is the effulgent light of **that** God which sends the power of comprehension in all of us all the time; '**Varenyam**' stands for the loveableness and adorable splendour of **that** God, which is usually forgotten due to the tricks (the three **gunas** or modes in which the process of living is transacted) of the Lord's **Maya**, which in turn graciously helps all to work out their past **karmas** according to their respective inclinations; '**Bharg(o)**': is the power of **that** God to ignite our sins and destroy them and replace them with His inspirations; '**Devasya Dhimahi**' means that, as I contemplate the adorable splendour of **that** Lord with these attributes He is going to be seated in my heart and I am going to imbibe all these attributes and pray to Him so that '**Dhiyo Yonah Prachodayat**' ie, He may lead us (in the plural) on to the right path and may give all of us the right inspirations all the time. In other words each one of us prays for the creative good sense, not only for oneself alone but for every one around.

There are a few more versions of simple translations, worth quoting here. Rabindranath Tagore gave a beautiful version which is as follows: "Let us contemplate the adorable splendour of HIM who created the Earth, the Air and the Starry Spheres and sends the power of comprehension within our minds". Colebrook gave the following translation: "Aum, Earth, Sky, Heaven. Let us meditate on the most excellent light and power of that generous, sportive, and resplendent Sun (praying that) it may guide our intellects". I attempted a translation of the short version of the spiritual meaning (bhawarth — भावार्थ) of **Gayatri mantra**, current in Yug Nirman Yojana, which is as follows: "Let us contemplate HIS adorable splendour and imbibe that vibrant, liberating, sportive, exalted, effulgent, generous, divine Supreme Being, praying that HE may guide our intellects".

This mantra which was supposed to be only whispered into the ears of the twice born was made available by **Gurudev** to all castes and creeds without distinction of colour of one's skin or language. This was nothing short of a revolution and no ordinary crusade, and he had to risk his life for it. The opposition from the orthodox Hindus was fierce and it was only **Acharyasri's** patience and perseverance and power of polemics and his love and compassion for all, that he carried the day. The **Gayatri yagya** was also a means of cleansing the environment and through it he was able to mobilize all and sundry to join hands to save the eco-system. These **yagyas** also became a

device to enable wholesome social values to get imbibed into the psyche of the Indian masses and also to rid them of their own dearly held 'precious' superstitions, masquerading as pious beliefs.

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In other words, Yug Nirman movement emerged as a mighty, full scale, comprehensive social reform effort in India the like of which had not been witnessed since the last such effort was made by Swami Dayanand in the nineteenth century. **Acharyasri** went about organising these activities vigorously but silently without fanfare in the Hindi belt, where the orthodox elements of the Indian society had done the maximum damage to the social fabric. **Gurudev** was very particular to avoid publicity, partly not to attract too much attention of the retrograde elements and vested interests and more so to emphasize that the work performed by **Gayatri parijans** should speak for itself, instead of **parijans** blowing their own trumpet to attract his attention and seek cheap publicity.

Gurudev was always anxious to stress, like Lord Buddha did after achieving **Nirvan** or enlightenment over 2500 years ago, that what he was attempting was nothing new and that he was merely carrying forward the cultural traditions and the spiritual stream which originated from the **Vedas**. In fact, **Gurudev** called Lord Buddha's ministry as the **PURWARDH — पूर्वार्ध**, the first half of **Vichar Kranti Abhiyan — विचार क्रांति अभियान** and the present one as the second half, the **UTTARAARDH — उत्तरार्ध**. I am therefore tempted to trace this cultural heritage backwards to the time of the **Vedas**. In the hoary past the **rishis — ऋषि** were guiding the whole of society through their **gurukuls — गुरुकुल** and **aranyaks — आरण्यक**, the former for the youngsters who wanted to be initiated into learning and the latter for the aged, the **BAANPRASTHIs — वानप्रस्थी** who before they took **sanyas — संन्यास**, wanted to devote their time and energy for the good of society. This network of **gurukuls** and **aranyaks** was what could be described as a '**Rishi-Tantra**' – '**ऋषि-तंत्र**' which had the **Vedas** as their inspiration.

It was for Lord Ram to establish a system of governance which would be bound to always accept the wise counsel of the '**Rishi-Tantra**', knowing that the rulers were likely to lose their head in the luxuries of their palaces and thus forget to do their duty by the people. The burden of protecting such an Indian polity which promoted the freedom of the individual, from the greedy

eyes and snares of the invaders fell on Lord Krishna who gave the concept of **Mahabharat**, the **Greater India** and who in his lifetime created such a **Mahabharat** by getting the unrighteous supermen led by Duryodhan eliminated in the **Mahabharat War**.

The war had ravaged the Indian society and Yogeshwar Vasudev Shri Krishna gave a slogan through his dialogue with Arjun, the Bhagwad-Gita – '**Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam**' – 'योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्' – meaning '**perfection in action is yog**' thereby exhorting each and every one in society to do his or her best according one's capabilities, and not get bogged down in merely ritualistic observances. "**Perfection in action**" implies that '**being**' one self while '**doing**' every action **mindfully** is essential and the message of the Bhagwad-Gita was in a way a step in the direction of drawing away people from too much dependence on a ritualistic way of life as initially prescribed by the **Vedas**. What the Vedas had prescribed was meant to be primarily a form of practice for beginners to make every action of theirs sanctified. "**Yogyukto bhavarjun**" – "योगयुक्तो भवार्जुन" – "**Be in a state of Yog, O' Arjun**" said Lord Shri Krishna.

Recreating a new society from the debris of the old required that each individual must begin to look inwards to improve himself and to bring this about, Maharshi Patanjali appeared on the scene to propound his '**Yog-Sutra**' – 'योगसूत्र'. The opening lesson of the '**Yog-Sutra**' was '**Yogah Chitta-Vritti Nirodhah**' – 'योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः' – meaning according to Swami Vivekanand '**Yog is the control of the human instincts through the mind-intellect and is the consequential synergetic sum of the concentrated power of each organ in the state of SAMADHI**'.

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It was given to Lord Buddha to address the spiritual needs of those who could not avail the benefits of the **gurukuls** and **aranyaks** for some reason or the other beyond their control, or who did not agree with what was being taught in them, by laying stress on '**Appa Dipo Bhav**' 'अप्प दीपोभव' – '**Be a light unto your self**.' The next fifteen hundred years saw the flowering of the Indian genius in the Greater India, not as a conquering imperial power but as a messenger of peace through the thousands of Buddhist **paribrajaks** and **bhikkus** who took the message of compassion that Buddha preached, to far off lands all over Asia including China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia. Dr. Sohan Lal Seth tells me that the four sentences uttered by Lord Buddha

after he attained **NIRVAN** and went to Sarnath to deliver his first sermon were: “Do not believe in what I say”; “Do not believe in what the priests say”; “Do not believe in the scriptures”; “Believe in what your *Buddhi* says”. This is how perhaps Siddharth Gautam came to be known as Lord Buddha.

By the seventh century AD the original message of compassion which Buddha gave had lost its vital life-force in the Indian society. What had replaced it began to sour his original message in the land of its birth, and the Buddhist *sanghas* had become shelters for all kinds of society drop-outs and the Indian youth was getting wasted. The *sansar-chakra*, the life-cycle ordains that what goes up must come down. A little over a century before Christ the persecution of the Buddhists had started as if to teach them a lesson for dominating the whole of society by their message of compassion. The dormant retrograde elements of society captured the state power to systematically set about to undo the state patronage to them and the Buddhists came to be derisively called Buddhu, meaning a fool. A similar fate seems to have met the disciples of Lord Mahavir, another contemporary Indian of prophetic stature, the 24th and last *Tirthankar* of the Jains who came to be derided for their practice of *LUNCHAN*, meaning pulling the hair of the body as a form of extreme penance prescribed in Jainism. While the outcasts of society had opted for Buddhism as a revolt against traditional orthodox Brahminism, the trading classes opted for Jainism.

Both these sects owed their origin to the *Vedas*, but veered away as a revolt against the *Vedic* traditions, because of the superciliousness of the Brahmins by birth who tended to become arrogant and acquired the airs of a superior caste. This attitude of the caste Brahmins by birth made them rely on rituals as an effective means of enslaving the rest of the people by denying them access to pure spirituality, the *ADHYATM* of the Bhagwad-Gita and other sacred writings of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. This arbitrary and whimsical haughtiness of the traditional priests, the Purohit, was to do a great deal of damage to the whole fabric of Indian society for over a thousand years and was to make them easy preys for the Muslim invaders and later to the East India Company. The Brahmin who as Purohit, had been the back bone of Indian society, had thus degenerated into becoming an agent for its downfall. The *PURANAS* thus, came in handy to these orthodox elements to insert retrograde ideas and superstitions into the minds of the gullible people. That provided an opportunity and thus became the main inspiration for *Acharyasri* to reinterpret them, as well as all the other ancient scriptures, to rid them of spurious ideas planted

by vested interests and write his **PRAGYA PURAN** in the same fashion as the **PURANAS** to introduce reformed ideas of YUG NIRMAN.

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Along with this development, the persecution of the Shaivites in South India in the third and fourth century AD was another tragic feature of Indian history. Thus, the have-nots of society for whom Shaivism and Buddhism had provided a path to salvation were suppressed by the haves under the garb of Vaishnavism. In such situations of social conflict the Indian genius for synthesis begins to surface. To quote Anand Coomaraswamy **“The heart and essence of the Indian experience is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of all life, and the instinctive and ineradicable conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the utter most freedom”**. It appears that the persecution of the Buddhists predominantly in the North and the Shaivites in the South had an indirect effect on the future directions of development in the two sects of Buddhism, **Mahayan** towards the north and **Hinayan** towards the south, which spread out in these two directions respectively during this period of social conflict. The transition of **Mahayan** and **Hinayan** Buddhism in different countries to different spiritual practices including the different forms of martial arts that these practices assumed, would be an interesting matter and subject for analysis and research to social scientists as well as for the students of Comparative Religion.

The decline in the character of the Buddhist **Sanghas** by the eighth century is what appears to have brought about further decay in Indian society and it fell upon Adi Shankaracharya to resurrect it. Shankar's **Advait** philosophy of 'Monism' was very much like the Buddhist nihilism (Buddha himself was silent on all ultimate questions and in fact never tired of emphasizing that he was teaching nothing new) with a difference that instead of the Buddhist **'Shoonyawad'** ie **"Nihilism"** Shankar asserted that there was only one reality ie, **'Brahma'** without attributes. He traced the **Advait** philosophy to the **Vedas** and **Upanishads**. Before Shankar the valiant Kumaril Bhat who immolated himself on the slow fire of paddy husk as a penance for **gurudroh**, having gone against his oath to his Buddhist mentors in Taxilla after graduating from there, had already established the primacy of the **Vedas** through his country-wide discourses on the **Purva Mimansa**.

According to Jawaharlal Nehru, Shankar's basic adherence to Shaivism is what may have also helped him in replacing Buddhism by Shaivism, which too advocated a casteless society. Such was the effect of Shankar's polemical skills as he defeated all the great proponents of various

theologies and orthodoxies in debate during his short ministry of fifteen years that within a few hundred years Buddhism was completely routed from the land of its origin.

Quite a few variants of the **Advait** doctrine were to come up in succeeding centuries such as **Vishishtadvait**, **Dvaitadvait**, **Shuddhadvait**, **Bhedaveda** and outright dualism – **Dvait** propounded by acharyas such as Ramanuj, Nimbark, Ballabh, Chaitanya, Madva and others. There were in India a large number of non-vedic traditions as well and it fell on Baba Gorakhnath to mainstream them along with the **Vedic** traditions through what came to be known as the **Nath-panth**. It also fell on Shankar to blunt the trauma of the arrival of Islam through Mohmmmed Bin Qasim in the eighth century in Sindh and the same burden fell on Baba Gorakhnath when Islam crossed the Indus River three hundred years later. Many Muslims were also **Nath-panthis** and **Kabir-panthis** and Baba Gorakhnath laid the foundations of communal harmony which was to be later built upon by the Sufi saints.

The Sufis brought the seven essential principles of Islam with them to propagate – “**Mohabbat**” meaning “**Love**”; “**Tauba**” meaning “**The things or actions to be avoided or penitence**”; “**Sabr**” meaning “**Patience**”; “**Shukr**” meaning “**Gratitude to God**”; “**Riyaz**” meaning “**Practice**”; “**Tawakkul**” meaning “**Reliance on God**”; “**Raza**” meaning “**Acceptance of pleasure and pain with equanimity**”. These have such a familiar ring of the Bhagwad-Gita and the **Vedic** injunctions.

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Sant Gyaneshwar, himself a victim of the orthodox Brahmins of his native village was the leading **Nath-panthi** who set in motion what came to be known as the ‘**Bhagwat**’ tradition. He translated the Bhagwad-Gita into simple verse form in Marathi through his ‘**Gyaneshwari**’ in **Dev Nagari** script at the unbelievably young age of 14 years, thereby making the message of Shri Krishna accessible to the common masses for the first time. **Dev Nagari** was the script for Sanskrit language and was also to become the script for Hindi in free India. For the next five hundred years the saints of the ‘**Bhagwat**’ tradition were to sing their way into the hearts of the people, spreading the name and glory of the Lord far and wide, **preaching equality among all humans** and dispelling their pessimism as the invaders were trampling upon all that was sacred to the people of India.

This was the time of Indian history known as the Middle Ages when Hindi as a link language in **Dev Nagari** script assumed its developed form after Amir Khusro and the Sufi saints began using

this language in the thirteenth Century for their own communications with the Indian masses and when numerous saints like Kabir, Tulsi, Raidas, Surdas, Meera, Dadu, Raskhan, Eknath, Tukaram, Namdev, Samarth Guru Ramdas, Jaisi, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Shankardev, Charandas, Nanak and other Sikh Gurus and many others in all parts of India in all regional languages flourished and sang their way into the hearts of the people. As the physical body, the *sthul sharir* of India was getting thrashed, its astral and causal bodies, the *sookshm* and *karan sharirs* were being nursed carefully by the saints of the *Bhakti* tradition in all regional languages of India.

It was with the arrival of the Sufis in India in the thirteenth Century that the message of **‘brotherhood of man’** of Islam came across to the people and to the Sufis goes the credit of blunting the terror of Islam as practiced by the sultans of Delhi and for promoting communal harmony in India. Guru Nanak took up the message of **‘brotherhood of man’** and the Sikh panth was founded as a variant of *Vedic* traditions with minimum or no rituals, but by the time of the tenth and last Guru Govind Singh the Sikh Panth blossomed into the *‘Khalsa’* as a separate panth.

It was for Paramhans Shri Ramakrishna Dev to prove that all religions of the world lead to the same Divinity and religion need not be a cause for social discord. Shri Ramakrishna Dev called Christ as *Krishna Chetana* or Krishna Consciousness, thereby implying that the Christian era would be dominated by the message and teachings of Lord Krishna as expressed through the Bhagwad-Gita. Aldous Huxley has described the Bhagwad-Gita as the most comprehensive expression of the perennial philosophy available to the entire mankind. The freedom movement in India may appear to have started in 1857, a hundred years after the arrival of East India Company in 1757, but in reality the seeds of the same were sown way back when Sant Gyaneshwar translated the Bhagwad-Gita into simple Marathi through his *‘Gyaneshwari’*.

It is worth quoting the extracts of Lord Macaulay’s address to the British Parliament on February 2, 1835 describing the difficulties of subjugating the Indian people to bring about British domination over India – “I have traveled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we could ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation”.

This address was to unfold the famous “**Macaulay minutes**” of 1836 to introduce teaching English into the new education system in order to educate Indians to think and behave as Englishmen. This is the system of education which still holds sway in India and has now become a rigid system which kills the creativity of the child. It is an irony of history that the first one to pass BA in India, the highest level of education then, was none other than Bankim Chandra Chatterjee of Bengal. He was later to compose the national song “**Bande Mataram**”, which was to be on the lips of all those who went to the gallows of the British, for their love of India and became the rallying song of the freedom movement for the next seventy odd years.

Let us contrast the description of Lord Macaulay with that of Bishop Haibar who wrote to his friend in January, 1824 – “All in all Hindus are a very vibrant, ingenious and interesting people....Their religion because of the caste system, makes them so heartless with each other that often tragic things too happen. I am describing an incident which took place ten days ago. A traveler was lying ill on a village road; no body knew his caste, therefore no body came near him for fear of getting polluted. He would have died before the eyes of every one but was noticed by a European who picked him up and looked after him. But if he would have died on the road, his carcass would have kept lying till the vultures would have picked it up”.

Such was the curse of the caste system on Indian culture that unless it was broken up by any means, there was no hope of deliverance for India. Lord Buddha had done this earlier by breaking away from the **Sanskrit** tradition of propounding missionary teachings by using **Pali** for his discourses and Lord Mahaveer had used **Prakrit**. Swami Vivekananda, another distinguished product of the Macaulay system of education, who shook the whole world in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, addressed this issue frontally by setting up the Sri Ramakrishna Mission on the lines of the Buddhist monasteries. A little earlier, quite independently Swami Dayananda through his Arya Samaj too was to remind Indians of the fact that the **Vedas** were open to all.

It is significant to note that Sant Gyaneshwar, himself a victim of Hindu orthodoxy was born on 15th August which also happened to be **Janamashtami** day that year, the birthday of Lord Krishna – an obvious and clear enough indication of association of the Bhagwad-Gita with the freedom movement and the day of India’s independence in 1947. Bhagwad-Gita, which had declared that **varna** was determinable not by birth but by the vocation adopted naturally, was to

become the guide to Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi and a host of other freedom fighters and social reformer.

Varna was never a rigid caste till vested interests in Indian society conspired to make it so. Fighting the scourge of the caste system was a major social reform that was addressed by all the saints of the middle ages. The bhajans and songs sung by the saints of the **Bhagwat** tradition were carried by the bonded indentured labour as they travelled far and wide with the colonial powers who took them as cheap labour to work on their plantations in their colonies, and with them travelled the seeds of the smouldering Indian freedom movement in those colonies. Tulsidas's **Ramacharitmanas** and **Hanuman Chalisa** were to be sung by the migrant Indians wherever they went and settled and were to become the rallying points of the freedom struggles in the colonies.

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Thus, the freedom of India in 1947 signaled the climax of the freedom movements in the colonies inspired by the migrant Indians, as well as the beginnings of political freedom from the yoke of the imperial powers for all colonies in the world, and the old imperial powers gradually retreated to their former original size soon after India became free. Before India actually became free carrying the **Bhagwat** tradition further, it was the task of Swami Vivekanand, Yogiraj Shri Aurobindo and Shri Raman Maharshi to prepare the people of India for freedom at the subtler levels of consciousness, and the task of freedom fighters like Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi and others at the ground level was to promote social reforms and prepare the people to hold that freedom properly in their hands when the British would finally deliver the reins of power to Indian hands on 15th August 1947. As '**Rashtra Kavi**' Shri Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar' said-"**Gandhi and Jawaharlal were the engineers who translated the vision sketched by the poet Vivekananda**" -"**Jis swapna kay kavi Vivekananda thhey, Gandhi or Jawaharlal uskey engineer huay hain**" – "जिस स्वप्न के कवि विवेकानंद थे, गाँधी और जवाहरलाल उसके इंजीनयर थे".

This was the time when Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya shifted his attention from the freedom movement and pondered over his new role in free India. He would have known that the people were still steeped in wretchedness, poverty and superstitions and that he must devote himself to raise the level of their consciousness through some way which would be attractive enough for the people to accept. He was aware that rituals in religious ceremonies attracted people no ends. From that he evolved what came to be known as '**Sanskar Paddhyati se**

Lok-Sikshan' – 'संस्कार पद्धति से लोक-शिक्षण' meaning '**Mass Social Education through Religious Sanskar Rituals**'. This became the starting point of 'Yug Nirman Yojana'- '**a plan to create a new society**', which thereafter never looked back and **Gurudev** marched on step by step to create a massive man-making mission as was long ago envisaged by Swami Vivekanand. For **Gurudev** Lord Buddha's ministry with his message of '**Appa Dipo Bhav**' was the first phase of Yug Nirman through '**Vichar Kranti Abhiyan**', a revolutionary way of thinking to create a new social order and what he was attempting was the second phase. Lord Krishna had taught '**Brahm Nirvan**' – 'ब्रह्म निर्वाण' as the end-all and be-all of a successful life.

Lord Buddha achieved '**Nirvan**' after giving up all his prejudices out of his compassion for all creation and set into motion a massive social and ethical movement to generate compassion for all living beings. **Gurudev** went on to advocate '**Brahm Nirvan** through **Yug Nirman**' – 'युग निर्माण की निष्काम साधना से ब्रह्म निर्वाण की उपलब्धि', which was a unique method of rousing a half-dead population out of its stupor induced by a thousand years of slavery and five hundred years of social upheavals prior to that, for whom '**Brahm Nirvan**' had meant a way to escape responsibilities of life by resorting to **sanyas**. Such escapades into sanyas, in turn often led many such people into addiction to drugs and immoral traffic.

Gurudev had the highest reverence for the prophets of all faiths and had a surprisingly extensive personal and intimate knowledge about them as if he knew them all personally. He called Lord Jesus Christ as **Mahaprabhu Isa** and Karl Marx as **Maharshi Marx**. He described **Vedic** and **Upanishadic** philosophy as "**Adhyatmic Samyawad**" or "**Metaphysical Communism**". His concept of social equality was such that he wanted to make every person a Brahmin, implying a highly evolved human being. This is how he was able to bring about a revolutionary social change in India such that persons of all castes who are of exemplary character are now enabled to preside over a **Gayatri yagya**.

Just as India's freedom meant freedom for the whole world, this method of '**Brahm Nirvan**' through '**Yug Nirman**' is similarly applicable to the whole world, which has been ravaged by wars promoted by the military-industrial complexes of the former imperialistic powers and pestilences promoted by pharmaceutical cartels of these same powers. The cool breeze of these ideas needs to blow every where. **Gurudev** described the **Gayatri mantra** as **VISHWAMATA**, mother of the entire world, of all communities and humans; **DEVAMATA**, mother of all the natural forces in the

Universe and all that inspires society and **VEDMATA**, mother of all knowledge. For him, all the sacred writings of ancient India were merely sincere attempts at elaborating and describing all the aspects of the **Gayatri mantra**. He had dedicated his entire life to master the **Gayatri mantra** to bring out the essence of the Indian experience in order to revive the sick world and had in the process become a super human being, through his **sadhana** and **tapasya**. He had great faith in the **“Sankalp Shakti”** meaning the capacity of **“sincere resolve”** of each individual, which he addressed for his Yug Nirman movement. This is how a world culture based on the values of the pluralistic Indian culture would flower to bring about peace and happiness to all humanity by making every one realize that each one would be able to survive, only if all survive. In the survival of all lies the survival of each form of life. The welfare of every person and living being on this planet was a matter of deep concern to Gurudev all his life. This was the secret of his simple and spontaneous compassion and catholicity. Shri Aurobindo’s Integral Yog aiming at the **‘Descent of the Supramental’** has been designated as **“Purnadvait”** **“पूर्णद्वैत”**. This is similar to Gurudev’s **“Dharti par Swarg ka Avataram”**. To me Gurudev’s work was a quantum jump on the work of Ballabhacharya’s **“Shuddhadvait”** – **“शुद्धाद्वैत”**. I would venture to designate it as **“Vishuddhadvait”** **“विशुद्धाद्वैत”**.

Chapter IV – Face to Face with Education

With the energy and inspiration I had drawn from my six days stay in Shanti Kunj after the ***Chaitra Navratra Anusthan*** in March 1985, I took over charge of the post of Secretary to the state government in the Department of Education. There was a quiet determination in my resolve to do my best as a professional civil servant in this most crucial of my assignments so far. I was aware of the importance of education and how it had been neglected so far. I developed an understanding with Shri Sayyed Sibte Razi, the Education Minister that all matters regarding teachers and employees of the department would be handled by the Special Secretary Education, Shri Hari Mohan Singh, a PCS-promoted IAS Officer of impeccable integrity and competence and if ever I disagreed with him on any matter I would approach the minister with my point of view and the minister was free to decide as he thought proper, and I would concur.

This meant that 90% of the time of the Secretary which was taken up in discussing and processing transfers would be saved and would be available to him to take the Education System in the state forward. I immediately set about studying the Education System of the state which had a hallowed past right since the days of independence. The first Education Minister of the state in Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant's Cabinet after independence was Babu Sampurnanand, who was a great educationist himself and a reputed astronomer.

The experience here was radically different from what I had been through so far in other departments. While the usual government departments address a set of planned activities targeted and budgeted for a year, here was a Department of Education which was concerned with the educational processes in scores of universities, hundreds of degree colleges, thousands of secondary schools and lakhs of primary schools. The department itself was a bureaucracy of inspectorates at the division, district and block levels along with the usual head of department structure at the division and state levels. This was a department with a difference, which did not have the usual physical and financial targets of development but was supposed to have targets of processes and their impacts on quality of education, which were extremely important and sensitive but difficult to measure. Studying the department and understanding it took me much

more time, unlike the three months time taken in other departments before this assignment and I would now say with hindsight that it took me about a year to do so.

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The first task I chose for special attention on my part was the need for inculcating values in the educational process. So while I was busy trying to study the department and its systems, I laid my hands on a report on Moral Education by Shri JD Shukla ICS who was then also Chairman, Board of Revenue. The report laid special stress on teacher-training and I picked up this line of action as of prime importance for me to work on during my posting as Secretary Education. This implied that the whole gamut of issues in education such as pedagogy, value education, scouts & guides, sports, games, National Service Scheme, NCC, extra curricular activities, Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) etc were also to be addressed while training the teachers who were the main instruments in bringing about education of our children.

This called for preparing good training material for each of the items which would figure in a six day long training programme. Regarding values I was very clear that unless we could ensure the use of hands by the students ie, provoking **“learning by doing”** we would not be able to go far in inculcating values amongst them. Mere lecturing them on values and ethics would convert them into hypocrites instead of developing their moral fibre. The task of preparing the training material was to be handled by the State Council for Education, Research and Training (SCERT) the counterpart of the NCERT at the state level.

So, involvement of Director Basic Education, Director Secondary Education and Director SCERT in evolving this programme of teacher training had to be organized. Fortunately, each of these positions was manned by very competent officers of the Education Department. Shri Govind Narain Mishra was Director Basic Education; Shri BP Khandelwal was Director Secondary Education and Dr LP Pandey was Director SCERT and over time they became my close friends as well.

Preparing training material for the teachers of primary schools as well as of secondary schools was taken in hand earnestly with all the three directors cooperating and coordinating closely. The training programme for primary school teachers was planned in such a manner that each district would have one week long training sessions one after the other every week in the summer vacations for two months ie, eight sessions in each district. This would require training of trainers in sufficient numbers in Shanti Kunj who would take up these orientation courses with the teachers. The head masters of middle schools and primary schools were chosen for becoming

trainers along with middle school teachers. The training of secondary school teachers was planned in such a way that each principal along with a few senior teachers would be given six days orientation in Shanti Kunj who would become the main organizers of teachers' training in each secondary school. Training of trainers and preparation of training material both began by the end of 1985 in order to catch the summer vacations of the year 1986.

In the meantime Government of India initiated a nation wide debate on the New Education Policy for the country to take stock of what had transpired since the Kothari Commission recommendations in the early sixties. This became a handy instrument for me to organize district-wise and block-wise seminars, the former for the secondary school education and the latter for primary and middle school education. The whole state was agog with such seminars and an environment of expectancy was generated in the whole education sector. These followed by teacher training programmes in the middle of 1986 really galvanized the teachers' community into feverish activity. The leaders of teachers' unions were dumb struck with all this hala bolloo because their whining complaints and maneuverings were lost in the urge to improve the education system. They were unhappy but helpless because they could not possibly oppose openly what was going on to generate an environment for improving the education system in the state.

Simultaneous with this feverish activity all over the state, I addressed the issue of preparing replies for Assembly and Council questions which took all the time of the minister, the secretariat and the directorate. When I joined the department the number of questions in both the Assembly and the Council was of the order of 250 odd questions in both the Houses every week when in fact not more than 10 to 16 questions could be taken up on the question day each week when the Assembly and Council sessions took place. The whole week was taken up in briefing the minister from morning to evening, leaving him no time to address substantial issues relating to education.

In one of the staff meetings of the directorate and secretariat officers I addressed all the officers that we should attempt to stem the tide of questions at the block and district level by resolving the problems then and there in stead of waiting for an Assembly or Council question. This trick worked and gradually the number of questions began to come down to about 200 for the Assembly and 200 for the Council per week within six months of my joining. Within a year this number – came down to 150 and by the time I left the department in 1988 the number was down to 10 to 15 per week. This had a tremendous impact on the morale of the officers who were terrified by the teacher union leaders who were in the habit of bullying them day in and day out.

Now, they could walk with their chest out while seeing the teacher union leaders shying away and avoiding them.

The process of planning the teacher-training programme had to be handled very carefully. The first task was to get an OK from the Minister with an understanding that the training would have to be organized at a reputed place like Shanti Kunj, Haridwar, as well as at the district and block levels with whole lot of seminars thrown in at the state and divisional levels. Next were the modalities of involving Shanti Kunj in this programme. Gurudev was most supportive and he asked his senior advisors to cooperate and collaborate with me. A brain-storming session with all the concerned officers of the Education Department, directors downwards up to district level was held in Shanti Kunj to make them realize the whole tenor of the training programme.

Only after these preparatory stages had been taken was a formal proposal moved for the minister's approval. I held my breath for a few days waiting for the file to come back from the minister's office. Shri Sayyed Sibte Razi was true to his promise and he gave us the go ahead. From then onwards there was no stopping us almost till the day I left the department in September 1988 with teachers' training going on in Shanti Kunj week after week, month after month and year after year, almost with clock-work precision.

During these three and a half years of my tenure over ten thousand secondary school teachers & principals and over two lakh primary school teachers were given one week orientation training in value education, scouting and guiding, SUPW, organizing sports, etc. for all category of teachers and with subject & curricular related orientation to the secondary school teachers. Never before had the whole of the Education Department been at one time given such an overall thorough orientation. It literally transformed the whole department and galvanized it to improve the general standard of education in UP.

This preoccupation with the primary and secondary education did not mean that nothing was done in the realm of higher education. All the vice chancellors were goaded to organize seminars on the new education policy and also to suggest changes in the University Act of the state. The teachers of the degree colleges were also put through one week's orientation training subject-wise after suitable training of trainers etc. Intra College Sports and Youth Festivals were organized. Universities were goaded to set their annual examination schedules to regularize the sessions which had suffered on account of slippages in the previous years. A whole set of proposals

for reforms in the policy of higher education and programmes were drafted for discussion with the minister to begin with.

It was also suggested to him that Vice Chancellors of selected Universities would also be invited for a brain storming session. But to my eternal regret I just could not get the minister to agree to holding a meeting on higher education, so apprehensive was he about the likely political fall outs. Any amount of persuasion that mere discussion on contentious issues did not commit the state government to any specific course of action, seemed to have no effect on him. That file remains buried in the UP Secretariat to this day and perhaps it never again surfaced.

In spite of all this I did succeed in getting the universities to convert their two years bachelor degree courses to three years and to correspondingly change their Master's degree curriculums, in spite of opposition from even the then Chief Minister, Shri Vir Bahadur Singh, who was very cross with me on this issue as well as on the issue of not changing the UP Board examination centres of students under political pressure. Changing examination centres in the class X and XII Board examinations was a merry past time for MLAs and other politicians and the Chief Minister and not succumbing to their pressures cost me dearly.

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One of the highlights of my tenure as Secretary Education was to set the working of the UP Board of Examinations, Allahabad to function professionally. When I joined the department in April 1985, the Board Examination Results were brought out by the UP Board as late as July and August of that year, thereby compromising one year of all students passing out after Class X and XII. This was totally unacceptable and I made it clear that whatever needed to be done for the results of 1986 must be planned in October 1985 and the whole process should be so streamlined that the results in the year 1986 should come out in the month of May and certainly not later than the first week of June that year.

This implied that apart from other preparations necessary to organize this massive operation, the conduct of the examinations should be so meticulous that resorting to unfair means by students was minimized. Students who wanted to resort to unfair means put pressure on their guardians to pull political strings in order to change their examination centres to such other centres where it would be easier to use unfair means. The only way to stop this practice was not to yield to such pressures. I even got the directorate of education to experiment with **'open-book-examination'** in class IX to see how it would work. The results were most encouraging

and the students loved it. There was no motive left to use unfair means but opposition came from an unexpected quarter, the teachers.

The students no longer hankered after tuitions from their teachers. The teachers' lobby prevailed with the minister and we had to give up a promising experiment. As for the Board examinations we succeeded in the year 1986 and the Board Results were brought out in the first week of June, in the year 1987 the board results were out in May third week and first week of June and the menace of unfair means was controlled to a great extent. In the year 1988, however when the examinations were to start, the then Chief Minister Shri Vir Bahadur Singh would divert all these pressures to change the examination-centres on to the Education Secretary. So in the month of February 1988 I was besieged by politicians and MLAs of all hues to change at their instance the examination centres already fixed by the Board according to the state government guidelines.

Day in after day in and week after week I was braving these pressures when on one particular day a group of MLAs turned up in my room in the State Secretariat at about 10.30 am and began to press for their demand to change the examination centres. I argued with them politely giving reasons for declining their request, but they maintained their harangue. They said that they would not let me leave the room till I succumbed to their pressure. This gherao continued and I too was determined not to budge from my stand.

At about 2.30 pm they asked me to accompany them to the room of the leader of opposition in the Assembly. I did so and repeated my stand before the senior leader also who really had nothing to say, beyond saying that I may give them a patient hearing. I told him that, that was precisely what I had been doing for the previous four hours. So the group of MLAs escorted me back to my room and threatened that they would not leave till I accepted their demand. In the mean time the news of my gherao had spread in the whole secretariat and the employees union was getting agitated because all of them knew that I was incapable of doing any wrong.

At about 5.30 pm a group of employees entered my room from the side-door and spoke to me in my ears requesting me to leave the room from that side-door. I did so, and when I had left the room, I was told later that they thrashed this group of MLAs and drove them out of my room. Of course, I came to know of this only after I reached home to eat my lunch at about 6 pm. This was an unprecedented episode which sent the right signals to the politicians of the day. I of course, felt vindicated and saw the hand of Gurudev in this turn of events, because he had cautioned me a week ago that I might be in trouble.

Another important department within the Education Department was the Adult Education Department which too received my full attention. It was a loosely structured system of imparting literacy skills in the three R's to the age group of 15 to 35 years of youth who had missed going to school. It was this programme which brought me in intimate touch with Literacy House-**Saksharta Niketan** under the India Literacy Board (ILB) with Sri Satish Chandra ICS (Retd), who had been Chief Secretary of UP some few years ago as its Chairman. Literacy House had been founded by an American lady Mrs Welthy Fischer at the age of 76 years in the year 1953 on 13th February in a verandah of Naini Agricultural Institute, Allahabad.

Later, when the then Governor of UP Shri KL Munshi allotted 20 acres of land near Lucknow, this was shifted to Lucknow where it still exists. It may be of interest to note that Gurudev founded the **Gayatri Tapobhoomi**, Mathura in June 1953, which later became the headquarters of the Yug Nirman Movement. In other words, movements from two different directions were initiated for regeneration of the Indian society by outwardly two unconnected different personalities of different nationalities at about the same time with me as a common link between them. What was this, a coincidence or a plan of Gurudev? I would say that this must be Gurudev's plan because he was guiding me while I never met Mrs Welthy Fischer, though I was suddenly pitch-forked into taking care of Literacy House, a precious legacy of Mrs Fischer.

Coming back to the Adult Education programme, states were happy implementing it because of central funding. However, this too was suddenly changed in the 8th Five Year Plan and the programme remained only a caricature of the earlier ambitious one. Apparently, the Government of India under one kind of political dispensation did not want to fund such a programme in states with different political hues. However, my tryst with Literacy House was just beginning and was to become much more intensive and excruciating in the year 1999 and thereafter for six years, about which I would have occasion to write when this narration begins to cover that part of my life.

One of the important decisions taken during those days in the Education Department was to have a period of scouting and guiding for every class once a week in all schools, primary as well as secondary. This required that each school should have a trained scouting and guiding instructor. This was achieved by making the scouting and guiding instructions part of the training material for the massive teacher training programme that was under way. But this was not enough. The Bharat Scouts and Guides was an All-India body and had its State Chief Commissioners, other Commissioners etc.

A proposal was moved that I may contest for the election of the State Chief Commissioner of UP. I put a condition that I would stand only if my election was un-contested. This was arranged and I became State Chief Commissioner, Bharat Scouts and Guides for UP without a contest in 1986 and was to continue as such for three consecutive terms of three years each till 1995. All the directors of Education were also included into this organization and in this manner both the scouting and guiding movements were galvanized in the whole state. State rallies, divisional rallies, district rallies, block rallies were held thereafter once a year and this had a marked effect on the whole tenor of school education in the state.

Along with this, Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) and sports as well as physical training were made compulsory in all schools. Methods were developed to assess children and grade them for the extra curricular activities and skills on a continuous basis throughout the year in an objective and transparent manner. An experiment was also started in which students of class IX and XI were to camp in a suitable village as guests of the villagers during the harvesting season once a year for a week or so. This was hugely popular with the students and was very well received by the host villagers as well as the guardians of the students. This programme was carried out for two years in the whole state with excellent feed-back but could not be carried on after I left the department in 1988.

In the degree colleges too, Rovers and Rangers were trained along with NSS and NCC activities. Eco-Restoration Nirman Clubs were organized in over a hundred and fifty degree colleges, in which interested faculty members and some activist students participated regularly, every Saturday to discuss issues concerning environment, health and other social problems. These Eco-Restoration Nirman Clubs were the precursors of the SAMEER CLUBS in institutions and Maitreya Clubs in neighbourhoods initiated by REACHA — ऋचा, a voluntary association (VA) after 1992.

SAMEER stood as acronym for Social Action Movement for Education & Eco-Restoration, which along with the **Maitreya** Clubs are the two work-horses of **REACHA (a voluntary association – VA) — ऋचा**, an acronym for Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture & Agro-forestry which was founded by me in March, 1992 in New Delhi. This (VA) was to function strictly within the parameters of the Directive Principles of State Policy (PART IV) of the Indian Constitution. The working of REACHA along with its two work-horses has since been perfected by

Nikhil, my son after he joined Manav Bharati in November, 1997 after he gave up his job with the well known steel consultants MN Dastur & Co.

Soon after this show down with a group of MLAs the dates for Board examinations were announced and as far as I can recollect they were to start in the middle of March in 1988. In the mean time the teachers' union leaders were getting restive and one of their unions announced that they would boycott the invigilation duties that had been assigned to the teachers for the Board Examinations. There was panic in the Board office as well as in the office of the Director of Secondary Education. They all came rushing to me for consultation to seek guidance of the state government on the future course of action. I spoke to the minister and he too was appearing to be helpless. I suggested that he may speak over the AIR to warn the teachers but he declined to do so. I then sought his permission to speak over the AIR in the evening of 14th March which happened to be a Saturday and the exams were due from 16th March.

Fortunately, the minister gave me the permission to go ahead. I told him that I propose to announce that those teachers who were to absent themselves from their invigilation duties according to the roster prepared by the Board would suffer a break in their service for which they alone would be entirely responsible. The minister kept silent and I took this as his approval and went ahead to broadcast a brief speech mentioning the importance of teachers reporting for invigilation duties so as not to compromise the future of a million students who were to take their Board exams that year. I also held out a threat that failure to report for duty on the part of teachers would tantamount to break in their service record. The effect of this broadcast was almost electric and by late night the Director Secondary Education and Chairman of the Board rang me up congratulating me for the bold stand taken by the state government, which had saved the time table for the Board exams from going hay wire. I of course heaved a sigh of relief and thanked Gurudev and duly informed the minister who too was overjoyed.

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It was during these days only that I received intimation that I had been selected to undergo a six weeks training programme in Pittsburg USA for senior executives to begin by the middle of April that year. I had been avoiding this for the last few years but this time the Department of Personnel, Government of India was being very firm that I should go in for it. I found out that Abha could accompany me on my own expenses and accordingly we went ahead to get our onward and return flights booked and ticketing to be arranged by the designated travel agent.

Before leaving for USA we went to Shanti Kunj, Haridwar to seek blessings from Gurudev and Mataji. They were both happy that Abha was accompanying me on this trip. We took the Air India flight from New Delhi to London. Shortly before landing at Heathrow in London I had an acute headache and we had to ask the stewardess to give us an Asprin tablet. On landing, the headache was better, but I began to feel breathless. We were received by Shri Vijay Rana and his wife Renu who happened to look forward to receiving us as well as to host our visit to London because as Secretary Education I had been instrumental in getting his leave without pay sanctioned by the college where he was teaching, to enable him to join BBC as a correspondent.

Apart from my breathlessness, our stay in London was very enjoyable and after a break in journey of 48 hours in London we boarded the flight to Pittsburg. We landed in Pittsburg by the evening that day but my breathlessness had increased along with excessive perspiration and headache. With great difficulty we could come out to the point where we were received by Shri Shashi Patel and his wife Kalpana, brother-in-law and sister-in-law of Shri Hansmukh Rawal who was running the Mussoorie International School for NRI girls. Shri Shashi Patel and Kalpana were kind enough to drop us at the Hotel Hyatt, where all the executives were to stay for the duration of the six weeks course.

I was feeling very ill, but managed to make an appearance at the short welcoming function that had been arranged that evening in the hotel lounge. The course was to start from the next day. After the night's rest I felt better in the morning to get on to the bus which was to take us to the Carnegie Mellon University where our course was to begin on that day. The most alarming piece of news to me on reaching the lecture room was that the whole group of executives was to go for a sailing trip the next day for the week-end.

The first day of the six weeks course was a Friday and as soon as the only session of the day in the forenoon was over I asked to be taken to a doctor as I wasn't feeling too well. I was taken to the Presbyterian Hospital where a lady doctor heard my story from the time I developed a headache before landing at Heathrow in London, the breathlessness in London and later, while landing at Pittsburg etc. As soon as she had heard me out she told me to get admitted in the emergency ward. Abha was informed over the phone by the course director and very soon Shashi Bhai and Abha were also at the Hospital to see what was going on. There was a couple in Pittsburg belonging to Lucknow, son of Dr Nityanand, former Director CDRI, Lucknow and his wife Mala and they too arrived in the hospital.

Enquiries were made whether I was covered by medical insurance and it transpired that I was duly covered. Abha had brought my night suit etc and I changed into them and felt very relaxed. I was soon shifted to a cubicle and a 24 hours vigil of my ECG was set up. The doctor on duty who saw me in the evening gave the necessary instructions to the sweet nurse on duty and later Abha went away with Shashi Bhai to spend the night with them as otherwise she would have been all alone in the hotel room.

They arrived again next morning and soon the cardiologist was to do his detailed examination. After the cardiologist and surgeon had had their confabulations I was told that I would be put through a procedure known as angiography which would reveal if any of my arteries in the heart was blocked. Some times the procedure of angiography itself as well as removal of the block in the artery, while doing the angioplasty could cause a heart attack in which event they would have to resort to a heart bypass surgery. Abha was to give her consent for all this and the papers were duly signed.

One can imagine the trauma through which Abha was passing and we kept thinking of Gurudev and Mataji who had insisted that Abha should accompany me on the trip. The procedure of angiography took about an hour and a half and I was watching the whole procedure on the monitor. I was told that the left anterior descending artery was blocked up to 99% and they would remove the same through a procedure known as angioplasty. I was told that the procedure would be painful and I should brace my self but not get worried or panicky. Till those days this procedure was not being commonly done in India. I was quite calm and collected and **felt as if Gurudev was standing close by**. There were anxious moments during the whole procedure and I did perspire as the doctors had indicated. The procedure over, I was brought back to the cubicle where Abha and other friends were waiting anxiously for my return. All was well that had ended so well and I was told that I was now fit enough to leave the hospital in the next twelve hours. This was a most encouraging out come from a real nightmare and we felt the grace of Gurudev in all that had happened since that excruciating headache before landing at Heathrow a few days ago.

By the evening of Saturday, the day I went through the procedure I received a "Get Well" card signed by all the course mates which was dispatched to the hospital before they left for the sailing trip. They were all to get back by Monday, and when they found me sitting in the lecture hall, their astonishment knew no bounds. They were full of admiration for me to be brave enough to attend the lectures in spite of what I had gone through. The doctors had advised me to take it

easy but at the same time had suggested to return to normal life as quickly as possible. The six weeks of the course were memorable in many ways in that my whole world view was getting sharpened and more focused. The course director Bob Dalton, when he called out my name at the valedictory addressed me as the 'iron man from India'. It was in a way a proud moment for me and I thanked Gurudev for it all.

The view of the whole world from the American continent was different and I realized that the common people there were just not concerned about the rest of the world. The Atlantic and the Pacific oceans had ordained that the Americas would remain a world apart. It was a great learning experience for both me and Abha. We both missed India desperately but a visit to the Hindu Temple every Sunday by courtesy of Shashi Bhai and Kalpana more than made up for our home-sickness. Health-wise too I felt fully rejuvenated. I was to go through a Thallium Test at the close of six weeks which too was conducted to the full satisfaction of the doctors.

Thus, my trip to USA seemed primarily to set my heart right and I could not but see the hand of Gurudev in all this. This was borne out when on seeing us after our return to India at Shanti Kunj which was our first destination on return, he exclaimed (*hamare Pantji aik naya janma lekar lot aye hain* – meaning **our Pantji has come back after a new birth**) हमारे पन्त जी एक नया जन्म लेकर लौट आये हैं। We had not told him or any one else in India about what had happened to us, but apparently he was aware of the whole trauma we had been through. My father who came down from Mussoorie to Shanti Kunj was dumb-struck when he heard the whole story. He too felt that it was Gurudev who had seen us through this crisis. Lalit, who had completed his apprenticeship in the Indian Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun after completing three years of his B.Tech in IIT, Kanpur was accompanying Babuji and he too heard our story with astonishment. Thereafter we all left for Mussoorie to meet my mother, Kailash and Nimmi and spend a few days there before returning to Lucknow from where Lalit later went back to IIT Kanpur where he was to continue with his B.Tech semesters for his final year.

My stint in the Department of Education turned out to be of great help to the Yug Nirman Mission in the sense that teachers trained there later carried the good word about their experience in Shanti Kunj to all corners of the vast state of UP which had been literally untouched by the Mission till then. Such was the explosion in the work of the Mission in UP thereafter that Gurudev would often say that **“Mission ka adha kam maine kiya or adha kam Pantji ne”** – ie, **half the work of the Mission has been done by me and half of it has been done by Pantji**, मिशन का

आधा काम मैंने किया है और आधा पन्त जी ने। This was Gurudev's way of recognizing the contribution of persons like me who had no axe to grind in this whole enterprise. **I happened to be convinced that Gurudev was doing what the Indian State was proclaiming, but really was not being able to do it.** This was because of the deadwood it was carrying and because of the perverted course that the politics of the country had assumed after the departure of leaders like Jawahar Lal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1966. It was Gurudev's generosity which termed the efforts made at my instance as equal to that made by him to get the Yug Nirman Mission to become such a potent force in Indian society, otherwise in reality what I had been able to do was just to move step by step in the scheme of Teachers' Training that we had evolved in 1985 to improve the system of education in UP.

It is true that civil servants in even those days did not stick out their necks to carry out any innovations and my contribution was that I could muster the courage of my convictions to do the right thing. This trait of mine took shape from the time I managed to gather my wits after the grueling training given by Bishan Tandon as District Magistrate, Meerut in 1962 to 1964 where I first joined as Joint Magistrate in 1962. This trait gathered momentum as I became senior and survived till the last day of my service, the 31st December, 1996 and every assignment that was given to me was like a command from the on high to do my best.

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It was in the year 1987 that it was decided in Shanti Kunj that the ***Pran-pratishtha*** of the ***shaktipeeth*** at Anwalkhera, the birth place of Gurudev had to be done. There was a great deal of speculation as to who would be the fortunate person to whom Gurudev would be assigning this responsibility or honour of doing it. There were quite a few contenders but I learnt later that Gurudev told Mataji that Pantji should be requested for the same. I was of course overjoyed to hear that and on a date convenient to us we drove from Mussoorie to Agra where we stayed in the Circuit House.

The next day we all drove to Anwalkhera and the ***Pranpratishtha*** ceremony was duly performed by the whole family. It was indeed a unique experience for all of us. Shri Bharadwaj was the parijan who guided us in this most important ritual through which a temple erected to facilitate dissemination of positive forces in society is energized and converted into a living deity by someone who has been specially authorized to do it by an adept, in this case Gurudev. The devoted discipline of daily ***puja*** and ***arti*** keeps the energization process alive and over time such

temples become strong radiation points of ideas which stimulate actions for social re-awakening, in this case for Yug Nirman, creating a new and just social order. According to Gurudev a temple of the Lord is only justified if it becomes a point from where positive forces of creativity are able to radiate and certainly not if it merely becomes a centre for collecting the offerings of devotees for the livelihood of the *pujari*, the priest. That is why all *shaktipeeths* of the Mission are supposed and expected to give to the devotees who make an offering, literature written by Gurudev equivalent to it in value.

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It was soon after this that, I began to explore means to take up introducing Yoga lessons in the schools of UP. Swami Dharendra Brahmchari from New Delhi came to Lucknow and we had a meeting in the Secretariat to hammer out the modalities of going about this exercise. As far as I can remember now, nothing concrete could be decided as Dharendra Brahmchari had conditions of his own to be fulfilled which did not seem to be practical from our point of view. In the mean time a person claiming to be a good teacher of Yoga exercises was introduced to me by Dr. Krishnawatar Pandey, a senior officer in the Directorate of Basic Education.

I took him with me to Shanti Kunj in order to measure the depth of his know-how and his general desirability. His behavior at Shanti Kunj was rather stand-offish and Gurudev became annoyed with me for the first time ever and the last time for bringing a stranger like him there. However, he put some senior parijan, perhaps Shri Vireshwar Upadhyaya to assess the exercises that he was capable of showing. Gurudev was however quick to make amends the next day when he realized that I had been hurt and embarrassed, for he knew that I had no ulterior motive for bringing that gentleman to Shanti Kunj. All in all, this turned out to be a damp squib and I also had a sour taste in my mouth at the end of it all. Thus, my initiative to introduce Yoga in the education system in UP came to an end with a sour note.

I later learnt that Gurudev was of the view that the so called Yoga lessons divert the mind of the practitioners from the essentials of sound moral behavior and the acquisition of yogic gymnastic skills give false notions about a person's moral stature which defeat the basic philosophy of Yoga ie, “योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्” “**perfection in action is Yog**”, action here meaning the whole realm of moral and ethical behaviour, **including the way we imagine ourselves to be and the way we think**, along with efficiency in action, not merely gymnastic skills. I did not quite relish Gurudev's annoyance at that time but now as I look back, I do appreciate Gurudev's annoyance

with me as justified, because he just could not brook the very idea of my going wrong in this regard perhaps, in view of the role in the distant future he had already then assigned to me. This lesson went right home and since then I have not laid much emphasis on acquiring gymnastic skills associated with yogic practices and exercises for any one. The upshot of this whole episode was however definitely positive in Shanti Kunj, in the sense that soon thereafter a concept of “प्रज्ञा योग” “*Pragya Yoga*” was initiated and disseminated from there.

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While my casual flirtations with Yoga came to an abrupt end I immediately picked up a programme of vocationalising education as distinct from vocational education as a separate stream of education. The Kothari Commission early in the decade of sixties had recommended vocational education as a separate stream from class VIII onwards as well as a period for Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) in the time table of all classes in primary, middle and secondary stages every week. Our teacher training program had given great importance to SUPW and this activity picked up steam in all schools in UP by the year 1987.

We went to the extent of evolving an objective system of continuous evaluation ‘*satat mulyankan*’ सतत् मूल्यांकन through grading of SUPW activities undertaken by each student every month in all schools, primary, middle and secondary i.e. non participation was zero marks, participation but unsatisfactory completion was one mark, satisfactory completion was good and was two marks, very good was three marks and outstanding was four marks. Similarly, sporting skills were broken up into three basic physical activities jumping, running and throwing for each student to be tested once every month, non-participation was zero marks, participation but not completing the minimum fixed for that class of students would fetch one mark, completing or even exceeding the minimum fixed for that class of students would fetch two marks, third position three marks, second position four marks and first position five marks. The sum of marks obtained in the tests for SUPW and sports every month at the end of the year would indicate the total performance of every student in extra-curricular activities, to be added to the total score achieved by every student in the academic tests.

We however, could not get to the point of continuous evaluation in academics as well, which was to be achieved 24 years later in Him Jyoti School in 2009 in Dehradun by the Principal Mrs Tanu Nayal when she began experimenting with Students’ (self) Management Committees (SMCs) as an extension of SAMEER CLUBS in classes VI to VIII during my tenure as the President of the

Himalayan School Society. This exciting story would appear at the right point in this narration in the eighth chapter. Every student would thus, be assessed for his or her total performance every year. Carrying this further, certain vocational courses were offered to students in classes XI and XII who could then decide after their grades or results were declared in the class XII UP Board Examinations, whether to pursue that vocation on their own or join a professional course in line with that vocation or even go for higher education, if so desired. In other words the system evolved by us in variance to Kothari Commission's recommendations kept the options open for every student passing class XII, denied to them earlier to either join a vocational course thereafter or go for higher education degree course of his or her choice etc. These courses were hugely popular and about 400 class XII secondary schools in UP became such vocational schools as well by the end of the year 1987. While this was a centrally sponsored scheme till 1990 and states had some incentive to take it up, I understand that it was given up in the 8th Five Year Plan (1990-95), thereby bringing to an end a very promising educational innovation started by us in UP.

This has been a recurring feature of central or centrally sponsored schemes after the decade of eighties (this did not happen till the seventies) that by the time they acquired a certain stability in implementation for a plan period of five years, the scheme began to be changed to suit the whims of the next set of planners in the next plan, in complete disregard to what was achieved in the previous plan, thus upsetting the valuable organic links that may have been developed between different stakeholders in the process of implementation in the previous plan. This may be of no consequence to our unscrupulous political leaders of today, but such unwarranted whimsical decision making at the highest levels has done untold harm to many an emerging community based organizations in the far flung rural areas of India. This has definitely been one of the main reasons why perhaps, vibrant and creative local self governance has not been able to thrive in India after political instability set in a number of states of the country as well as at the central level.

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On my return from USA in early June 1988 I took up bringing the officers of the directorate of education as well as the secretariat officers up to date on the new trends the world over, which I had gathered during my six weeks training in USA. In the mean time, there was a change in the government and Shri Vir Bahadur Singh was replaced by Shri Narain Datt Tiwari as Chief Minister. The teacher union leaders who were feeling orphaned so far suddenly got a new lease of life from the new Chief Minister and they all gunned for me. I was transferred from the Education

Department to become Principal Secretary Transport after a long tenure of three and a half year as Principal Secretary Education. This was easily the longest tenure I experienced in one department during my thirty five and a half years of service in IAS. Every one in the department was stunned with this bolt from the blue as there was nothing in the air about such a possibility. The minister, too, was surprised at not being consulted by the Chief Minister.

This was the last time in UP that one Principal Secretary was looking after Adult Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education and Higher Education as well as Sports and Languages. After me soon there were three or four or even five education secretaries in the state of UP at one time, which was obviously most damaging to the whole education system in the state with no possibility of coordination between the various departments involved in education. The work done in these three and a half years by the unified ministry at the secretariat level however was to last as a precious legacy for it to remember and to follow to the extent the officers were allowed to do so.

Succeeding education secretaries would meet me and tell me that my name had become a legend in the department. I could only look up to the sky and thank Gurudev for his blessings, for all that had been made possible only due to his foresight and the role played by Shanti Kunj and their dedicated parijans to organize the massive teachers' training programme for three years. It so happened that BP Kahandelwal, who was one of the officers of the Education department of that time, was to be posted as the Chairman, CBSE for five years on deputation from UP. He took up the ideas initiated by us on continuous evaluation of students in UP in 1985-86, to mature into the latest initiative of CBSE in school education by the name of Comprehensive Continuous Evaluation (CCE) in the year 2009. This was, when as President of Him Jyoti School I was able to see to fruition, with the cooperation of the Principal Mrs Tanu Nayal the experiment of Self Management Committees (SMCs) of students to enable the new format of CCE to take a definite shape.

Chapter V – Passing away of Babuji & Taking Leave of Gurudev

I took over charge as Principal Secretary Transport Department in September, 1988 and was also to be Chairman UP State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC), a mammoth of a State Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) with huge losses. Having served as Managing Director of the UP State Sugar Corporation about ten years ago and as Chairman of UP Nirman Nigam and UP Bridge Corporation as well as HARIVAS about five years earlier, it was not difficult for me to slide into this new PSU as its Chairman.

Shri Pramod Tiwari was the Minister of State for Transport while the Chief Minister was the Cabinet Minister for Transport. So after calling on the State Minister, I called on the Chief Minister to take his briefing on what he expected me to do. The Chief Minister appeared apologetic for having transferred me from the Education Department because he must have by then got an adverse feed back on this step of his. However, I was nonchalant and sought his directions on my new assignment. He really did not have much to say except a few inanities and I left from his presence, determined to chalk out my own programme.

I decided that I would concentrate primarily on reducing the losses of UPSRTC, improve the quality of the service the roadways were providing to the commuting public, streamline the functioning of the various depots and bus-stations, improve the maintenance of the fleet of buses, and attend to the human resource issues to improve the morale of the work force of UPSRTC etc.

The improvement in the functioning of the UPSRTC had to be my priority because Shri Babu Ram the Transport Commissioner being a head of a regulatory body, was to attend to the legal enforcement and statutory matters relating to this department. I was aware that he was close to Shri Narain Datt Tiwari, the Chief Minister and accordingly Shri Pramod Tiwari, the Minister of State for Transport also had a lot of respect for Babu Ram. Incidentally, Babu Ram was well known to me since last ten years when he was Director, Harijan and Social Welfare and I was the Secretary to the state government in the same department. Accordingly, he too had a healthy respect for me and my method of working. All in all, the entire work environment was quite cordial and I set about chalking out my reform agenda for the UPSRTC.

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The Managing Director was a very good officer by the name of AK Rastogi who himself was applying his mind to improve the functioning of the Corporation. So here was an opportunity to join hands with him and go along with him for all the good work that he was doing. I had no reason or even any intention of supplanting his efforts beyond giving a nudge here and a push there. The first programme I decided to launch was to put the bus conductors through a course of good behavior in Shanti Kunj.

First a briefing session was held with the officers in Lucknow to chalk out a programme for the bus conductors by first having a session at Shanti Kunj of the depot in charges of all the bus depots. This was to sink in their minds the basic content of good behavior that we expected the bus conductors to practice while dealing with the public. A brief pictorial training manual was prepared which included the dos and don'ts for every bus conductor as part of his duties. This training manual was duly printed and on an appointed date the training was started at Shanti Kunj. The training was for two days so that the trainees may have a chance to stay overnight in Shanti Kunj to fully savour the environment there.

The Minister of State Shri Pramod Tiwari was overjoyed at the response the training had from the trainees as well as the report he began to receive from the field regarding the marked improvement in the quality of service that was given by the bus conductors to the passengers as well as at the bus depots. There was all-round improvement in the overall results of the UPSRTC that year and every one in the department was optimistic and trying to improve himself. This turn around in the fortunes of UPSRTC also had its impact on Babu Ram and his officers in the Transport Commissioner's office and all in all the department seemed to have done well in all aspects of its functioning. The social messages of Shanti Kunj began to figure prominently in all offices of the Transport Department as well as at the back of all the trucks and buses that were plying in UP.

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While all was hunky dory at the office front, there was disquiet in the family arena. Ever since our return from the USA my father was in a state of shock after hearing what all I had gone through while we were away. He was full of gratitude to Gurudev for ensuring that Abha accompanied me as well as for seeing us through the whole crisis. In August a flower pot fell on his left forearm one fine morning while he was tending to his flower pots, and the radius and the ulna bones were fractured into a number of pieces. He was in terrible pain and had to be operated

upon in a private hospital in Rajpur where a steel rod was inserted into the pieces to give the forearm its natural shape. This surgery was under general anesthesia after about a fortnight and I was present throughout the operation as well as till he came around to consciousness.

I caught the evening train back to Lucknow that evening. Shri GC Garg Superintending Engineer PWD who was posted in Dehradun and his family were very helpful in tying up the loose ends and arranging for a number of chores that were necessary for taking care of my father in the hospital away from home. The pain my father had gone through for about three weeks had also shaken me considerably but there was little I could do beyond commiserating with him.

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By and by the forearm fracture healed up and we were hoping that Babuji, as I called my father would recover full health. He was about 78 years of age and had been maintaining good health for as long as we could remember. Of late, however he began to complain of continuous nausea. Babuji, Ija my mother, Nimmi and Kailash came down to Lucknow by December, 1988 to stay with us and to escape the cold of Mussoorie winter. Babuji's continuous nausea was a cause for worry for all of us and especially to Abha, who as a doctor was anticipating a prognosis that was disturbing.

She arranged for a thorough medical check up in the KG Medical College where Dr. MC Pant the Radiologist (who was honored by the President of India with Padmashri in 2008) gave us the bad news that Babuji was suffering from cancer of the liver and that the secondaries too had developed. The question posed to us was whether my father would like to go in for chemotherapy. The news was a shattering one and the whole family was downcast in gloom. Babuji, of course knew the diagnosis and we sought his opinion on the decision to go in for chemotherapy. We were aware of the perils of chemotherapy, which could prolong life but the suffering too would be prolonged and all the while the body would begin to shrink. Babuji was clear that he did not want the chemotherapy but was brave enough to explore alternate remedies such as Ayurveda and Homeopathy.

So we began to explore what all could be done in Ayurveda and Homeopathy. I also suggested the urine therapy but that was just not acceptable to Babuji. In those days the use of Gaumutra – cow urine had not really picked up though it is now well known as an important therapy in Ayurveda. Soon, it was time to return to Mussoorie for Babuji, Ija, Nimmi and Kailash and I accompanied them till Haridwar.

We broke journey in Shanti Kunj and I gave the bad news to Gurudev half expecting that he would proffer his grace to give us some hope of Babuji's recovery. But, before I could proceed to even mention a possibility of his intervention, he spoke to me with full gravity – “पन्त जी, इस विषय में आप कुछ मत कहिये बाबूजी का समय आ गया है” । Expressed in roman script '*Pantji, is vishaya main aap kuchh mat kahiye, Babuji ka samaya aa gaya hai*'. Translated into English this would read '**Pantji, do not say anything on this matter, Babuji's time is up**'. This was like a bolt from the blue and I was stunned. I kept staring hard on the ground not knowing what to say. He consoled me in his usual affectionate way and I left his presence to join Babuji, Ija and Nimmi, Kailash in Tirpada 4 where we were halting. Before leaving for Mussoorie they all called on Gurudev.

I was downcast beyond words. A gloom of such intensity I had not experienced in the past, descended on me. Now with hind sight I could compare it to some extent with the deep set back and disappointment I had experienced when in my childhood Swami Brahmanand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath passed away in 1953. It was my close association with Swami Brahmanand Saraswati which began in 1950 that changed the course of my life thereafter. Prior to that I was a happy-go-lucky kid but Swami ji's influence set me on the path of spiritual development for the first time in my life. His death was indeed a great jolt to me just like this latest news of Babuji's condition announced by Gurudev was that morning.

Shri Pramod Tiwari, Minister of State was to come to Haridwar by the state plane which was to land at the Jolly Grant air strip and was to return the same evening to Lucknow. I decided to join the Minister on the return flight in the evening and sat in the plane with a numb feeling all over. I just could not imagine a world without a father and here was a prognosis from Gurudev that he, my father, would be leaving his physical frame very shortly. How shortly was not at all clear, but it was a chilling enough prophesy.

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I reached home in the same benumbed state and hastened to tell Abha all that had transpired between me and Gurudev. She too was dumb struck and we both just stared at each other for a while, not knowing what to do. We both decided to visit Mussoorie as early as possible in March. Babuji, Ija and Kailash & Nimmi had returned to Mussoorie to get the cafeteria going by the third week of February. This cafeteria had been started by Babuji in the year 1970 at the newly renovated old Waverley Dean building near Waverley View where we stayed, and Waverley

Cafeteria was the new name given to the new complex. This was primarily to serve as a respectable vocation for my mentally retarded brother Kailash, but was in reality being run by my father and mother on behalf of Kailash.

Dr. Sunil Sanon, a personal friend who had done valuable work in organizing a "Save Mussoorie" workshop in the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy was the person we turned to help manage the pain of the last few months of Babuji's illness and whatever time was left for him. Gurudev sent Dr. Pranav Pandya to speak to Babuji and to record his feelings in a dictaphone, which was duly carried back by Pranav ji for Gurudev to listen to. Dr. Uniyal, a Homeopath of the family too began to attend to Babuji to deal with such new symptoms as were showing up every day and to manage the pain as well as it could be managed. We could make it to Mussoorie in the last week of March only.

Babuji was facing up to his terminal illness with quiet resignation. It appeared that he felt cheated by such a disease which seemed to have no remedy. Dr. Sanon advised blood transfusion and he was given a bottle of blood which seemed to cheer him up for some time. I would sit besides him discussing with Dr. Sanon various ideas of how to save the environment and ecology of Mussoorie to divert Babuji's mind from his own predicament. While he did not speak much to me he would confide in Abha that his end was near at hand. In spite of his illness Babuji was still going to the toilet all by himself without any help and support. He was having his daily bath and performing his daily *sandhya*. After staying for about four days we left for Lucknow by train.

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We had barely been in Lucknow for a day when we received word that Babuji was sinking fast. We caught the next night train, Doon Express to reach Dehradun the next morning. We were received by Shri Rahman Executive Engineer PWD and rushed to the PWD Inspection House for a quick wash and breakfast. It was only when we were ready to move to Mussoorie that Rahman broke the news to us that Babuji was no more. He had passed away the previous night at about 10 pm soon after we had boarded the train for Dehradun at Lucknow.

However much this news may have been a forgone conclusion to Babuji's terminal illness, the force of this news expressed in so many words was like a hammer blow to both Abha and me. We were stunned beyond words and were in a state of reverie while the Ambassador car which was carrying us was speeding to Mussoorie. We reached the Waverley gate and saw that on both sides of the road leading to Waverley View where we had lived since 1948, Waverley girls were

standing solemnly near the entrance of our house. Mr. Vegas the Head Master of Modern School was standing at the school gate and he offered condolences to both of us.

We entered the house which was full of people and Babuji's body lay on the ground with the priest ready to perform the initial purificatory **puja** before the body could be placed on the bamboo bier. My mother and sister Champa were wailing and they embraced me and Abha. I touched Babuji's icy cold feet and as soon as the **puja** was over, the body was placed on the bamboo bier. I was to shoulder the bier from the front and others joined from behind to carry it outside to the waiting bus arranged by the UPSRTC to carry the bier and all of us to Haridwar.

All thinking in me seemed to have been suspended while the bus took us down to Dehradun and then on to Haridwar. Before reaching Haridwar there was a river stream, perhaps the Song River where the bus stopped and we all got down to perform some ritual in the clear waters of the stream. I was already moving about bare feet because that was the traditional mode of carrying the bier on the shoulders of four persons, two in front and two in the rear with adequate number of persons to keep changing and providing relief to the ones already shouldering the bier. When we reached the gate of Shanti Kunj, I got down from the bus to walk up to where Gurudev and Mataji were waiting for me.

I broke down for the first time since the morning, because so far I was maintaining a brave face. They both consoled me in their usual affectionate way. I came to know later that Gurudev had already spoken to Mataji early in the morning that Babuji was no more and that we would be on our way to Haridwar. We had not sent any intimation to Shanti Kunj since the passing away of Babuji. This was, in many ways my first intimate encounter with death because while I had been to many a funeral, this one was definitely the most special. Gurudev gave instructions to Shri Balram Singh Parihar ji to get the bus brought into Shanti Kunj and to get it parked between the Nalanda and Taxshilla Blocks near the main gate of Shanti Kunj in those days, with all the parijans in Shanti Kunj to shower flowers over Babuji's body kept on the roof of the bus from the balconies on the two sides of the bus. This was a unique tribute that Gurudev had arranged to be paid to Babuji at Shanti Kunj. All the persons who had come from Mussoorie too joined in this showering of flowers on Babuji. We were all touched deeply to the inner most core of our beings at this grand sight.

Before the bus left Shanti Kunj for the burning ghat, Balram ji told me that I may put on my slippers otherwise I could hurt myself in my feet. It was, in fact nothing short of a miracle that I had not hurt myself so far while coming bare feet from Mussoorie because where we got down on the

main road to go to the flowing stream of Song river on the way, broken glass pieces were strewn all over the road over which I had walked barefeet. Simultaneously, Shri Kapil Kesari ji, Shri Ram Sahay Shukla ji and a few more parijans also got on to our bus with all the items of material required for the ritual cremation.

The bus sped on to the appointed place perhaps Kharkhari, the cremation ground on the bank of the Ganga and all the necessary rituals were performed by me on the directions of Shri Ram Sahay Shukla according to **Vedic** rites. Babuji's soul must have been delighted with such a grand send off that Gurudev had arranged. The cremation took about three hours to get completed and we all left thereafter for Shanti Kunj in the same bus. There we all took our bath to purify ourselves and had our meals, the first time in the day. We took leave of Shanti Kunj by the evening to reach Mussoorie by 7 pm. Our experience in Shanti Kunj had uplifted the spirits of all the persons in the party and they all began to feel that they would also like to avail such a send off whenever their turn to leave was to come.

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Back home, the ladies were anxiously waiting for us and to know the details of the whole cremation ritual. They were also full of gratitude for Gurudev and Shanti Kunj and all the parijans who had joined us in this ritual. The void created by Babuji's departure was louder now that we could feel the vacuum when left to ourselves in moments of contemplation.

That night I slept on the diwan on which Babuji had spent his last three months lying down or sitting in the day time or at night when the pain of the cancer was unbearable. I was tired and weary beyond words and sleep was quick to come to me. However, I felt an icy chill late in the night or may be it was three in the morning. I felt as if Babuji was telling me to look after his flowers - मेरे फूलों की देखभाल करना expressed in roman script this would be '**meray phoolon ki dekhbhal karna-look after my flowers**' of which he had been very fond as long as we could remember. Next morning the first thing I did was to send word around that we had to arrange for a **mali**, a gardener who would come every day for a few hours to tend to all the flower beds as well as all the flower pots. Babuji was particular about every plant, every flower in the premises and would tenderly pluck the dry leaves and petals every day from every plant. This was a routine practice every day of his life, morning and evening.

The new **mali** was given precisely these instructions to be carried out every day. When I told Mataji on the third day while we had gone to Haridwar for **Asthichayan** about my experience and

what I had arranged, she had tears in her eyes and she complimented me for the arrangements made.

Asthichayan — अस्थिचयन — too was a unique experience. The ritual provides that on arriving at the site where the cremation had taken place, after the initial purificatory rituals, the person who had given the **Mukhagni** — मुखान्नि ie, the person who had lit the pyre that was me in this case, was to imagine that I was embracing the departed soul. To my astonishment, I could literally experience the presence of my departed father, Babuji and an icy thrill went all over my body and I had tears in my eyes. Thereafter, the task of picking up all the bones was accomplished and these were immersed in the Ganga at a suitable point. This may appear as something which may pollute the Ganga but in reality the bones provide valuable food in the shape of phosphorous to the fishes which are swarming the banks of the river. We came back to Shanti Kunj and my head was shaved as is the tradition whenever a dear one departs. After our meals I returned to Mussoorie and was to sit on the same Diwan in the drawing room where I had slept the previous night, for the next nine days till **Dwadasha** — द्वादशा, the twelfth (12th) day.

I was not to leave the house and was only to move when I had to for my daily chores of getting ready, having meals etc. An earthen lamp, Diya was lit from the very first day in front of Babuji's portrait. This was again going to be a unique experience, in the sense that all the persons who had known Babuji were turning up from morning till evening from far and wide to express their condolences. While I knew most of them, yet quite a few strangers would also come and express their sorrow. Such was the extent and spread of magnanimity that had been Babuji's life, part of which was shared by me and a great deal was not known to me.

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The importance of the tradition of **maranotar sanskar** — मरणोत्तर संस्कार as Gurudev called it ie, the ritual associated with the departing of a soul dawned upon me. We had now to plan the **Dwadasha**, the twelfth day ritual, the printing of an obituary postcard in black with a corner cut signifying that the ill effects of the inauspicious news that was being conveyed had been exorcised, preparing a list of invitees, mailing them in time, the nitty-gritty of organizing the ritual **Gayatri yagya**, requesting Shanti Kunj in time to depute a team to perform the same, cleaning the

house to prepare for it etc. All these activities went on along with the mourners streaming in and streaming out one by one after meeting me and expressing their condolences every day.

The twelfth day was upon us and we all got up early in the morning to get ready and also to clean the drawing room where the **Gayatri yagya** was to be held. Proper seating arrangements were made and the **hawan kund** which was brought by the Shanti Kunj team was placed in the centre. Shri Ram Sahay Shukla and one other parijan had arrived and they were busy preparing to start the **yagya** by 9 am. Simultaneous arrangements for lunch to feed up to 100 persons were being made. When the **yagya** was about to start we were delighted to see Dr. Durga Prasad Pandey, the founder of Manav Bharati entering the room to join us for the **Dwadasha** condolence **Gayatri yagya**. His presence was indeed a great support for the whole family as both our families had known each other for over forty years. His son, Vishwa Kant and I had walked nine miles to and fro every day to St. George's College, Barlowganj for two years from 1952 to 1954. (See my article ' **Manav Bharati-down the memory lane**' published in the school journal issued along with the inauguration of the new auditorium in the school premises on 9th February, 2008 in New Delhi as well as reprinted here for ready reference at the end of the book).

All the persons invited joined the **Gayatri yagya** in batches of 5 to 7 and the whole ritual was over in about two hours. This was followed by lunch and this continued till about three in the afternoon with fresh batches of invitees joining the lunch. Bidding goodbye and thanking each and everyone was my bounden duty for the support that each one of them had given us in this hour of great personal loss to us. The whole family realized the greatness of Babuji whose passing away had given rise to such effusion of good will for his family. Abha and I had now to reorganize the arrangements at Mussoorie without the watchful care of Babuji. Ija, Kailash and Nimmi were to restart their new life, and we were to leave for Lucknow the next day to rejoin our respective duties.

In Lucknow too we had a stream of visitors every evening to condole the passing away of Babuji. One caller who specially comes to my mind was Shri RK Dar, a senior colleague in the service who had the sensitivity to empathize with me when he said that losing one's father is a decisive break from the past and the loss usually takes months to sink in. I was already feeling this, especially so in my case who had had such an intimate encounter with death of a dear one for the first time. All the while the support and blessings of Gurudev and Mataji were with us, which seemed to take away a great deal of the sorrow gradually.

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By the end of December, 1989 I was transferred from the Transport Department and posted as Principal Secretary, Hill Development Department whose office was on the seventh floor of the Janpath Bhawan in Hazratgunj. The tenure in the Transport Department was most cordial and friendly and it now appears from hind sight that all the arrangements of Babuji's cremation and last rites were very much facilitated by my being in the Transport Department, and such developments all by themselves were basically the handiwork of the hidden hand of Gurudev and Mataji, that is what I feel now. The training of the conductors of the UPSRTC had created a great impression on the commuters and the financial results of UPSRTC were also very much better than any previous year.

My transition to my new job was not at all unwelcome to me and I got down to work seriously to study the new department. Being a resident of the hills of UP I was keen to know how exactly the Hill Development Department functioned and this was a golden opportunity to find it out, and do what all I could do. My tenure in the Hill Development Department was going to be short-lived because already, in the first week of January, 1990 I received a call one fine morning from the Union Cabinet Secretary Shri Vinod Pande that **"would I be willing to leave my beloved Lucknow"**. Till then I had never been posted in New Delhi. I gave him my consent and within a fortnight I received my posting orders as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture in New Delhi. I began to get congratulatory telephone calls for this unexpected development as central deputation was considered to be recognition of ones competence. I called on Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Chief Minister for being relieved but he did not appear to like my leaving the state to go to Delhi. He said as much and said that he would like me to become Education Secretary again. I pleaded with him that normally going back to a department where one had served was considered inappropriate for various reasons, and in any case my going to the Ministry of Agriculture could benefit the state in many ways. He was caught in two minds and finally consented to relieve me.

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I then made a programme to visit Shanti Kunj to seek Gurudev's blessings. Gurudev seemed to have expressed a desire to leave his mortal frame and I found Shanti Kunj agog with all sorts of conjectures as to what may happen. It must have been the last week of January 1990 and Gurudev sent for me soon after my arrival in Shanti Kunj by the morning train from Lucknow. It must have been 8 or 9 am and I saw Gurudev was pacing across the floor too and fro in his room giving

instructions to whoever was coming and going. Gurudev seemed to advise me not to go to Delhi and I pleaded with him that it was by then too late for me to change my mind. He consented and kept me sitting in the room with him for may be over four hours, because perhaps this was to be our last sitting together. I was completely oblivious of the passage of these rare few hours, the longest time I had spent with him in the past in one session. He was exuding the airs of a person who was taking his leave from this world, but while the atmosphere was certainly heavy with the thought of his impending departure from the scene, there was still a great deal of cheer and excitement that he seemed to be instilling in all and sundry.

I was sitting partly speechless and quite apprehensive and dazed with the thought of Gurudev's absence in my mind, which was definitely a blow. This was in spite of the fact that for the past five years Gurudev had prepared every one for it, saying in his usual manner that it would make no difference to any one. He never tired of emphasizing that he would be more mobile and able to help every one in need much better if he were to be relieved of the shackles of his mortal frame. I asked him what did he want me to do and I do not remember any particular direction that he may have given me beyond blessing me and assuring me that he was always going to be with people like me who were close to him. The experience of being in his presence continually for over four hours was definitely a unique blissful experience tinged with sadness and I do not remember whether I was even aware of the passage of time.

The memorable sojourn of a great man of prophetic dimensions on earth was going to come to a close before my own eyes, perhaps to inaugurate another phase of Yug Nirman which would be more subtle and widespread to engulf the entire humanity. This would perhaps be in contrast to his efforts so far which were primarily focused on reforms in the faiths which had originated in India as well as to instill intra-faith goodwill to enable meaningful collaboration between them to usher in an era of tranquility. In the decade of eighties only he had begun the process of decentralizing the movement to the hundreds of **shaktipeeths** that were springing up all over India. His plan appeared to leave Shanti Kunj as a spiritual powerhouse while the decentralized Yug Nirman movement carried on by the shaktipeeths in future would address local issues according to the treatment that was needed where they were located.

Now perhaps the movement at the subtler level had to cover other faiths and religions for which he and later Mataji in her astral frame would be called upon to play their part in the scheme of the **Mahakal**, the Lord of Eternity. In his writings Gurudev was prolific and all that he wrote for

six hours a day every day of his life after 1937 was prose or poetry in Hindi of the highest quality and of permanent value which cannot just be translated into any other language. So any one aspiring to read the persona of Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya to imbibe his spiritual vibrations instantly, must learn Hindi and become good at it before his writings can be savoured and digested to one's satisfaction.

Chapter VI – Passing Away of Gurudev & Krishi Bhavan

There was a numbness of a strange kind in my whole body and the very process of thinking seemed to have been suspended as I took my leave of Gurudev that afternoon towards the end of January, 1990. Sometimes in the past few months he casually during a conversation had said, **“retire hokar yahan aaker Shanti Kunj sambhaliye”** – ‘come here after retirement and take care of Shanti Kunj’ रिटायर होकर यहाँ आकर शान्ति कुन्ज सम्भालिये। I was taken aback as for all practical purposes Dr. Pranav Pandya was being groomed for the succession. In any case in the scheme of things as Gurudev seemed to have envisaged, Mataji would be looking after the Gayatri Pariwar, the Yug Nirman Yojana, Shanti Kunj and all the vast paraphernalia of the Mission that Gurudev had created during his life time. I had no stomach to get into any kind of hassles in relation to my own role in the Mission and its work.

I recently had an occasion to call on His Excellency Sri Rajyapal of UP, Shri BL Joshi, in Lucknow – and while informing him about my book he made a few interesting observations about Gurudev. He had met Gurudev in person and observed that when he was to visit Shanti Kunj as Governor of Utarakhand, he was informed by the district administration of Haridwar that Shanti Kunj had become a family concern and he may like to keep this in mind. Shri Joshi told me that he asked Dr. Pranav Pandya whether this was so. Dr Pandya denied this, and Shri Joshi wanted my views on this observation. I told Joshi ji that as far as I was aware, Gurudev was always far above such considerations during my interactions with him for eleven years from 1979 to 1990. Perhaps, I had Gurudev’s words **“retire hokar yahan aaker Shanti Kunj sambhaliye”** in my mind when I answered Joshi ji.

My whole approach thus far and thereafter too in relation to the Mission had been that I would not expect anything but would hold back nothing as far as my contribution to its objectives and their implementation was concerned. With hind sight, I feel that the passing away of Babuji almost a year before Gurudev’s passing away seemed to have prepared me for the absence of Gurudev, otherwise perhaps, I would not have been able to bear the prospect of his passing away. I say this because, the passing away of Swami Brahmanand Saraswati in 1953 had been a great

traumatic experience for me and it took me a number of years to get over it, but in comparison the prospects of Gurudev's passing away was an intensely deep spiritual experience alright without at the same time being traumatic. This was partly due to the fact that Gurudev had prepared all and sundry since 1986 that he would be leaving shortly; how shortly was however never spelt out.

The incident in April 1986 in which Gurudev was attacked by an assassin had been preceded by Gurudev exhorting all the parijans close to him that they were not being careful enough regarding all those entering Shanti Kunj. He had gone to the extent of saying that he would be attacked in day light and nobody would become aware of it till well after it was all over.

That is how it all happened. The assailant entered his room at about 11 am and after touching his feet, set about attacking him with a long sharp dagger aiming his attacks at the vital parts of the body like the heart, the kidney etc. Gurudev deftly warded his thrusts with his left hand so that his right hand used for writing was not hurt. In fact, he caught hold of the blade of the dagger with his left hand and snatched it from the grip of the assailant to the latter's great surprise. It appears that the manoeuvres of Gurudev to minimize the damage due to the assailant's aimed attacks were those of an adept in close quarter hand to hand battles. The strength of the left hand of a man of seventy six years had overpowered the brute strength of the right hand of a trained young assassin.

There can be no doubt that the ***Mahakal*** too must have been there to ward off the assassin's plans, as Gurudev would casually remark that he had been granted extension for five years, just as retired government servants are given extension when they prove themselves indispensable. The assassin was in panic and Gurudev shouted at him telling him to get away as quickly as possible; otherwise he would be killed by the parijans. However, after the assailant had fled the parijans began to trickle into Gurudev's room on hearing his shouts aimed at driving away the assassin, and were shocked to find him in a pool of blood.

The doctors were called, some parijans who were doctors as well as others, practicing in Haridwar. His left palm and arm were badly cut at a number of points. His heart area and stomach and kidney were missed by the assailant. This was going to be a medico legal case and a formal police report was lodged and doctors began to write out their report simultaneously as the first aid was being given. Gurudev refused to take any injection or blood transfusion as well as any anesthesia injections before the doctors could operate wherever necessary. Gurudev kept on

laughing and making light of the gruesome incident in order to allay the guilty consciousness of the parijans who had been negligent about his security.

I got news of the incident in Lucknow from Shri Leelapatji and Shri Mrityunjay Sharma, Gurudev's son who dropped in at our residence in Dilkusha Colony late that evening. We were shocked beyond words and I wanted to know what exactly I could do. They told me that they would like proper and thorough police investigations in this matter as well as appropriate security measures around Shanti Kunj. I do not remember what exactly I did but I must have phoned the Home Secretary and the top police officials. I also decided to visit Shanti Kunj immediately the next day by the evening train, reaching Haridwar on the third day after the incident.

Gurudev was his usual cheerful self but Mataji was weeping when I called on her and did my usual pranam. I too began to cry, bemoaning that a saintly person like Gurudev had to bear such assaults from the underworld who felt threatened by the Yug Nirman Mission. Every one in Shanti Kunj was feeling guilty for their negligence and an eerie silence prevailed in the usually jostling environment of Shanti Kunj. Gurudev had deftly saved his right hand and in spite of his injury he kept up his routine of writing every day for six hours in the morning and meeting all and sundry who visited Shanti Kunj as usual to, dispel their doubts and mental darkness. Such was his greatness.

Gurudev chose this incident to give a signal to all concerned that he would henceforth only meet people whom he would like to meet and others who wanted only favours could have a darshan of the two temple-like structures, **CHHATTRIS** as they were called in Gayatri Nagar at the gate of Shanti Kunj in those days. All petitions for help could be addressed to these two temples, one representing Gurudev as **Prakhar Pragya**, the other representing Vandaniya Mata ji as **Sajal Shraddha** and to the extent feasible the solutions to those petitions would be facilitated. In this manner he sought to save his own precious time, which was taken by seekers of favours who constituted the majority of casual visitors to Shanti Kunj. The genuine ones got immediate access to Gurudev and thus Gurudev decided to help such genuine persons who could also be depended upon to do some useful work for the Mission.

He used to say that Mahakal had granted him five years extension, which he would like to fully utilize for the Mission's work. Since some people wanted to have a glimpse of Gurudev, it was so arranged that the morning queue to have darshan of **"Akhand Jyoti"** could see him writing at his desk at a certain window en route. I was given the maximum time for two or three

hours at a time when I visited Shanti Kunj every two months from Lucknow on my way to Mussoorie. In the mean time the teachers' training programme continued unabated till I was Principal Secretary in the Education Department. Later the training of bus conductors too was completed when I was Principal Secretary Transport.

A new chapter was to begin in my life after I bade a final farewell to Gurudev that afternoon in late January, 1990. After returning to Lucknow, I left Lucknow for New Delhi soon thereafter to take charge of my new posting on 13th February 1990 as Additional Secretary, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) in the Krishi Bhawan on Dr. Rajendra Prasad Marg. Shri SK Mishra, also endearingly called Chappy Mishra in hostel days, a senior of the Dr. AN Jha (Muir) Hostel days was the Secretary DAC and I called on him as soon as I reached Krishi Bhawan. He was his usual polite self and he welcomed me profusely when I mentioned our past association in Allahabad University. He was regarded as one of the most successful officers of the IAS, in the Haryana Cadre and I eagerly looked forward to work with him.

Work routine in Government of India, New Delhi was vastly different from the hustle and bustle of the State Secretariat in Lucknow. Lunch break could not mean going home to have lunch, as was our practice in Lucknow. The staff car which brought one from home to Krishi Bhawan at 9.30 am was available for dropping one at home at 6 pm every day only. I was putting up in the UP Sadan on the Sardar Patel Marg and Lalit and Abha were in Lucknow where she was working as MO-I/C Family Welfare Centre in the civil hospital. Lalit had passed out after completing his final semester of B. Tech from IIT Kanpur and had appeared in the prelims of IAS, and Nikhil was doing his 3rd year B. Tech, in Motilal Nehru Regional Engineering College, Allahabad. There was a drastic change in the whole rhythm of one's official life and I was trying to come to terms with the new routine. Understanding the system of working in Krishi Bhawan, so different from the Lucknow Secretariat as well as getting acquainted with the whole of the Agricultural Sector in India was a big task. This was the first time ever that I was to work in the area of agriculture, so crucial to India's well being and self-sufficiency in food grains.

I remember that the very first note I began to work on was rainfed farming which had been an important new initiative of DAC in the Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-1990. This programme was under the name of NWDPRP standing for National Watershed Development Programme for

Rainfed Agriculture, but which seemed to have had little impact due to various deficiencies in its planning as well as in conceptualizing the details of its implementation. I prepared a detailed note out-lining these deficiencies as well as the corrective modifications that were called for in order to carry it forward into the Eighth Five Year Plan. The note was an explanatory one which suggested a meeting of all concerned in DAC and ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) to obtain their consent for the new strategy. Essentially, the new strategy suggested developing models of watershed development at the block level in rainfed areas as separate self sufficient projects evolved through consultations with the beneficiaries, which would internally provide for all the various components required for rain water conservation in that watershed.

The usual hassles of inter-departmental coordination in planning, which had always been emphasized but which had for ever remained a myth to this day were obviated in the new approach. Thanks to petty ego problems between the field functionaries of different departments, this old concept of inter-departmental planning was nevertheless bravely envisaged in the seventh plan programme, which was the main cause for its low impact. It was specifically provided that only implementation would require various disciplines to work together in a coordinated manner in consultation with the self-help groups of the beneficiaries. At the same time it was to be ensured that a special programme component of each model project would only be funded from one source alone ie the project. Retaining the same acronym NWDPRA, the new scheme changed the term PROGRAMME in it to PROJECT and AGRICULTURE in to AREAS, and thus came to be known as NATIONAL WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR RAINFED AREAS in the eighth Five Year Plan. This apparently minor change in the NWDPRA was to have a profound impact on the practice of dryland farming followed in over two thirds of the total unirrigated cultivable lands in India which depended entirely on rainfall, year after year. The change from the nebulous programme approach to a specified need-based farmer friendly area-specific project approach was to minimize the siphoning off of the central grant at different levels which was leaving only a trickle for the farmers' field.

Internally, there was wide appreciation for this new strategy and accordingly the proposal for the first year as well as for the VIIIth Five Year Plan began to be prepared along with detailed guidelines for the field workers as well as for the planners, which were carefully drafted by me with the help of Dr. S. L. Seth, Agronomist in the Agriculture Division of the DAC. Accordingly, burning midnight oil the first draft guidelines were named WARASA – standing for Watershed Areas' Rainfed Agricultural Systems' Approach. WARASA also being “वरसा” from the famous quotation of

the monumental work of Goswami Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* – '*ka warasa jab krishi sukhane*' – "का वरसा जब कृषि सुखाने". Translated this means '**what is the good of the rain which comes after the crops have dried**'.

With the sanction obtained for the first year of the Eighth Five Year Plan ie 1990-91 for NWDPRA in its changed format (National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas), a team for each major state comprising of various disciplines of DAC and ICAR under the leadership of a Joint Secretary of DAC was deputed in the first week of October 1990 to each state capital to address a conference on watershed development in that state so that the inputs from these conferences could later be incorporated into the *Rabi* programme of that state in that year. This was going to be the most important new initiative of Krishi Bhawan as its flagship, for the whole decade of nineties. Thus also began a precious association with Dr. S. L. Seth whom I found to be a highly competent scientist of the purest hue and integrity with rare courage of conviction to stick to his point of view and who was later to become a valuable family friend and fellow founder member of REAHCA, the voluntary agency I was to set up later in 1992.

WARASA guidelines envisaging a farming system's approach comprising of all programme contents to address all kinds of problem areas and contingencies like action research, sustainable agriculture in dry land areas, cattle care, poultry, household production systems, horticulture, forestry, water-logging were prepared in stages as we gathered working experience from the field. Care was taken to simplify the essentials of planning of each model in each development block, in consultation with self-help groups of the beneficiaries by utilizing their services on payment of minimum wages to implement the model project itself and to minimize the mischief of the usual technical priest-craft, the bane of many a soil conservation projects in the past.

The past emphasis in soil conservation projects had been primarily on soil conservation more than on water conservation with the result that they emphasized on costly engineering structures more than on simple earth work which even the farmer could do on his own. The new approach was for more emphasis on simple earth work to enable water conservation which would automatically take care of soil conservation. There were hallowed traditions of rain water conservation in different parts of India which were known to the farmers and were emphasized in the new guidelines with firmness.

These guidelines were prepared between the years 1990 to 1995 mainly with the help of Dr. S. L. Seth, the Agronomist of the DAC and other scientists from ICAR, keeping in mind the

continuous feed back from the different agro-climatic regions of the country and were named respectively, WARASA and WARASA-2,3,4,5,6,7 and 8. I was told by Mohan Kanda, a senior IAS officer of Andhra cadre that in Telegu '**warasa**' means a series, thus this became a series of guidelines for watershed development programme.

Efforts were made to convert the whole programme of watershed development in the country into a peoples' programme to be conducted by the beneficiary farmers and landless agricultural labour all over the country with the assistance from the government instead of making it a government programme with the assistance of the farmers. In a way NWDPRA, which was a model of '**rainfed farming**' soon began to emerge as a model of '**sustainable agriculture**', which came to be called '**tikaoo kheti**' – "टिकाऊ खेती" as against chemical farming, '**bikaoo kheti**' – 'बिकाऊ खेती'. This latter method is supposed to rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides for unsustainably increasing crop production and profitability at the cost of the capacity of the irrigated land, in the shortest possible time and was to become the biggest and most powerful vested interest in agriculture. The only way to counter this development was to start working on the promotion of what came to be called '**organic farming**' – 'जैविक खेती', which too I began to address as an essential component of NWDPRA.

The feed back of stray success stories was heartening but a realization soon dawned on us to our horror, that the governmental field, district and state machinery system as it had evolved everywhere over the years was proving to be the biggest stumbling block to the watershed development programme from becoming a peoples' movement. The working of NWDPRA in the ministry and the success in its new incarnation also began to become an object of envy for those officers who had piloted the watershed programme in the Seventh Five Year Plan. The easiest way to derail it was to get this project to which I had given my best consideration, shifted from my desk through the usual office machinations that had already begun to plague the Indian bureaucracy at the highest levels.

Dr. Seth became the next target and he was even threatened with dire consequences and his very life was at stake. According to Dr. Seth he was told in private "I will see now how Jagdish is going to save you" to which Dr. Seth's response was "**Jagdish**, the Lord of the Universe saves every one including you Sir". Of course, I heard nothing of this till some time ago, which speaks volumes for Dr. Seth's sense of discretion not to disturb my peace of mind and thus, add to my discomfiture.

In the mean time the Department of Rural Development (DRD) adopted the new approach without even acknowledging that the DAC was already working on these lines and made their scheme open as projects for implementation by NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations) as grants to them, while in the DAC we had only allowed mobilization of the beneficiaries as a component for NGOs. Complaints of corruption in implementation of the DRD scheme by NGOs soon brought a bad name to the programme and pressure mounted on DAC to farm out NWDPRAs to NGOs.

I was livid with rage and it was this realization, about the state of the bureaucracy all along the line from bottom to top, as well as the then government's new policy of globalization, that the provocation to set up REACHA – रक्षा, meaning a Vedic verse, as a Voluntary Association (VA) came about in my mind. This diverted my attention from the mounting office bitterness and I used my ingenuity to do all to make REACHA a VA to become a model of transparency in practice, in order to ensure that it may become a bridge between needy people seeking development and the organized governmental and societal management systems which had failed them. The new policy of globalization was going to be an opportunity for the countrymen on the one hand as well as a gateway for multi-pronged challenges from multi-national companies (MNCs) to the nation's sovereignty on the other.

If left to themselves these incoming MNCs would begin to dominate the Indian economy if it were not to become internally strong enough. Contributing to the strengthening of the whole of the Indian economy from grass-roots upwards through a peoples' programme of rain water conservation, in our own special and small way had to be thus, addressed by a group of dedicated professionals which constituted the General Body and the National Governing Board (NGB) of REACHA.

This VA was registered as a society under the Societies Registration Act 1860 on 9th March, 1992. While narrating this turn of a new development in my life is taking only a few lines here, the whole story of what all agonizing moments and hours of thinking went into this step is being postponed lest the narration becomes too clogged at this juncture. I was pleasantly surprised when after my retirement while I was participating in a seminar on rainwater conservation in Bangalore, a senior officer of the DAC Mohan Kanda who was then Additional Secretary, and later was to become Secretary DAC as well as, still later was to become Chief Secretary Andhra Pradesh addressed me as 'father of watershed development in India'. This was in a way a compliment to what REACHA had been able to do in a short time.

The body of work done by REACHA during the last 17 years including nation-wide advocacy campaigns in support of ‘polio eradication’; ‘observing 3rd December every year as **“Pira Niwaran Diwas”** – **“पीड़ा निवारण दिवस”** by means of all-religions’ prayers-this happens to also be the **“International Day of The Disabled”** and an all-religion effort is likely to bring different faiths together for the common cause of alleviation of human misery’; ‘health of mother and child’; ‘ante-natal care – पुंसवन संस्कार’; ‘care for adolescents’; ‘eradication of parthenium – गाजर घास उन्मूलन’; ‘cleanliness in every village and mohalla’; ‘rainwater conservation’; ‘keeping all village wells and ponds, water bodies, water streams and rivers clean’; ‘Ganga Abhiyan – गंगा अभियान’ to prevent pollution of Ganga; ‘desilting of village ponds’; ‘energy conservation clubs in fifty schools in New Delhi and three schools in Mumbai’; “‘Students’ (self) Management Committees (SMCs)” in schools to enable continuous comprehensive evaluation of students and to promote **“learning by doing”**, ‘ “Maitreya Clubs” in colonies and housing societies to enable child development, mentored by parents in neighbourhoods’; ‘SAFE INDIA campaign through the pamphlet **“BHARAT JODO-DIL JODO – भारत जोड़ो, दिल जोड़ो”** after the 26/11 episode in Mumbai’ can be the envy of any VA specially the contribution made by Nikhil, as Member-Secretary of the National Governing Board (NGB) of REACHA’. This effort on ensuring a SAFE INDIA – सुरक्षित भारत could be seen by any one interested in it by visiting the website <http://www.reacha.org/local-files/action-ideas/safeindia.pdf> to appreciate our basic analysis and thinking, on what had gone wrong in India since independence.

While REACHA’s capacity to reach out has grown considerably, thanks to Nikhil’s ingenuity, it has to face a severe resource crunch which cannot be met by my paltry charity. The blessings of Gurudev and Mataji have been felt by Nikhil as well as me, almost at every critical step during the last 17 years and we are convinced that REACHA has now become an alternate vehicle for Yug Nirman. There are surely going to be many more such alternate vehicles for the same, as and when new players dedicated to Yug Nirman spring up from time to time from the seeds which were sown far and wide by Gurudev. Gurudev’s and Mataji’s blessings would always steer such vehicles for Yug Nirman. I do not forget to fondly recall that Vandaniya Mataji had personally blessed the birth of REACHA with tears in her eyes when I handed over to her the first copy of REACHA’s first brochure at Shanti Kunj in 1992 and uttered Rabindranath Tagore’s line **‘O amar desher mati, tomar paayay**

thekai matha' – 'ओ आमार देशेर माटी, तोमार पाए श्हेकाई माथा' printed on the inside cover of the brochure meaning '**O soil of my country, I bow my head at thy feet**'. The vision of those tears is etched in my memory as a precious remembrance.

While the narrative of the initiative taken in Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi relating to watershed development had to be taken to its logical conclusion, simultaneously a lot was happening on the Shanti Kunj front soon after my arrival in New Delhi in February 1990. The ***Chaitra Navratra*** of that year fell in the last week of March and on the 3rd ***Navratra*** we duly observed Babuji's ***Varshik Shraddh*** at Shanti Kunj. This was the first time Abha, I and Nikhil had an opportunity to perform a ***Shraddh*** and we were truly amazed by its profundity, its comprehensive coverage of all ancestors and its emotional and cathartic value. It was during one of my earlier visits to Shanti Kunj soon after Babuji's demise the previous year that one fine morning in Tripada 4 where I was staying, I experienced the now familiar icy touch of Babuji's soul, his astral and causal bodies. I could not quite comprehend the significance of this but may be, he was reminding us of our obligation to perform the first ***Varshik Shraddh*** for the peace of his soul which was to fall due on the third of ***Chaitra Navratra*** in the following March 1990.

During our short stay in Shanti Kunj this time in March, 1990 we were told that Gurudev was preparing to leave his mortal frame, and again in one of such visits a month or so later I was summoned in his presence in his room where he was lying in bed. He motioned me to come near him and conveyed to me a certain request of Shri Mrityunjay Sharma's son-in-law, Shrimali to be transferred to Dehradun from some distant location, perhaps Nasik in Maharashtra. I was to intercede on his behalf with the concerned scientist and officer in the ICAR which I duly did and the request was soon granted. That was the last I saw Gurudev who was already quite emaciated and list-less in his appearance. It appeared that leaving his mortal frame was only a formality to be performed at the appropriate time. We were told that during the last six months of his life he was preparing to leave his body by discharging his powers into deep space to be availed by whoever was ripe enough to receive them according to his or her capacity.

Next we heard that on ***Gayatri Jayanti*** day, the 2nd of June 1990 Gurudev breathed his last while Mataji was addressing the Gayatri parijans in the assembly near the yagya kunds. I was away to Lucknow and Abha rang me up from UP Sadan in New Delhi that Gurudev was no more in his physical frame. One had a numbing sensation all over but that was the way Gurudev chose to leave. A prophet masquerading as a commoner had decided to move on to a higher world stage to

carry on the task of alleviating human misery by taking it upon himself while he was on the planet Earth. Abha had received a telephone call from Shri Balram Singh Parihar giving this piece of news with a request to get the same broadcast over the television and the radio ie, Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR). This was duly done and the whole world heard that Gurudev had decided to shed his mortal frame as declared by him six months ago. This announcement was not to be followed by any formal mourning and the Mission was to carry on as if nothing had happened.

I hastened to visit Shanti Kunj as soon as possible on a weekend from New Delhi to be with Mataji and other parijans. Life and routine in Shanti Kunj was exactly as if every thing was normal. That was Gurudev's wish that his departure would make no difference. The **yagyopavit sanskar** of Sonu and Monu ie, Ashish and Abhishek, sons of Shri JP Joshi and Poonam, Abha's youngest sister was performed two days after the passing away of Gurudev. This was the criterion that everything was to be normal and Gurudev's departure was not to make any difference in the functioning of Shanti Kunj, in other words there was to be no formal period of mourning.

We were told that Gurudev's astral body – **sukshm sharir** would be active till the end of the century ie, the year 2000 and thereafter he would continue to exercise influence on world affairs through his causal body-the **karan sharir** till the end of the 21st Century. All the while till the year 2000, the Mission would be under the active supervision of his astral and causal body. As soon as I entered Shanti Kunj on arriving from New Delhi that morning I first stood silently near the spot in front of **Prakhar Pragya** and **Sajal Shraddha** where the funeral pyre had been lit and the last rites had been conducted. We were also told that no **Shraddh** related rituals were performed which are supposed to be for the peace of the departed soul. Standing with tears streaming down my face I shut my eyes and tried to comprehend all that had happened.

The heat of the summer morning at about 7 am on that day of June, which was perhaps 7th or 8th June was very special. There was a certain sting about it in the air, which seemed to hit me in the face and penetrate deep into me. It was not the kind of heat which may make one perspire as it was still the usual cool summer morning in Shanti Kunj, but it seemed to smite one in the face and all over the body. Such was the sheer power of the astral and causal bodies of Gurudev which seemed to permeate the whole of Shanti Kunj as if he left his mortal frame to then spread himself all over every particle of Shanti Kunj. In other words, Shanti Kunj became his physical body and would remain so till the end of the 20th Century. After that, in the 21st Century his causal body, the **karan sharir** would permeate the whole world as he would have already merged himself with

Brahm, the cause and the sustainer of the whole Universe at the time of his death. This feeling of his powerful presence persisted for the whole time I was in Shanti Kunj on that occasion.

I went up the stairs to meet Mataji who was distraught, yet composed. I sat silently all the while, for what words could be uttered on such an occasion. She broke the silence saying with quiet resolution that Gurudev's work had to be carried on with renewed vigour. She emphasized that what Gurudev was able to achieve through his mortal frame had to be built upon and expanded many folds in years to come. I told Mataji that my family and I were entirely at the disposal of Gurudev's Mission and we would do whatever was possible within our limited means and abilities. She blessed me in person and blessed all in the family in her affectionate way and after having my lunch in her watchful and caring presence, I left for Mussoorie to be with Ija and Kailash, Nimmi that evening and the following day, before returning to New Delhi the next evening by train.

As I reflected on the stark fact of Gurudev's departure I could not but recall that first meeting I had with him over eleven years ago on 6th March, 1979. In the last one year Babuji had passed away and his void had to a large extent been filled by Gurudev. Now he too had gone, though he had been preparing every one for this contingency very diligently and very imaginatively for the last five years. I first met him a year after I became Secretary to the state government of UP and was thereafter closely associated with the power structure of the state government as well as of the central government, the **raj-tantra** as Gurudev called it. This was going to be my official status for the next seventeen years and how I conducted myself was going to be extremely important to the country as well as to the Mission.

The subtle manner in which Gurudev steered me, goaded me, guided me during the past eleven years, and in view of the fact that his astral body was going to be very active up till the year 2000, his guidance was going to see me through till my retirement in December, 1996. At that moment of course I did not think at all of the future but just deeply thought about the manner in which I had changed and matured to become very effective in whatever work I did or whichever assignment I was given in government. I always felt that I was being guided by an unseen hand which protected me as well in a number of tricky situations, some of which I have already described earlier. The assurance of Gurudev that he was going to be with whoever needed him for the good of society was definitely a great solace to one's heart.

Our family was scattered between New Delhi, Lucknow and Allahabad and I had a new job on hand. Nikhil was in MNR Engineering College in his final year of B. Tech while Lalit was still in Lucknow preparing for his prelims of IAS as well as for his M. Tech entrance test which was also due. Abha had arrived from Lucknow on 31st March, 1990 to join as MO-I/c in NDMC New Delhi on 1st April leaving Lalit behind. In other words, the external world for me was in a total flux and Gurudev's physical departure only added to the extent of the flux. While Gurudev had prepared all and sundry for his final departure, his actual physical departure was nevertheless going to make a great deal of difference in Shanti Kunj. Mataji's presence was no doubt going to be a stabilizing influence but the towering dynamism and fatherly affection of Gurudev was going to be sorely missed.

The Mission was not confined to Shanti Kunj alone and for the lakhs and lakhs of Gayatri parijans in India and abroad his departure was going to signal a vacuum which would be difficult to fill. Parijans began to pour into Shanti Kunj, day in and day out and to give solace to the large number of devotees all over the world Mataji decided to organize a ***Shranddhanjali***, thanks giving event in November 1990 in order to regulate this in-flow of parijans, as well as to give a new vigour to the Mission.

I made it a practice to usually avoid going to Shanti Kunj whenever it was over crowded, and in any case my domestic front was totally disorganized. The house CII/10 Moti Bagh in New Delhi which was to be our residence till I retired was allotted in July to me and getting it ready took another month or so. Then only could we think of getting our luggage transported from Lucknow sometimes in September. **This upheaval in our personal lives as well as in Shanti Kunj and the Mission thus coincided and the shock of each seemed to balance the other.** My two monthly visits to Shanti Kunj to meet Mataji and Ija in Mussoorie however continued without fail. The distance from New Delhi was definitely shorter than it was from Lucknow and therefore, these visits now were far more convenient.

When I occasionally reflect on what this phenomena known as Pandit Sriram Sharma "Acharya" was, I am filled with dismay and a sense of helplessness overtakes me in finding the right words to do justice to my description. With the exception of those who were living in Shanti Kunj or those who had been with him in Mathura and had a lifetime of an opportunity to live near him, I was perhaps the only one who saw him once in two months regularly for over eleven years at a stretch.

Every meeting with him was an intense interaction between us, almost on equal terms in the beginning and later when I realized where I stood, as a meek but rebellious disciple of a Guru who regularly conversed with God, and who was for all practical purposes a specially chosen messenger of the Almighty. His outward humility and appearance were so deceptive in regard to his real strengths; his unfathomable depths, his comprehensive compassions, and his concern for every one every where, that only if he himself allowed the other person to know about him was it possible to have a glimpse of his persona. He went to great lengths to keep his real personality hidden from the onlooker and only a glimpse of that part of his personality would be revealed to the other person, which he willed deliberately on every such occasion.

Gurudev's biographical details are well documented in Shanti Kunj and any one can access them. There is a detailed well written biography in Hindi by Dr. Pranav Pandya and Jyotirmay, which has rare details too about Gurudev's life and works. This narrative of mine in English is only an inadequate and humble attempt at interpreting him as a silent revolutionary of his times. He brought about such fundamental changes through his speeches, writings and deeds in the basic interpretation of the numerous texts comprising the **Vedic** lore, the **Upanishads**, the **Puranas**, the Bhagwad-Gita and others that they have now become fountain-heads of a new and vibrant philosophical basis for a world culture to foster world unity of which the springboard would be India of the twenty first century.

He was a model son who did what he wanted to do and carried his parents with him; he was a model husband who gave his better half not only her due but made her a willing partner in his ventures; he was a model father who took great care to nurture his children; he was a model friend, a “यारों का यार” ‘**yaaron ka yar**’ who never let go an opportunity to extend a helping hand to who ever sought it; he was a model teacher who went to great lengths to make himself understood. He was a great speaker who conversed with his audience and a great writer. What he wrote in Hindi cheers and churns up one's insides to prepare and propel that person in the direction in which he or she could move best to do the best to the extent of one's ability.

He himself had said of his writings “**I have written fire**”, ‘**hamney AAG likhi hai**’ – ‘हमने आग लिखी है’. He was a model householder, conscious of the needs and limitations of each and every one who was a member of his household, the Gayatri pariwar, to whom he was a father figure. For him the human body with all its faculties was a precious gift of God to all of us and taking proper care of it, the ‘**sharir yantra**’ was a bounden duty of each one of us. He was a social reformer who

understood the dynamics of social reform and the many pitfalls that may beset any one attempting them. He was a leader of the masses, the ***Jan-gan-man-adhinayak*** – जन गण मन अधिनायक (the first four words of India's National Anthem) in physical frame, who could not be hustled by them to take a wrong step, but who would not hesitate to tell them what was good for them and what was wrong with them. He had his finger on the pulse of all events taking place around him and he was prescient enough to caution every one to take adequate measures to avoid mishaps. He avoided talking of the miracles which were associated with him and discouraged any loose talk about them in order that people around him did not lose faith in their own capacity to do their best.

He was conscious that the Gayatri parijans would not be above exploiting his extraordinary powers for their own selfish ends and even become indolent and dependent on him, instead of exerting themselves. He appeared to be a family elder of every family in the world and was quick to silence persons who would try to flatter him. Right till the last few months of his sojourn on this planet he maintained robust health and observed a punishing work regime of up to 18 hours a day of which six were spent only in writing, which he did every day without fail. I remember that during the last year of his life he told me once that he was working on preparing a ***'Gita-Wishwakosh'*** – 'गीता विश्वकोश', an encyclopedia on the Bhagwad-Gita which he said would not be ready in his lifetime. I never heard of it thereafter in Shanti Kunj.

Gurudev often mentioned ***"Nishkalank Avtar"*** – "निष्कलंक अवतार" as the real ***Kalki Avtar*** and added that only ideas could be **blemish-less** – ***"Nishkalank"***. There is no doubt that the vast body of his writings which he had left for posterity are blemish-less and constitute a fine blue print of a new and modern civilization, which would give rise to a new man, and a new woman, a new paradigm of human existence which could at present, only be imagined. To that extent he was the prophet of a bright future for the whole of mankind which is in sharp contrast to the myriads of prophets of doom we have been hearing of since I can remember.

He wanted to prepare this generation of humans to have faith and address self-improvement as a way of life to fight their own negativity. हम सुधरेंगे – युग सुधरेगा, हम बदलेंगे—युग बदलेगा ***'Hum sudherengey-yug sudherega, Hum badelengey- yug badelega'*** were the main themes of the Yug Nirman movement which would enable the ascent of the divine in every human and the descent of the Supramental, the Atimanas as described by Gurudev on this Earth.

I am deliberately using this word from the vocabulary of Sri Aurobindo because he and Gurudev had met in Pondicherry and there was a crucial exchange of views of strategic nature between them. Every human was called upon to do his or her best for the good of society and for self improvement and the divine forces operating in the world would assist every one, far out of proportion to the efforts made. Shri Aurobindo described the present time as **‘Bhagwat Muhurt’** while Gurudev called it the **‘Yug-Sandhi’**. The Gayatri pariwar was to be in the vanguard of this Yug Nirman effort every where. Gurudev kept on assuring that wherever and whenever such efforts would be made by whomsoever, he would rush to assist that effort. There is no doubt that lakhs and lakhs of Gayatri parijans are doing their best and their efforts may even not be known to anyone in Shanti Kunj or Gayatri Tapobhumi but the efforts go on.

My own understanding and experience in this regard is what I would like to narrate here. Gurudev had a profound understanding of the psyche of the Indian masses, whose plight during the last thousand years of servitude and about five hundred years of social upheavals prior to that had smashed their self-esteem and had made them slaves of their own superstitions. The War of Independence of 1857 and the following freedom struggle of ninety years which led to India’s freedom in 1947 – had to a certain extent, no doubt made a dent into these attitudes and mindsets. The War of Independence and the succeeding freedom movement however, respectively had really been the handiwork of a few tens of thousand scattered fighters led by inept military leadership a century ago the first time or in recent times, at the most the efforts of a lakh of hard-core non-violent vocal **satyagrahis** and activists.

The millions of masses of India steeped in indolence continued to wallow in the most obscurantist worlds of their own making, of different shades and different intensities in different parts of India even after independence. The forty odd years of freedom in which India breathed during his life time was only the beginning of a gradually waking up of the half dead masses and it was this process of awakening to their depths, that Gurudev supported by Mataji started single-handedly addressing during the early years of Yug Nirman movement in the first decade after Independence from Mathura.

He deliberately avoided rushing to acquire any political plums of office which were floating aplenty. Fortunately, most of the politicians in power in those days were products of the freedom movement and had been in jail with him, which ensured that at least, the State was not going to be hostile to the Yug Nirman movement led by him. The obscurantist ritualistic Hindu orthodoxy

was up in arms against him and Gurudev strategically allied with the Arya Samaj, which was also the rising political group in North-West India to counter them.

Apart from this, his own skills of polemics and erudition combined with his tremendous patience succeeded in winning the opposition over gradually and steadily all over the country. By the time he decided to quit his mortal frame in 1990, the sacred Gayatri mantra which could not even be pronounced loudly by any one and not at all by women and dalits, had become a household mantra for people of all castes and even creeds to be sung at **deep yagyas**, lamp festivals. These **deep yagyas** were again a short-cut version of the elaborate ritualistic Gayatri yagya prescribed in the **Vedas**. In this shorter version of the newly devised lamp festival, people of all creeds too could participate with their lighted candles without any hesitation. Gurudev first got down to making the **Vedic Gayatri yagya** accessible to all castes and creeds as well as women and once they had got addicted to yet another form of superstition of believing that the ritual was the real thing, he set about finding and initiating and popularizing a short-cut version of **deep yagya** to rid them of their new found superstition.

Knowing this propensity of the Indian mind-set to look for rituals for a solution to every problem, he devised the strategy of mass education '**lok-shikshan**' "लोक शिक्षण" through rituals associated with antenatal care **Punswan Sanskar**; naming a child after birth – **Nam Karan Sanskar**; birth days every year – **Janmadin Sanskar**; six monthly ritual of feeding cereal to the new born baby for the first time – **Anna Prasanna Sanskar**; the beginning of learning – **Akshararambha Sanskar**; the Sacred Thread ceremony – the **Yagyopavita Sanskar**; the marriage ceremony – **Vivah Sanskar**; the marriage anniversary – was a new sanskar for the modern age to ensure family harmony, and the last rites on death – **Antyeshti Sanskar**.

Reviving these rituals performed sensibly and mindfully as a **primer of civilized social behavior in good humour** and not as exercises to be done forcibly, has been one of the biggest achievements of the Yug Nirman movement. This has over the last fifty odd years of Gurudev's constant slave-driving with a smile, simultaneously brought about mass education to rid people of their superstitions, to inculcate the right values like honesty, thrift, concern for others, women's emancipation, concern for the environment, small family norm etc. without at all arousing fanaticism of any kind. Values like socialism, secularism, democracy, scientific temper etc also became the subjects of mass education through these rituals.

This has been, indeed a movement of great import to enable these values of the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in PART IV of the Indian Constitution, to get imbibed into the psyche of the people of India. There is today a hard core of Gayatri parijans who are living the ideals enshrined in the Indian Constitution and their number is growing every day, day by day. The social revolution to create a pluralistic modern society ushered by the dawn of independence in 1947 is very much in the process of getting consolidated to a stage where the hustle and bustle of negative forces operating in India today would not succeed in their nefarious designs. That revolution is now very much maturing to a definite stage where its organic growth is fast becoming self-generating and self sustaining. The noise, pain and clamour including the frequent explosions all over India, which kill innocent children, women and men, the loud protestations of imagined grievances by sections of society who are constantly jockeying through violent or non-violent means to gain unfair advantages and such other negative forces operating in India today, appear at first site to be powerful enough to up-turn the dream of the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution. But they are not going to succeed.

I remember that when once after the passing away of Gurudev, I went to Mataji in a pessimistic mood, she consoled me saying that the righteous five Pandavas were more than a match for the evil and unrighteous, one hundred and one Kauravas in spite of their superior arms and army in numerical strength. So she never tired of assuring me that such outward manifestations of contrived and sponsored unrest are bound to peter out in view of the solid work done by Gurudev and the Gayatri pariwar.

I see that the silent revolution which is unfolding at a million points in various parts of the country as well as amidst myriads of communities and families, schools and colleges, villages and towns and the numerous mohallas is going to set at nought these sinister designs of the numerous disgruntled vocal groups appearing to work in tandem today. What is called for today is, more and more positively inclined persons of all castes and communities to come out together in the open to counter these negative forces of Indian society as it is trying to get rid of them. Gurudev and Mataji were uncompromising optimists and they instilled optimism in all who came in touch with them all their lives. The negative forces the world over, would soon cancel each other and get spent away, that is the way I look at the whole situation today. Each one of us has only to persist in the little good that each one can do and ought to be doing, to the best of one's ability.

While a great deal of this scenario had been my own world view as it was when I met Gurudev and as it further developed during the eleven years that I interacted with him, his presence in my proximity has been a constant feeling almost from day one. I was quite unconscious of it in the beginning but as this association developed this feeling became a very palpable one. Its intensity has definitely gone up after his shedding of the mortal frame, however dear its appearances may have been in his various moods for all who came close to him, and however much we may be missing his physical presence in our daily lives.

My own life after his departure has been full of major upheavals through which I was guided and steered safely and every crisis saw me through stronger than ever before. These years have also been years of achievements of which I can personally be proud and I have always felt his hand in pushing me into those achievements.

I can now recall that whenever a challenging assignment was posed to me by any agency after my retirement, with advancing years my first reaction usually was to avoid getting embroiled in yet another challenge, but then a voice from within would shake me up and I would end up accepting it—surely it was the voice of Gurudev who would not let me relax into oblivion. Gurudev had a telling message for all those who begin to grow old at whatever age. ***“jab tak jiyo, garam hokar jiyo-sakriya hokar jiyo: roshan hokar jiyo: sabko apney jaisa banao”*** – “जब तक जियो, गरम होकर जियो – सक्रिय होकर जियो: रोशन होकर जियो: सबको अपने जैसा बनाओ”. This translated into English would mean **“Live actively so long as you live: be a light unto others so long as you live: become an example for others to follow, so long as you live”**.

As the years pass I feel that the intensity of his presence inside me is increasing day by day, and very often I feel he is acting through me and this feeling too is growing day by day. These effects also seem to be working on members of my family, on Abha my better half, my elder son Lalit, his daughter Anu and a new arrival delightful Aditya whom I began calling Adi-Nanoo soon after he was born on Buddha Purnima day in 2008, my younger son Nikhil, his promising son Mudit who was born on the Vernal Equinox, the 21st March 1997 and our dear daughters in law, the TWO **BAHUS** Vibha and Ruchi. Each of them seems to be getting not only influenced gradually in their personalities, but also in the life each is living, specially its quality, apart from the fact that otherwise financially too they are doing well.

I often remember the words of Thiruvalluvar, the great saint of India who said “If you want to know how any one is doing just ask that person what his children are doing”.

Chapter VII – Shanti Kunj After Gurudev & Passing Away of Mataji

Outwardly Shanti Kunj was the same even after Gurudev's departure, but those close to him were carefully reordering their lives with an eye on the future. Mataji regained her composure soon after Gurudev's departure and was firmly in-charge of the Mission. She seemed more determined to inject a new vigour into the Mission than ever before. Now began the first of a series of **Ashwamedha yagyas** all over the country. These were very elaborate **yagyas** requiring year long preparations and thereafter required an elaborate system of follow ups. In other words, an **Ashwamedha yagya** — अश्वमेध यज्ञ any where made a quantum difference to the environment of the given place and also laid the ground for sprouting of new volunteers for the Mission.

The next four years that Mataji was in her mortal frame, she personally steered these **Ashwamedha yagyas**, over 30 in number which led to an explosion in the spread of the Mission in India and abroad. I attended a few **Ashwamedha yagyas**, the first one in Jaipur, and the one in Anwalkhera, Gurudev's birthplace and also the **Ashwamedha yagya** in Kurukshetra, the battlefield of Mahabharat. Mataji wanted me to occupy the centre stage at Jaipur in the evening public function, but I quietly excused myself. I really did not want to project myself in public as an important volunteer of the Mission though I always tried to do the best I could in any situation.

My two monthly visits to Shanti Kunj and Mussoorie continued and these brought me very close to Mataji. Her over-flowing affection for me and our family was a source of great strength to us and we never lost an opportunity to bask in it. Whenever Mataji would pass through New Delhi on her way to other parts of India or even abroad, we were always there to sit at her feet for a few hours at the airport and she would make solicitous enquiries about every one in the family, particularly my mother in Mussoorie, Abha's mother and our two children, Lalit and Nikhil.

Getting used to the working routine of Krishi Bhawan, exploring and studying the all important Agricultural sector were, indeed very engrossing and soon I was quite adept at what I was doing. Apart from water-shed development, the cooperative sector was of great interest to

me. Agricultural extension which aimed at delivering the benefits of researches made by ICAR to the farmers was another important area of my interest. Gradually I was given the work of different divisions and within three years I had handled almost all the divisions in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC), and as was my wont I had acquired a certain level of mastery as well. After being Additional Secretary for may be a little less than two years I was elevated as Special Secretary, which is supposed to be equivalent yet not equal to Secretary to Government of India.

It was only in October, 1993 that I succeeded Shri MS Gill as the Secretary Agriculture. This was a major break through in my career and I realized that it was nothing short of an intervention from the on high that this happened. I could distinctly feel the blessings of Mataji, since the politico-bureaucratic set up in New Delhi at that time could hardly be counted as favorable, if not hostile. My elevation to the position of Secretary to Government of India appeared to have taken place despite these unfavourable factors.

This was the highest level for a civil servant to achieve under normal circumstances; one who had done his best in service to be counted as sufficiently competent could normally hope to achieve this, as the next higher level ie, that of the Cabinet Secretary was one which very often also called for appropriate political connections just as elevation to the level of Chief Secretary at the state levels too did. In this regard I was totally committed to the Indian Constitution and an **'innocent'** civilian who had scrupulously avoided any personal contacts with politicians all along my service career from the beginning. My relationships with ministers and politicians were always strictly based on the Code of Conduct of the civil services, and no politician of the day could be counted to care for a neutral civil servant like me.

It was during one of the silent bureaucratic upheavals in Krishi Bhawan in the early months of the year 1991 of which I have made a passing reference in the earlier pages, that I was provoked to start thinking of setting up a voluntary association of dedicated experts in agriculture, agri-business, agro-forestry, forestry, horticulture, energy and rain-water conservation and such other allied concerns, who would only care for the country and who would strive to get know-how relating to these areas available to the concerned people in India, with or without the support of the governmental systems. This was also the time when the national initiative relating to globalization was being discussed at policy levels. The benefits and dangers of this initiative were being put forth both by the proponents of the move and those opposing it respectively. The

out-dated but over-bearing public sector including the dead wood in the governmental system, which was not delivering was also an object of criticism and discussion. The bureaucracy was being targeted like never before at the instance of interested politicians and members of the media as stumbling blocks in the path of the nation's progress at the instance of external forces with a hidden agenda of keenness to destabilize India.

There is no doubt that the rising number of black sheep in the bureaucracy had brought its prestige and standing down and it was fast losing the higher moral ground of being custodians of the public good which it had acquired substantially in the first twenty five years after independence. Globalization thus could not be morally opposed by the bureaucracy, yet it had to re-adjust its own functioning and reinvent itself and its own role in it. To me the picture was very clear. If the country was to become strong at all levels, then globalization would mean opportunity to the more progressive elements in Indian society to innovate. If this was not so, then India could even lose her sovereignty and remain a free country only in name. The stakes were thus high and I realized that if I had to play my part then it would have to be from outside the governmental system, which was only possible through a voluntary association of like minded individuals who could keep the interests of the country above all. This was indeed a sad revelation for a professional civil servant of my standing.

Functioning honestly with the purpose of serving the country well from inside the governmental system, which was so heavily infested with deadwood on the one hand and sharks in the shape of corrupt personnel as well as corrupt political leadership on the other, was in any case proving progressively, more and more difficult. My own service tenure in government would be coming to an end within the next few years. So evolving a voluntary platform which could develop into a useful instrument in the service of India was a new challenge.

This was a tall order and required the blessings of Mataji in Shanti Kunj. From the point of view of the Mission as well, I realized that Gurudev had in the last few years of his sojourn on this planet begun realizing that the Mission was getting bogged down in mere **Karma Kand – कर्म कांड** — ritualistic observance of various **mantras**, at the cost of the larger vision of the Mission, which was **Vichar Kranti Abhiyan** and **Yug Nirman** ie, change in attitudes and ways of thinking of people from a self-seeking mode to a mode of enlightened self-interest, where-in each individual would begin to realize that unless he or she contributed to the common weal, the whole of humanity

would perish. It was this realization amongst the people which would bring about the impetus for **Yug Nirman**, not a mere ritualistic observance of **Gayatri yagyas** which were very useful in the beginning to break the ice of retrograde thinking. The ritualistic observances were not unimportant in themselves, but they were primarily meant to initiate more and more new people on to the path of rectitude, not to become the final resting place on one's haunches and their laurels for even the veterans of the Mission.

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How was the proposed new voluntary association to address all these issues? This became a subject of deep thought and meditation in which, I felt Gurudev was propelling me. Quite independently, Shri VP Singh an IFS officer of the West Bengal cadre who belonged to West UP and who worked as a Director in Krishi Bhawan with me, came to me on the eve of his reversion back to his state, that I may think of organizing a voluntary association in which he would also like to play a role. These discussions were taking place in August 1991 and I asked VP Singh to attempt a draft of the Memorandum of Association (MoA) as well as objectives of the VA, along with the Rules and Regulations for its functioning. Thus began the initial process of setting up REACHA, Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture and Agro-forestry – ऋचा – which also stood for the verses in the **Vedas**. The drafts were ready by December, 1991 and we now had to look for five more like minded individuals. **I remembered that Gurudev had advised all aspirants of voluntary work to first make their own contribution before seeking the contribution of others.** Since we would be needing funds to get the VA going we decided that Rs. 5000/- should be the amount we may request an adherent to cough up, for it was neither too little nor too much for a person who planned to set out to do some good to society, and an average honest professional of moderate means, who was well meaning enough, should not find it too difficult to part with it.

Two friends immediately came to my mind. Captain Vishva Kant Pandey, an ex-service officer who was Director, Manav Bharati, an old and tried friend and Somnath Som, a batch mate from 1961 batch from the Orissa Cadre of IAS who was posted as Additional Secretary, Department of Rural Development also housed in Krishi Bhawan. Dr. Sohan Lal Seth, Agronomist in the Department of Agriculture was by then already a close associate in the water-shed programme. We managed two more volunteers – one was Smt. Malti Sinha, a Joint Secretary in the Department of Agriculture and another junior colleague whose name and rank I am not remembering as he

promised to pay Rs. 5000/- but later backed out. The seven of us signed the Memorandum of Association (MoA) necessary for registration for submission to the Registrar of Societies, New Delhi. With some minor pursuing with the help of Shri AS Awasthi of the Delhi Administration the formal registration certificate was soon received. The date of registration was 9th March 1992. The digits of the dates of birth of Lalit, 27th April and Nikhil, 27th February were also adding up to number 9, the date of registration of REACHA — रीचा on 9th of March. Thus, the date of registration of REACHA was in the intervening connecting month of March after February, Nikhil's month of birth and before April, Lalit's month of birth. In the Science of Numerology this is supposed to be very significant and I would interpret this coincidence as Gurudev's blessings to me and both Lalit and Nikhil, to collaborate in taking REACHA forward. Thus REACHA formally took shape after over ten months of pen-pushing and legwork with VP Singh as the first Executive Director and me as Chairman. Propelling it forward with the help of all good people was the next step to be planned.

Once registration was done I proceeded to Shanti Kunj to seek Mataji's blessings and to seek her consent for a decision to make a representative of Shanti Kunj a formal member. I gave her a copy of the brochure which we had prepared incorporating the MoA, the Rules and Regulations, the various forms for membership etc. After the usual pleasantries and exchange of news of Shanti Kunj and the family, I gave her the background of the provocation of setting up REACHA as a voluntary association in New Delhi, much against my retiring nature. Handing her a copy of the brochure gravely, with feelings of trepidation and all my salutations, I sought her blessings.

Without even blinking her eyes, she pointedly asked me – "How many members do you want, one or three"? I too answered without blinking my eyes – "One member Dr. Pranav Pandya would be enough". She gracefully accorded her approval and accordingly, the formal association of Shanti Kunj with REACHA was initiated. I remember that when I read out Rabindranath Tagore's line '*O amar desher mati tomar paayay thaikaaye matha*' "ओ आमार देशेर माटी तोमार पाये ठैकाया माथा" as one of the punch lines of REACHA printed on the inside cover of the brochure to Mataji, she had tears in her eyes. This was more than Mataji's verbal blessings; these tears were to be the real life force injected into the fledgling REACHA to enable it to become an alternate vehicle of Yug Nirman.

My own analysis of need for a forum like REACHA was that, the Yug Nirman Mission which was steeped in the **Vedic** religious rituals and idiom needed a secular instrument to convert the vast manpower of positively inclined persons of all creeds to take up constructive work on the lines of the directions of Mahatma Gandhi. I was in a position to get the best brains in the country to begin working on the various problems it was facing and the Gayatri parijans could be suitably mobilized to fan out into the nook and corners of India to enable such activities on a steady basis. The blessings I received for REACHA from Mataji with tears in her eyes were more than a guarantee for this to happen in future and I was delighted beyond my expectations. This was going to be an exciting experiment of coordination between **DHARMTANTRA** — धर्म तंत्र and **RAJTANTRA** — राज तंत्र, which Gurudev had desired through me while I was in service. Now, with Mataji's blessings REACHA would hopefully enable this to happen even after my retirement from service. I returned to New Delhi in an elated state of mind forgetting all the humiliations of the past one year.

This was the formal initiation of my social activism through REACHA while still in government service. **I and my associates had to be cautious not to breach any of the Rules of Conduct prescribed for government servants.** This was not difficult. The activities and programmes of REACHA would never be outside the pale of government policies and the values of the Indian Constitution to which I swore allegiance on oath in 1961 in the National Academy of Administration as it was then known. REACHA thus became for me another vehicle for implementing government policies which were proving difficult to implement through the governmental system, such as the watershed development programme etc. where the schemes had been specifically designed to be people and farmer friendly. The bureaucratic structure at the field and state levels had over the years become so rigid and unresponsive that genuine farmer and people-friendly initiatives through them were just not going forward, with honorable exceptions.

Since then this rigidity has permeated upwards as well making even the higher bureaucratic machinery to become listless and subservient, only to the directions coming from above, thereby completely ignoring the groundswell and feedback from the field as well as from the lower formations of the bureaucracy. What seems to have happened appears to have developed as follows: according to the system of governance inherited by the country, the political bureaucracy was supposed to give policy directions to the civil bureaucracy after the same had been hammered

out through extensive discussions with the latter. Thereafter, the implementation of that policy was supposed to be the responsibility of the neutral civil bureaucracy without interference from the politicians.

In reality, it transpired that after a few decades of independence the political bureaucracy lost real interest in policy formulation, with honourable exceptions, and began to take interest only in its implementation as well as in the transfer and posting of the civil servants according to their whims, thereby curtailing the natural rhythm of the functioning of the civil bureaucracy with well established traditions. In this process both policy formulation and its implementation suffered irretrievably. It is these tendencies that have rendered the political and civil bureaucratic systems unfit for both policy formulation as well as routine civil governance today which require ability to respond to developing situations all around according to the merits of those situations. The sad story of progressive mis-governance and mal-governance in India after Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri is thus of our own making.

REACHA thus naturally seemed to emerge as an effective bridge between organizations such as Shanti Kunj and the government till I retired in December 1996, both central and states. Soon, I began to initiate training programmes relating to watershed development in Shanti Kunj on the lines such as the teachers' training done earlier in Shanti Kunj for the Education Department of UP. The officers of the Agriculture Department of all the states were sent for training to Shanti Kunj for a week, state wise. **A REACHA PRAKOSHTH** was earmarked in Shanti Kunj to facilitate these programmes. Another programme of training volunteers in self-help groups sponsored by NABARD was also conducted with REACHA as the main resource group immediately after my retirement. Such was the high praise for REACHA's work that the UP government was asked to submit a project for watershed development on the lines of REACHA's working methods by NABARD, when the latter was approached by them for funding. In fact, REACHA and Yug Nirman Mission were complementing each other beautifully, the latter stressing on improving quality of volunteers through its working methods and REACHA stressing on genuine people-friendly secular constructive work.

Instructions were issued from the Krishi Bhawan by me as Special Secretary, Agriculture to all the states to organize watershed lamp festivals (दीप यज्ञ) **deep-yagya** in each of the over 2500 model watersheds in all blocks which were the so called rainfed development blocks. These lamp festivals enlivened the watershed programme many folds. The success of these lamp festivals in

mobilizing people in the watershed programme had a curious fall out. The vested interests operating in the concerned state agriculture departments got alarmed with this kind of peoples' response to the watershed programme under the NWDPA. If this was to continue indefinitely, they would have to give up their wayward ways of working, because as Special Secretary I had again started overseeing this project with the help of Dr. Seth as vigorously as ever before.

In order to upset the new methodology of mobilizing people for the programme to make it a peoples' movement, state government officials began dodging the participants and misleading them by changing the dates fixed for various events of a **deep yagya** at short notice, thereby upsetting the mobilization of people, in this case the **Gayatri parijans**. Such was the disgust amongst the average **Gayatri parijans** that but for the select few **parijans** who were patient and persevering, the others began to gradually drop out from these programmes. This was a big set back to my efforts in evolving a stable working partnership between Shanti Kunj and REACHA. I pleaded with Shanti Kunj and the **parijans** who came for training to Shanti Kunj, that if we have to change the mindset of governmental functionaries, which is a must for **Yug Nirman**, then they the **parijans** would have to practice patience and perseverance as advised by Gurudev.

Regretfully, my pleadings fell on deaf ears and this initiative had to be given up too soon after it had begun to succeed so well as an example of successful working cooperation between **DHARMTANTRA** and **RAJTANTRA**. I was reminded of one of Gurudev's favourite sayings '**Asafalta yahi siddh karti hai ki safalta key liye purey man say prayatna nahi kiya gaya**' – 'असफलता यही सिद्ध करती है कि सफलता के लिए पूरे मन से प्रयत्न नहीं किया गया' meaning '**Failure only proves that full efforts were not made mentally or physically to achieve success**'. Why this effort could not be made to follow Gurudev's sterling directions for Yug Nirman by Shanti Kunj, I would never know!

In the mean time yet another set of social dynamics began to operate within the Yug Nirman Mission. The advent of REACHA had set into motion a strong under current of constructive activity within the Mission and naturally the adherents of pure **Vedic Karam Kand** ie, elaborate rituals, who believed that **Karam Kand** was the most important activity of the Mission began to feel that the Mission was deviating from its basic charter. With my retirement from the service in December 1996 my utility to the Mission as a bridge with the governmental set up in the centre and the state too began to wane. A favourite question to me in those days from parijans in Shanti Kunj was –

“Ab aap kaun sa pad lainey waley hain?” meaning- **“What position of authority are you going to take now?”** to which my answer would be **“Param Pad”** meaning **“The highest, which is referred to as merger with *Brahm* ie, God Realization”**. These two developments made me realize that REACHA would not be able to do much in partnership with the Mission and that it had to charter its own independent course of action and establish itself as a strong think tank of creative, scientific and constructive modern ideas for Indian society.

REACHA was firmly committed only to constructive programmes in a purely secular format as envisaged in the Indian Constitution and I felt that, its continued association with the Mission, which was increasingly projecting itself after the passing away of Gurudev and Mataji as a rigid orthodoxy of a new kind, would hardly be of any advantage and in fact would be a disadvantage. During Gurudev’s and Mataji’s life time people of all faiths were visiting Shanti Kunj and the image of the Mission was that of a secular Hindu organization which broadly projected the kind of social and cultural values which the Indian Constitution provided for or even promoted.

This realization that REACHA would cease to be useful to the Mission was indeed a painful revelation to me but I took great care that while REACHA charted its independent course, I personally and my family members would maintain our contact with Shanti Kunj, so that the precious links from Gurudev’s time may not be snapped. No matter how much Shanti Kunj appeared to deviate from the line of action that Gurudev would have desired it to follow, its basic capacity of disseminating the message of ***Vichar Kranti*** and ***Yug Nirman*** were going to remain undiminished for the immediate future as far as we could see. This line of thinking in me began as early as the early months of 1997 as I began to notice the changed attitude of the parijans in Shanti Kunj, but the actual withdrawal from Shanti Kunj on my part was still to take some more time as there were so many on-going training programmes that were being steered by me with them. It was only well after March, 1998 that Nikhil’s and my weekly visits to Shanti Kunj came to an end. Thereafter, I made it a practice to visit Shanti Kunj at least once a year on Shravani, the Raksha Bandhan day to change my ***yagyopavit***, the sacred thread which must have been the primary link with Gurudev since April 1950, when my ***yagyopavit sanskar*** took place in Mussoorie for full three days.

With hindsight it would have to be said in praise of the Mission that in spite of whatever may have happened soon after the passing away of Gurudev and Mataji, it has kept the ***Yagyagni***, the sacrificial fire lit by Gurudev, burning bright and Shanti Kunj continues to be a magnet for all those

who were close to Gurudev and Mataji. Shri Vireshwar Upadhyay said it aptly '**Tirth apna kam kar raha hai**' 'तीर्थ अपना काम कर रहा है' meaning '**Tirth or the pilgrim centre which resides in Shanti Kunj, is doing it's duty**' and Shanti Kunj has looked after that '**Tirth**' beautifully and with great care like a loving mother. The task of '**Sanskar Paddyati se Lok-Shikshan**' meaning '**Mass-Education through Sanskar Rituals**' is far from over, and in itself is no mean task and Shanti Kunj continues to labour and plod on admirably in this mission of bringing the values and concerns of the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in PART IV of the Indian Constitution to the reach of all individuals throughout the length and breadth of India to enable these values in getting imbibed by the masses. Gayatri pariwar the world over cannot but feel grateful to the present managers of Shanti Kunj that the precious legacy of Gurudev and Mataji is being taken care of so well and the same **yagyagni** – यज्ञाग्नि burns and lives as brightly as ever.

Two more achievements must be credited to Shanti Kunj after the passing away of Gurudev and Mataji: one is the '**Bharatiya Sanskriti Gyan Pariksha**' – 'भारतीय संस्कृती ज्ञान परीक्षा' which has brought and continues to do so, the salient facts of true **Vedic** Indian cultural values to lakhs of school children in India, through an annual examination which is open to every one. The other is relating to the follow-up of the disaster management exercise which took place as a result of my assignment of the High Powered Committee (HPC) in which a conscious effort was made to involve over 600 voluntary agencies in this activity all over India in the year 2000 through what was named as VASUDEVA- Voluntary Agencies for Sustainable Universal Development and Emergency Voluntary Action, as a platform to enable NGOs to collaborate with each other as well as with the governmental systems.

Unfortunately, this initiative could not be carried further due to the indifference of the newly set up National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in New Delhi by the new government of Sardar Manmohan Singh which came in power in 2004. Genuine efforts to this effect were made by the Executive Director of the newly set up National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), the successor institution to NCDM (National Centre for Disaster Management) which was the secretariat for the HPC for over four years in New Delhi and itself housed in IIPA since 1994, but to no avail. Such is the blindness that prevails in our national polity today that good initiatives of the previous government have to be dumped. This tendency is there also in the state governments and districts too since a few decades.

Most of these developments were to take place well after the major event of Mataji's passing away in September, 1994 after a prolonged illness. Her passing away had really widened the vacuum created by the passing away of Gurudev in 1990. We had fully partaken of her affection after the passing away of Gurudev, and now her passing away was going to be a loss, which would be difficult to fill up. Shanti Kunj was going to have to re-arrange its whole daily cycle of routine considering that the austerity of the life style of Gurudev and Mataji, once they were no longer on the scene was going to be very difficult to emulate. Mataji had taken great pains to prepare Shailji, their daughter for the kind of responsibilities that she was discharging; and similarly Gurudev had taken elaborate measures to prepare Dr. Pranav Pandya, their son-in-law to steer the Mission with the help of a group of tried and tested parijans who were residing in Shanti Kunj. Gurudev and Mataji had thus, done every thing possible to ensure a smooth transition after their exit from the scene.

The year 1997 was a year of great transition for me and the family as well, since that was the first year after my retirement that I was venturing out into full time social activism. By now, the **REACHA PRAKOSHTHA** set up in 1993 began to be called **RACHNATMAK PRAKOSTHA** in Shanti Kunj, symbolically signalling my prospective exit, in a way. Converting the watershed programme into a peoples' programme was an objective firmly embedded within me since my Krishi Bhawan days and I was still groping on how to go about it. During the last few years it came to my notice that compost of cow-dung mixed with soil increased the moisture bearing capacity of the soil. If this was so, the presence of the cow was going to be crucial to rain water conservation in our rural landscape.

From this idea sprang the need for promoting **cow-care** ie, **Gosamwardhan — गोसंवर्धन** as a spearhead for a peoples' programme relating to rain water conservation. This meant looking at the state of **gaushalas — गोशाला** in India and I attended a two-day workshop on **gaushalas** in Kanpur in February, 1997. The interaction was revealing – milk dairies were passing for **gaushalas** and as soon as the cows became unproductive, they were let off in to the streets from where they found their way to the slaughter houses. I was horrified. India which was a land dedicated to cow-worship was treating the cow in this hypocritical manner and leading it to the slaughter-house systematically. But for occasional outbursts by some people some where for banning cow-slaughter the matter was as good as settled against the cow.

I began using my limited resources to exposing these hypocrisies and soon I had the lobby shouting for banning cow-slaughter approaching me for my support to their cause. I politely told them that for me this was only possible if we promote **Gosamwardhan ie, promoting cow-care** which if done sincerely and effectively would leave no cow for slaughter in India. They soon lost interest in me but to my delight, Shanti Kunj accepted this logic and soon we began preparing a manual for **“Gosamwardhan”** on the lines of the one earlier prepared by me for **“Gramotthan” – “ग्रामोत्थान”** through rain water conservation, which had a substantial input from REACHA’s experience of Krishi Bhawan days. Soon it transpired that the Bharat Vikas Praishad also got interested in this movement in consultation with Shanti Kunj and my basic objective of combining **cow-care with rain water conservation** had thus been achieved and taken up by Shanti Kunj and Bharat Vikas Parishad.

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On Basant Panchami day in January 1998, the formal Pran Pratishtha of **REACHA PRAGYA SANSTHAN – ऋचा प्रज्ञा संस्थान** at Shraddha Kunj, 159/I Vasant Vihar, Dehradun was performed by Gayatri parijan late Shri Bharadwaj ji in my presence. He had also facilitated the **Pran Pratishtha – प्राण प्रतिष्ठा** of the shaktipeeth at Anwalkhera, Gurudev’s birth-place in presence of Abha, Lalit Nikhil and my self in 1986. In the **Gayatri yagya** that was performed on that day in Shraddha Kunj, a large number of Gayatri parijans of Dehradun also participated. This was planned to be a centre to propagate the ideals relating to Yug Nirman as well as to provide ideas to REACHA to work upon in order to become a worthy vehicle of Yug Nirman.

In the meantime, Haridwar was gearing up for the last Mahakumbh of the millennium to be held in January-March 1998. I drafted a **“Haridwar Mahakumbh Srijan Sankalp” – “हरिद्वार महाकुम्भ सृजन संकल्प”** to be adopted in the Mahakumbh by as many people as possible. This was a comprehensive **sankalp** encompassing as far as possible the various aspects of Gurudev’s constructive programme. A conference of over 100 Gandhian societies operating in different parts of India was called on 20th and 21st March 1998 at Shanti Kunj and this **“Srijan Sankalp”** was ratified by all in the conference on the first day. On 21st March 1998 there was a large gathering of parijans in Shanti Kunj and in an assembly in the morning, presided over by Dr. Pranav Pandya with Swami Satyamitranand as the chief guest the **sankalp** was repeated after the chief guest by over

5000 parijans. Thereafter, in the camp of Shanti Kunj, which had been set up in the Kumbh Mela the **Srijan Sankalp** was distributed to thousands of people who came to the camp. This was indeed a grand consummation of REACHA's efforts in Shanti Kunj for about five years. Incidentally, it was also my last public appearance on the platform of the Mission. The two years after my retirement had been devoted to Shanti Kunj on an intensely regular basis in continuation of my past sixteen years while I was in service.

Nikhil and I had visited Shanti Kunj almost twice a month to participate in some training programme or the other for over two years after 1996 and I realized that those in the Mission who were dedicated to **Karma Kand** were finding us as obstacles in their work. These parijans felt that REACHA was leading the Mission astray in the direction of constructive work which was only secondary to **Karma Kand**. To me Gurudev's mission was mainly constructive work with the **Karma Kand** as only a starter, not the end. I had, therefore no further use as a social activist for Shanti Kunj and vice-versa, though I resolved that I would continue to do my bit for whatever Shanti Kunj may need my services for.

In other words REACHA set about charting its own course after April 1998, but I and the family decide to maintain our association with Shanti Kunj as here-to-fore. I recalled the message of Gurudev now displayed prominently in the office of Shri Gouri Shanker Sharma Ji, the **Vyawasthapak**, meaning the manager of Shanti Kunj which reads "**Patrata vikas key bina na is sansar main koi rishta hai or na iske bina adhyatm kshetra main koi rasta hai**" – "पात्रता विकास के बिना न इस संसार में कोई रिश्ता है और न इसके बिना अध्यात्म क्षेत्र में कोई रास्ता है", meaning that "**without appropriate capacity development there is no relationship possible in life for any one nor is there any way forward in the field of spirituality**". REACHA would have to develop its own capacity in order to be counted, which was bound to take some time. This meant that usually not more than one visit to Shanti Kunj every year would happen till some time in the future, and that day usually happened to be the day of **SHRAVANI** ie, **Raksha Bandhan** to change the sacred thread as well as to get a rakhi tied on my wrist by Shailji, daughter to Gurudev and Mataji. It may be worth mentioning here that the birthday of Shail ji falls every year on **Gita-Jayanti**, the **Ekaadashi** of **Shukla-paksh** in the month of **Margshirsh**. The birth of Shailji also happened to coincide with the day on which **Bhoomi-Poojan** for setting up **Gayatri Tapo Bhoomi** was performed by Gurudev in Mathura. I chose **Shravani** for our annual visits to Shanti Kunj because of the importance Gurudev attached to the **yagyopavit**.

After completing the narrative of one phase of my association with Shanti Kunj I must go back to the point up to which I had covered my story ie, my stint in Krishi Bhawan. While my elevation from the position of Special Secretary to that of Secretary Agriculture in October 1993 had the blessings of the then Agriculture Minister Shri Balram Jakhar, the provisional honey moon could not last beyond a year. By October 1994 I began getting a feeling that the minister was not finding me too amenable to many of the things he wanted to get done.

I was also driving my favorite programmes such as organic farming etc, which were hurting vested interests in agriculture, the chemical fertilizer and pesticide industries. He would use other officers in the department to do his favourite things, who however would keep me informed of what all was happening. My advice to these officers was that they should not forget to observe their respective professional precautions and not go over board in these matters. The Cabinet Secretary Shri Surendra Singh did sound me about these under currents, but it was not possible for me to change my priorities regarding what was good for Indian Agriculture. I understand the minister did pester the then Prime Minister Sri Narsimha Rao to accede to his request but the PM took his own time to decide on this matter.

I was duly transferred from the position of Secretary Agriculture to the position of Secretary Family Welfare (FW) in the month of May 1995 to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) where my batch-mate Madhusudan Dayal was then the Health Secretary. This move too seemed providential. No sooner had I taken charge, than an unstarred question (a question which does not require the usual supplementary information) raised in Parliament was on my table which read **“When does Government of India plan to eradicate poliomyelitis from India?”** The Health Portfolio at that time was with Shri Narsimha Rao, Prime Minister (PM) and Dr. Silvera from Mizoram was the Minister of State.

He happened to be a medico and I went up to him with the question and suggested to him that we may give the following reply – **“Government proposes to eradicate poliomyelitis from India by the year 2000 through the process of National Immunization Day (NID) and the first NID is proposed to be held on 6th December 1995”**. He asked me with dismay – can we do it? I told him, **“Let’s try, why can’t we do it”?** He agreed and this draft reply was sent to the PM for his approval. On the question day the PM gave the reply as proposed, and a decision which would

have taken months to deliberate upon had been taken. The Health and Family Welfare Ministry was in panic. How can we do it? I said let's sit down and plan it.

Incidentally, it was not known to me that the Department of Family Welfare had all along been opposing the NID strategy strongly since 1988, when WHO decided to adopt it, and I happened to be aware that it could succeed provided we tried hard enough; I had known that the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi had attempted the same strategy in December, 1994 in the whole of the NCT of Delhi and Abha, my wife who was the Chief Medical Officer, NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Council) had been involved in it. I knew what a great event it was in Delhi the previous year. Fortunately, Shrimati Adarsh Mishra, the Joint Secretary-in-charge of the programme, who belonged to the Union Territory Cadre of IAS was herself very positive about it and she threw her weight (which was quite considerable otherwise too) behind this decision. The next six months were going to be most crucial for the success of our venture, so after getting the financial clearances on the basis of available budgetary provisions, we set about the task in right earnest.

The first task was to call a National Conference of the State Health Ministers and Health and Family Welfare Secretaries. By this time Shri AR Antulay had been sworn in as the new Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare. He would have been obstructive but considering that the main decision of having a NID on 6 December, 1995 had been taken, he had little choice but to go along with what we were attempting. The conference was duly held on the due date and Shri Antulay was good enough to read his prepared speech and later got into the tempo of the decision and gave a clarion call to all the State Health Ministers to make the programme a success. The path was cleared for Adarsh and me and we went about the preparations at a feverish pace.

Knowing what was at stake, I began calling DMs of districts prone to civil unrest, where underground armed resistance could hamper the movement of the parties carrying the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) doses. I suggested to them to try and establish some kind of informal contacts with them to seek their cooperation instead of the prevailing confrontation. These tactics worked and from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari and from East to West every where 6th December, 1995 became a great festival with mothers carrying their children below 5 years of age to the polio booths in droves. By the evening of 6th December Adarsh Mishra was excited to report that 99% of the children of the country below the age of 5 years had received two drops of OPV – oral polio vaccine.

This was an unprecedented achievement and the doubting thomases of the ministry were silenced. We had now to wait for the detailed reports from the states to ascertain the pockets where the coverage may have been lower, and the reasons thereof. After taking stock of what we had been able to do and what had been the deficiencies of the programme, we had to immediately plan our programme for the next year, apart from repeating this exercise six weeks later in January 1996. The success of the NID strategy for polio eradication buoyed the WHO and the Rotarians who had been pressing the Health Ministry for the last few years to adopt it. Now that it had been done almost without any effort on their part this time, with government of India's own budgetary resources, they chipped in, in a big way to finance the programme thereafter.

This was the first time I made my acquaintance with three remarkable individuals Shri Sudershan Agarwal, who was later to become the Governor of Uttaranchal in 2003, Shri OP Vaish and Shri Raja Saboo. These three gentlemen were at that time leading the Rotary initiative for polio eradication in India and had been lobbying for the NID strategy, which was being resisted tooth and nail by the Health Ministry. The latter two were to play a very important role to assist Sudarshanji as I began to address him later, in a major project which Sudarshanji was to launch in Uttaranchal in 2003 and yet another one in 2005 to assist deserving poor students of the new state.

Coming back to polio eradication, the international donors like USAID, UNFPA, the DFID and many others too jumped on to the band-wagon and the NID of December, 1996 when I was to retire, was not to be hampered by shortage of funds. Adarsh Mishra was in her elements and NID was in safe hands. Polio eradication programme thus was set on course in right earnest on the eve of my retirement from the service on 31st December, 1996.

It fell on me to make a greater success of the NID of December 1996 when the coverage was extended to children below 6 years of age as compared to a much lesser number of children below 5 years which were covered a year ago, then due to shortage of financial resources as well as not enough time for mobilization. The programme, however was to receive a set back when my successor seemed to take an opposite stand and try and revert back to the earlier stand of resistance of the Health Ministry, after I moved out from the scene. Shrimati Adarsh Mishra however resisted these efforts bravely, while courting the displeasure of the Secretary and the pulse polio programme came to stay.

The new Secretary's attitude of resistance however had another effect, in the sense that the WHO began to experiment with more than two NIDs, which were earlier one after the other in an interval of six weeks in a year, as well as later visiting the house holds from where children were not turning up to the polio booths on the NIDs. More than two NIDs in a year cast an unacceptable burden on the regular health and family welfare staff, who were manning the polio booths on the NIDs, thereby affecting their normal routine immunization programme for other vaccine preventable diseases as well. **This also substantially changed the complexion of the NID strategy that had been evolved by us in 1996 to suit Indian conditions, in order to enable and arouse voluntary effort of people to bring their children to the polio booths on NIDs, in their own interest.**

Visiting house holds intensively for a week by field workers initially and by ASHAs of the National Rural Health Scheme later after the NID, **made the programme invasive** to be resisted by some sections of the population particularly the Muslims, who later began to nurse strange apprehensions that the dose of OPV given forcibly would sterilize their children. This had the unintended and unwanted consequence for India in the shape of the failure of the NID strategy so modified later, to eradicate polio mylitis from India by 2000 as assured in Parliament in May-June 1996 by the PM.

There appears now little hope that this scourge would be eradicated from India in the near future. The perhaps, unintended prospects of the international vaccine manufactures, both oral and injectibles making profits for an indefinite period, appeared to have been thus guaranteed in this process. India is now trapped in an unenviable catch 22 situation, getting out of which is going to test the ingenuity of the Health Ministry in New Delhi for some time to come. Some enterprising MP may even raise a question in Parliament why the declaration of the Prime Minister to the nation has not been so far honoured.

The next major initiative in the Family Welfare Sector was relating to the sterilization programme, wherein year after year all targets of sterilization were being met but the achievements in the shape of decline in birth rate was just not visible, and neither was the rate of growth of population in the country going down which had been increasing continuously ever since 1947. Having been associated with the programme since my district magistrate days I knew that reporting of achievements in the programme from the states was to a large extent fake and

the vicious cycle of successful achievement of targets giving no results had to be broken. This could not be done without doing something drastic.

The opportunity for it came in a strange way for me. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) which was held in Cairo in 1994 had stressed the importance of women's status to make a success of the population stabilization programmes. The hitherto used term population control was stressed as being coercive and dictatorial and was replaced by the more appropriate term population stabilization. This was a golden opportunity to make the sterilization programme **"target free"**. Instructions were issued to all the state governments that with effect from 1st April, 1996 this programme would be made target free and instead a Community Need Based (CNB) programme would be evolved for which a manual was under preparation.

Adarsh Mishra and I got down to drafting a manual on Community Need Based Assessment (CNBA) which had to be sent to the states by December, 1995 so that each state could carry out, state level, district level and block level workshops to train the personnel involved in the new strategy of the programme. Before that we would have to call a National Training Workshop in New Delhi by November 1995. Working at a feverish pace all this was done and we could get all the states to follow the target free approach willingly with effect from 1st April 1996. The impact of this change was more than earth-shaking. The entire health care system in the country got a jolt and the comfortable working style of fudging the figures of achievements to match the achievement of targets was suddenly thrown out of gear. Community Needs Based Assessment (CNBA) became the new buzz word and the effect of the shock therapy was palpable. Ostensibly, nobody however well entrenched in the old system could point a finger at the new approach, which immediately won approbation all over the developing world who were still groping how to re-adjust their programmes to the mandates of ICPD. For them this was a ready-made solution to be adopted and this is exactly what happened.

Some enterprising NGOs in Bangla Desh were to copy our manual wholesale and put their seal over it to make it appear as their own creation, and thereby gain advantage of offering consultancy to other developing countries including India on the quiet, at a high cost. Adarsh Mishra was again in her elements to go hook, line and sinker after the new system to make it a success. All objections from the field were answered by her and her team-mates, and also by the officers of the ministry who were traveling all over the country to explain the new system of

working. The term population stabilization instead of population control too was widely appreciated in all circles as well as the media. The biggest surprise was that the SRS (Sample Registration Survey) figures of the Registrar General of India for the year 1995-96 showed, for the first time after independence a small decline in the rate of growth of population.

This trend of decline in the SRS figures every year thereafter was to get accelerated as the years rolled on. At last, the jinx of population explosion was broken and the rate of growth of population began to show a greater percentage decline every year than ever before. But then, opposition came from an unexpected quarter. The proponents of the target approach to sterilizations, both for males and females for population stabilization had been offended very severely by this new approach to population stabilization and they lost no opportunity to launch an attack on the new approach as responsible for the decline in the number of sterilizations that followed the new approach. This was bound to happen since fudging of targets achieved was no longer being resorted to by the states at the field level ever since 1st April 1996. After I left the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare on my retirement on 31st December, 1996 these proponents of the targeted approach to sterilization gathered steam and the target free approach was ridiculed openly in official conferences.

It was during my Health Ministry tenure that extending health-care to far-flung remote areas of India became a major concern for me. Knowing full-well that no matter how many doctors the country may prepare, they would not be going to the remote rural areas for serving the poor, I hit upon an idea of initiating a programme of organizing Swasthya Melas or Health-Care Fairs in remote areas where the doctors of different specialities could willingly camp for one week at a time say once in six months, to reach out health-care facilities to remote areas.

This idea immediately appealed to Shri AR Antulay, the minister who wanted such camps to be organized in large numbers in his parliamentary constituency and also began to oblige his political friends with a free hand. Swami Ram, the great saint of Uttarakhand was also thrilled to know of this scheme and he invited me to organize one such camp in Doiwalla near Dehradun. This was done with the typical fan-fare as only Swami Ram could do and I had the unique privilege of sharing the Dias with Swamiji as well as to help organize the first Swasthya Mela in Uttarakhand in November 1996, a short time before Swamiji shed his mortal frame.

In this quest of reaching out health-care to remote destinations I was acutely aware of the poor state of health-care provided to our government school-children nearly all over the country.

Here again the problem was that there would never be enough doctors to reach out to all children in all schools. Could this task be performed in two stages ie, the first stage to be addressed by the school-teachers and the Auxilliary Nurse Midwife-ANMs for short, who could carry out a preliminary health check-up of each child on the basis of a standard check-list of common ailments found among children.

In the second stage only those children who had a problem or problems, were to be tick-marked during the first stage on a standard format bearing the entire list of such ailments, to be referred for further thorough check-up to a pre-arranged Swasthya Mela at the neighbouring primary health centre where a full battery of qualified doctors would be available on the due dates. After this second stage of Swasthya Mela, the still more serious cases could then be further referred to hospital care at the district hospital on fixed dates in that month. Earlier, at the school level the school teacher and the area ANM would have given such first aid as would be needed in each case. When I first discussed this idea with Adarsh Mishra she was thrilled and excited and immediately offered to take up such a programme all over the country, and we immediately set about drafting a letter to be addressed to all the state governments.

Thus, the first and the last such a school health check-up drive was launched in the second fortnight of July 1996. When we reviewed the outcome of this unique first time effort in the first fortnight of the following month of August, we were thrilled to learn that over 90% schools and their students availed of this health-check-up throughout the country.

I mentioned earlier that this was the last such country-wide effort, because with my retirement in December 1996 there was no one to carry this on, such is the fate of innovations in governmental functioning about which I have also commented earlier in the book. However, in Uttaranchal, a new state formed in the year 2000 and now known as Uttarakhand since 2007, under the auspices of the then Uttaranchal State Council for Child Welfare we were able to take up such a school health check-up programme in 2003 and thereafter for a few years only, for school children of government schools with the help of the state Director General of Medical & Health and the Director of School Education. A few years later this programme was taken over by the state Education Department to be run in the usual half-hearted casual manner of governmental functioning to the detriment of the children of the state.

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The next major initiative in the Health Ministry on which I worked, pretty hard and seriously was to get a three monthly course based on Indigenous Systems of Medicines prepared by Shanti Kunj in collaboration with the Advisor, Ayurveda in the ministry one Dr. SK Sharma. This course material was actually prepared and discussed over a number of sessions by Dr. RP Pandey of Shanti Kunj and Dr. Sharma's team from the ministry for which special visits of their team to Shanti Kunj were arranged at my instance.

My plan was that before my retirement in December 1996, such a training programme may start with the Mission inviting its doctor parijans and retired teachers to come for the training at Shanti Kunj. This training would have had the formal approval of the Health Ministry, so essential for providing it the necessary recognition in the eyes of the professional practitioners as well as the state governments. A proper time table too was drawn up, but to my eternal regret the powers that be in Shanti Kunj could not be persuaded to adopt it. It appeared that the debate within the Mission on ***Karma Kanda*** versus constructive work was coming in the way of decision making in this area too. While in watershed development it had been in the shape of opposition to REACHA, in this matter the very initiation of the programme at my instance was affected. I may mention here that the objectives of REACHA had "**health for all**" also as one of its major objectives, and perhaps, it was felt that this new programme would increase the importance of REACHA, which did not seem to go well within the Mission. This was a far cry from the days when Gurudev had offered to me that I may seek the support of the Mission for whatever programmes I thought were useful to the country. This only convinced me that for Gurudev, Yug Nirman was more important than mere ***Karma Kand*** and that ***Karma Kand*** was only a means to facilitate Yug Nirman.

With Mataji having left the scene, there was hardly anyone in Shanti Kunj with whom I could discuss these matters. To me the social activist, the Mission was not just the same which had attracted me to Gurudev in the first instance in March 1979. But, true to their promise, Gurudev and Mataji have been within me as my constant companions all the while. Every major decision that I have taken since the passing away of Gurudev and Mataji has been prompted by them in spite of my occasional reluctance and I have at the same time received adequate moral and physical strength to cope with the consequences of those decisions.

This has been applicable to Nikhil too, who often speaks the language of Gurudev to my utter astonishment. It is these developments during the last 17 years that have convinced me that REACHA is destined to be an alternate vehicle for carrying the torch of Yug Nirman, which would be

able to attract sincere people of all faiths and followings as an instrument of cooperative secular endeavour for the common cause of humanity. For Shri Aurobindo **“karma”** as defined in verse 3 of Chapter VIII of the Bhagwad-Gita was the quintessential message of the **Vedas** and they the Vedas, were really **“Ideas capable of inspiring creative useful disinterested activities”** in a person living and practicing purity.

Yug Nirman Yojna crafted by Vedmurti Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya too for me has had the same connotation and REACHA could be that instrument for such activities in the twenty first Century. In other words REACHA is already a tried and tested practicing instrument of Yug Nirman. The new generation in India is somewhat impatient, but quite clear in its objectives and REACHA has already made substantial inroads into these rising stars of the firmament and a fresh crop of sincere activists is getting ready. I feel that REACHA has stood Gurudev’s test of **“Patrata Vikas”** to become a fit vehicle for Yug Nirman very well so far.

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I must at this juncture mention my first and only meeting with Sant Waryam Singh in November 1999 in Gurudwara Ratwara Sahib near Chandigarh, where I had gone to seek his blessings for the Lamp Festival, **‘Deep Yagya’ that we were planning to organize throughout India at the same time between 5.30 and 6.0 pm on 3rd December 1999, for an all-religions’ prayers to eradicate polio from India by the year 2000.** The idea was to institutionalize observance of 3rd December every year as **‘Pira Nivaran Diwas’** or a day of prayers for **‘Alleviation of human misery’** by all religious groups in the country. 3rd December also happens to be the International Day of the Disabled as well as the birthday of Shri Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India.

This objective of **simultaneous prayers all over India**, on the lines of the pulse polio immunization programme for giving **‘dawa’ – ‘दवा’** or medicine initiated by me before retirement in December 1996, then in the shape of two drops of oral polio vaccine **for eradication of poliomyelitis by the year 2000**, now took me to nearly all the major religious groups in India for doing simultaneous prayers – **‘duwa’ – ‘दुआ’ for the same objective.** These included Darul Ulum in Deoband, the Golden Temple and Durgyana Temple in Amritsar, the Radha Soami Satsang in Byas, the Chinmay Mission, the Satya Sai Baba group near Bangalore, the Shirdi Sai Baba group, the Sachha Sauda group, the Dalai Lama in Macclowdngung and of course Shanti Kunj to whip up support for such an effort of prayers to pray for eradication of polio from India. This effort was later to be a

great success and on 3rd December, 1999 such prayer meetings were held throughout India and the feedback was most encouraging. My contact with these various groups had taken place well before my instant visit to see Sant Waryam Singh and he was quite charmed with my zeal and blessed me heartily.

While Sant ji blessed my mission of all-religions' prayers at one time throughout India on 3rd December 1999, he expressed great concern about the diabolical method of discharging raw sewerage as well as the so called **treated sewerage** into the rivers throughout India by state agencies such as Jal Nigams or Municipalities. According to him the so called sewerage treatment plants (STPs) just do not work for lack of power or diesel and even if they do work, the effluents are no less poisonous, and discharging them into the rivers and water-streams is the worst crime committed by the states against our population. This concern of Sant ji expressed with great anguish was to stick to my mind and I resolved that I would not rest till I was able to convey this to the powers that be in our country.

This led me later to move single-handedly to mobilize public opinion in support of what I chose to call '**Ganga Abhiyan**' – 'गंगा अभियान', for which an intensive dialogue was conducted with the Uttaranchal state government when Dr. RS Tolia was the state Chief Secretary, to begin with and later still with the Uttarakhand state government through the Administrative Reforms Commission, of which I was Chairman for 22 months from March 2006 to December 2007. A separate chapter on '**Ganga Abhiyan**' was given in the five volume report by the Administrative Reforms Commission submitted to the state government of Uttarakhand through the state Chief Secretary in December 2007. Simultaneously, letters were also written to the Secretary to Government of India in the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) as well as all the district magistrates of the country.

A small booklet '**Ganga Abhiyan**' in Hindi was also written by me and five thousand copies were got printed and distributed throughout Uttarakhand. A similar theme was woven into a manual on '**Management of Rain-water**' and a manual on '**Shram Shakti**' – 'श्रम शक्ति' written by me for the Administrative Reforms Commission for circulation to all field workers of the state government as well as to all the Panchayats and the voluntary groups working in Uttarakhand. Ten thousand copies of the manual on rain-water conservation and five thousand copies of the manual on '**Shram Dan se Shram Shakti**' – 'श्रमदान से श्रम शक्ति' were circulated to all concerned.

Fortuitously however, a great deal of public awareness has been generated in the past three years and after all I feel that perhaps, my efforts may not have gone entirely in vain.

Chapter VIII – Beginnings of Dadagiri & Retirement

A great deal was taking place on the family front all the while as we settled down in New Delhi in the newly allotted residence CII/10 Moti Bagh. Lalit joined his M. Tech in IIT Delhi and also took a room in the hostel. Nikhil began preparing for his prelims of the IAS to take the exam in 1992. He cleared the prelims and later also cleared the written exam and got a call for his interview by the UPSC sometimes in 1993. When the results were announced his position was quite low and he was offered one of the less known allied services in the Defence Ministry. The prospects of doing a desk job did not quite appeal to him and he did not join. Instead he took up a job with MN Dastoor & Co. which was a reputed Company of Steel Industrial Consultancy.

It was then that he broke the news of his desire to get married to Ruchi Mishra who had been a few years junior to him in the Motilal Nehru Regional Engineering College, Allahabad. Abha, I and Lalit were thrilled at this development and expressed our desire to formally meet Ruchi. We met her and liked her and the go ahead for their wedding was given from our side. Soon they were engaged at a simple ceremony which was held in Allahabad where Ruchi's father Shri AB Misra was posted as Superintending Engineer in the UP Jal Nigam. Revisiting Allahabad was always a pleasure and doing so after many years was still more a matter of joy for me and this occasion became joyous in more than one way. It was also a pleasure to meet retired Justice Jag Mohan Lal Sinha who had been district judge in Jhansi when I was posted as SDM Lalitpur in 1964 and had acquired fame for the judgement he had delivered in the election case involving Smt Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India in 1975. This had led to the imposition of the infamous emergency in India in 1975 for the first and may be, hopefully for the last time.

Ruchi and Nikhil got married on 19th November 1995 at Shanti Kunj in a simple but profoundly moving ceremony in which the wedding oration was delivered by Shri Vireshwar Upadhyay who had also presided over the **yagyopavit sanskar** of Lalit and Nikhil on 6th June, 1979 at the same venue. Six months into the first year of their marriage we got the good news of Ruchi's pregnancy which however turned out to be a troubled one for her. The diagnosis was APH due to placenta previa which implied that she would have to be on complete bed rest for the initial few

months. Later to make her feel more comfortable and in consultation with the doctors and Abha we decided that she should go to Lucknow to be with her parents for the delivery.

Our first grand child Mudit was born on Vernal Equinox the 21st March, 1997 in a private nursing home at Lucknow. This name was suggested by Shanti Kunj and at the ***namkaran sanskar*** held eleven days after his birth this name was given to the new born baby in my presence. Abha had earlier visited Ruchi and the new born grand-child on the sixth day known as ***Chhatti***. This was the arrangement made because both Abha and I could not leave New Delhi at the same time for some reason I am unable to recall. Abha and I who considered ourselves young, over night became ***Dadi*** and ***Dada***, and we soon realized what an earth-shaking experience this is in one's life the first time. Mudit was a lovely and lively baby who reserved all his antics for the night time and kept all of us on our toes, and enjoyed his deep slumber in the day time when the rest of the family was out earning their bread and butter. Ruchi, Mudit and Nikhil stayed with us for about four years, three years in CII/10 Motibagh and about a year in XY-9 Sarojini Nagar, where we had shifted after vacating the official residence, almost twenty months after my retirement and then they shifted to Ruchi's allotted residence in BEL Officers' Colony (BOC), Chandernagar, Ghaziabad. While we missed Ruchi and Nikhil thereafter, we missed Mudit the most who too apparently missed his ***Dadi's*** company sorely. As ***Dada*** I was at the receiving end of his ***dadagiri*** and ***Dadi*** was of course always doting on him.

Lalit had completed his M. Tech in 1992 and soon took a job with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) with whom he was to be for the next five years. Our suggestions to him to get married were falling on deaf ears and he persisted with his indifference in this regard with the usual shrug of his shoulders. We were still not too concerned about it but with Nikhil getting engaged, we did begin to pester him. Professionally he was doing well and we also began to look for suitable girls in our circle of acquaintances. There really was no break through till one fine forenoon Dr. Pranav Pandya and Shailji came to visit us in CII/10 Motibagh on their return from some visit down south early in 1997. They were aware of Lalit's resistance to get married and incidentally met Lalit also, who happened to be at home at that hour. I do not recollect what transpired between them, but we did find that Lalit was now more forthcoming in this regard for which we would like to give credit to Pranav ji and Shail ji. They seemed as if sent by Gurudev's inspiration, to bail us out of our predicament.

Late Dina my maternal cousin brother who was in Almora, then gave us particulars of Vibha daughter of Shri BC Pandey of Haldwani whom we then met on our way to Nainital in June 1997. Thereafter Lalit and Vibha met and they finally agreed to get married; the wedding was duly held in Shanti Kunj on 9th November 1997 which happened to be a Sunday and Shri Vireshwar Upadhyay, delivered the wedding oration.

Both his speeches at Nikhil's and Lalit's weddings were outstanding speeches and beautifully encapsulated the philosophy of Gurudev regarding the sanctity of the wedding ritual, the **Vivah sanskar** and marriage vows as well as the essential rituals prescribed by the **Vedic** traditions as rationalized by Gurudev. As in Nikhil's wedding the wedding feast after the ceremony was hosted by Shanti Kunj as **Prasad** of the **Gayatri yagya**. Lalit had already changed his job from TCS and was now due to take up a new job in Pittsburgh, USA. So after the formalities of passport and VISA for Vibha were over, they left for USA in February 1998. I must not forget to mention that Mudit's **Mundan sanskar** and **Annaprashan sanskar** too, were also held at Shanti Kunj on 8th November, the day before Lalit's wedding, in keeping with the by then tradition of our family to sanctify every important event in the family in Shanti Kunj.

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Abha completed her deputation with NDMC on 31st March 2000 and we decided to shift to Dehradun on 1st April, 2000. Abha had gone on deputation to NDMC from UP PMS and so she reverted back to UP PMS with a posting at Dehradun. She had only 10 more months to serve before she would superannuate at the age of 58 years in January 2001. Moving to Dehradun to our own house in 159, Phase I, Vasant Vihar was a very exciting prospect and Nikhil came with us to set us up in the house which had been rented out since 1979. We had in the mean time named the house as **"Shraddha Kunj"** to remind us of **"Sajal Shraddha"** the memorial for Vandaniya Mataji in Shanti Kunj. The next few days were days of feverish activity with Abha in her elements going from one corner of the huge house to the other to get it going. Leading a retired life all by ourselves was going to be a new experience with Abha still having to go to the office in Chandernagar which was a good 8 Kms from Vasant Vihar. Kalpana, our experienced maid in Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi and her son Ajay were with us and so getting settled down became quite easy.

Abha finally retired on 31st January, 2001 when the new state of Uttaranchal was only two months old after separation from the then state of UP. Our biggest surprise was when on 1st

February, 2001 Shri TN Singh Director Treasuries, Uttaranchal personally came to our house in the morning to deliver to Abha her pension papers. This had been made possible due to the courtesy of Shri Indu Pande, the state Finance Secretary and Shri TN Singh who out of regard for us had brought this about in record time.

I must, of course mention that during the last one year before Abha's retirement, Smt. Veena Upadhyaya, my erstwhile colleague in Krishi Bhawan who was then Resident Commissioner UP posted in New Delhi, had liaised with AG UP and others in UP government in Lucknow to straighten Abha's pension papers. This particular instance is being mentioned because usually it could take years before a retired person begins to get his or her pension. In Abha's case the matter was still more complicated because in the last year of her service she moved from one deputation while reverting back to UP PMS in the first instance and then the second one when she moved from UP PMS to Uttaranchal PMS just two months before retirement.

One notable fixture in the first year of our stay in Dehradun was a two-day workshop organized in Forest Research Institute (FRI), in July, 2000 on Land Use Planning for Development, Rain-water Conservation and Disaster Management in the then Uttarakhand divisions of UP. This was done with the assistance of Shri SP Govil IFS (Retd.), then fellow of FAO, who had been a colleague in my Forest Secretary days in Lucknow and was at that time working on a FAO project in FRI. Shri Satya Narain Shukla IAS, who had earlier succeeded me in PWD in 1985, was then the Principal Secretary, Uttarakhand Development Department in Lucknow, the new name of Hill Development Department and he too was a notable supporter. Shri MC Ghildyal, IFS was then the Chief Conservator of Forests in Nainital for the Uttarakhand divisions and he too whole-heartedly helped in organizing this workshop. All the Chief Development Officers (CDOs) then posted in Uttarakhand were invited along with all the DFOs. This workshop was a great learning experience for me as well as all the participants due to the variety of parameters that had to be taken into consideration for proper land-use planning in Uttarakhand.

The proceedings were prepared with great care and these subsequently became an annexure to a booklet on Uttaranchal brought out by Literacy House, Lucknow which mainly comprised of my paper on population and development issues of Uttaranchal, read out in a state level workshop organized by Population Foundation of India (PFI) later in April 2001. In fact these two workshops were a great learning experience for me in relation to the new state of Uttaranchal. This booklet contained a definition of Uttaranchal coined by me as *'jahan vishwa ke sabhi prashno ka uttar*

milta hai usey Uttaranchal kahatey hain' "जहाँ विश्व के सभी प्रश्नों का उत्तर मिलता है, उसे उत्तरांचल कहते हैं". Translated this means – '**Uttaranchal is a place where answers to all questions in the world are found**'. These two workshops were a good beginning for my social activism in the new state of Uttaranchal. This state level workshop of PFI was followed by district level workshops of NGOs on population, health, development and disaster management during the rest of the year 2001.

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In August 1999 while still in New Delhi I was approached by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC), Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India if I would be prepared to head a High Powered Committee (HPC) on disaster management with a mandate to prepare national, state and district level disaster management plans in an honorary capacity. I gave my consent for it and soon this was to become a major activity for me at the national and the state levels for the next four years. So when we arrived at Dehradun I was able to establish a small office in our house with a personal computer, a fax machine along with a computer operator to facilitate the working of the office and an office help.

This small office thereafter became a nucleus for a great deal of office support to almost all my social activism on behalf of REACHA to date. The assignment of Chairman, High Powered Committee (HPC) was to be a serious engagement for a good part of four years which took me to all parts of India in all directions. There was intense interaction with all the central ministries, all the state governments and all the district magistrates of the country as well as with over 600 NGOs from all parts of India. I can regard this effort as a fundamental one which later became basic to all the planning that was to be done in the country in the area of disaster management.

Simultaneous to this assignment was the one relating to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD) which set up a Review Committee under my honorary Chairmanship for a review of the management structure of the Kendriya Vidyalay Sangathan (KVS) in the country which was managing Central Schools, also known as Kendriya Vidyalayas. This was yet another absorbing assignment which brought me in intimate touch with the MoHRD as well as the Kendriya Vidyalay Sangathan. Along with this was a Planning Commission assignment which set up a task force under my Chairmanship for preparing guidelines relating to Watershed Development, Rainfed Farming and Natural Resources Management for the whole country for the Tenth Five Year Plan.

Yet another assignment was given by the World Health Organization (WHO) to review its programmes world-wide in view of the polio eradication initiative which took to me to Geneva a few times and to Washington once. This visit to USA also gave me an opportunity to visit Lalit and Vibha in Pittsburgh, where only three months ago our first grand daughter Anusha was born and seeing her was a matter of top priority.

On top of all these I also became Chairman of India Library Board (ILB) in Lucknow in July 2000, which implied an involvement of great intensity to resurrect and revive this august institution at the behest of the Allahabad High Court. I often wonder how I handled all these assignments with ease and can only think of the blessings of Gurudev, which must have made it possible. I say so because every time I got an offer to take up a new responsibility, my first reaction would invariably be no, but then Gurudev's visage would appear in my mind to impel me to say yes.

In January 2003 I was visiting the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) New Delhi and was staying in their hostel to attend some conference on disaster management, when in the morning before entering the toilet to have my bath I had an intense experience in which I felt that Mataji was talking to me. She seemed to tell me that when I would die she would personally be present to take me to the next destination which was not clear. I was thrilled at this prospect and told Abha about it when I reached Dehradun the next day. She was not at all amused and began to look worried. Whether this was a portent for the future or what exactly was its import, was not all clear to me at that time.

As Chairman of ILB since the year 2000 I had had to face any number of problems to set that organization on its feet. Very often I was at my wits end and every time it was some divine help which sorted out matters for me. Mataji's message to me in IIPA and what all I was attempting to do in order to make available the benefits of my experience to all and sundry at all levels in India was definitely a pointer to Gurudev's close proximity to me all the time. The middle of February 2003 saw Mudit our grandson, falling ill in Ghaziabad and Nikhil asked whether his Mummy could come over to attend on him. We readily agreed and Abha caught the next evening train ie, Shatabdi Express for New Delhi.

It was 22nd February after a week's stay with Mudit who had in the mean time recovered, when Abha left New Delhi Railway station for Dehradun by Shatabdi Express, I was feeling out of sorts that morning in Dehradun. I told Manju the maid that I would not be taking a bath that

morning as I was not well and I straight went to the bed room and lay down. I suddenly experienced Angina pain in my heart and immediately put two tablets of Isordil under my tongue in the mouth and lay on my back with my eyes closed. There was a young handsome yogi with a small black beard who appeared to me as a vision. This vision began to change rapidly and the yogi was becoming older till he looked like Lord Jesus Christ. That image again changed and soon the yogi became still older and older till he began to look like Dada Guru. What was the relationship between the two of them, Lord Jesus Christ and Dada Guru? Historically, over twelve hundred years separated them in time. What was the significance of this vision for me? **I haven't found an answer to these questions that came up in my mind, at that time or ever since.** This was indeed a strange vision but I was completely at peace with myself and I experienced a sense of relief. Once I came around I began doing Gayatri jap and lay in bed only.

I kept on getting Abha's calls from the Shatabdi Express that she had reached this or that station. There was no occasion for me to tell her about my condition and I sounded as cheerful as I could. When she arrived at the house she was expecting me down stairs at the gate and when after climbing the stairs and entering the bed room she saw me lying in bed she looked alarmed. I told her that I had experienced a severe angina pain at about 10 am. She suggested immediate hospitalization but quite foolishly I said I was OK and refused. This was a blunder which I however, survived to regret.

At night after dinner I had a severe heart attack and it was the goodness of our neighbours, Sri Girish Raturi and his son Shubhang that I could be taken in their car to the Ashirwad Nursing Home close to Vasant Vihar. Abha frantically rang up Nikhil and every one else whom she could think of. That was indeed a restless cold winter night at the nursing home in Dehradun for me. I must have gone to sleep at intervals now and then but there was no sleep for Abha. Nikhil had in the mean time fixed up with Dr. SS Bansal, the Chief Cardiologist of the Metro Heart Institute, Faridabad for an ambulance which would come and pick me up on 24th morning with a doctor and other personnel. I was evacuated to Faridabad to reach there by 4 pm the same day. Dr. Bansal was ready with his team of doctors and I was immediately put on all the necessary life support systems. After they had ascertained that my condition was quite stable, I was taken to a private ward which was to be our abode for the next two weeks. The severe heart attack had damaged 40% of the heart muscles, which could have been avoided if I had heeded Abha's advice of hospitalization in the afternoon of 22nd February.

I was feeling quite cheerful and relaxed and on 27th February, which happened to be Nikhil's birthday the angiogram was performed. Dr. Bansal announced the result that heart by pass surgery was necessary and unavoidable and up to five grafts would be required and the same would be performed in the Metro Heart Institute Noida after my condition stabilized still further. The doctors had advised that a good fortnight's gap after the heart attack was essential before the heart by-pass surgery could be considered. The time from 25th February to 8th March 2003 was thus relaxation time for me during which all the possible visitors came to meet me.

This time was also utilized to tie up the arrangements for availing the Central Government Health Scheme's (CGHS) benefits to enable payment of surgery and hospitalization bills. It also turned out to be a very fertile period in the sense that while discussing my future plans as Gurudev seemed to prompt me from time to time, I was simultaneously evolving the strategies for implementing those plans. The title for my next book "कुछ तो करना ही होगा" '***Kuchh to Karna hi Hoga***' ie, meaning '**Some thing definitely needs doing**' emerged out these deliberations. The disaster management assignment was still to be completed and so was the assignment of the MoHRD relating to the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. The ILB had only in the Board meeting held a month earlier in January, 2003 extended my tenure which was to be over in July, 2003, by another three years.

Now, this was the kind of tricks Gurudev seemed to be playing with me. While I got the heart attack primarily because of my tribulations of the ILB, he had in the mean time conspired to get my term extended by three years and not only that, he as well appeared to see that I survived the severe heart attack. Not only that, he had again seen to it that I was in safe hands for the by-pass surgery, which again would set me up for yet another spell of frantic activity through which he alone would be guiding me. Had my tenure not been extended in January, I am sure that after the heart attack I would have called it a day in ILB, when my term was to come to an end in August that year.

But, that was not to be and the subsequent toil of ILB was still in store for me which was to go on till 31st July 2006. However, I must say that these three years of the second term were far more creative for me in ILB as compared to the first term of three years, which had been primarily devoted to spring cleaning of the great old organization and streamlining its out-dated functioning methods and improving the work culture prevailing in it.

Yet another important assignment fell on my lap almost within a month of the bye-pass surgery. I was still in Nikhil's house in Chandernagar Ghaziabad when I got a call from the then Governor of Uttaranchal, Shri Sudershan Agarwal from Dehradun asking me to set about organizing a State Council for Child Welfare for the new state. My protestations fell on deaf ears and he said that now that I had survived the bye-pass surgery I could handle this assignment. I thus became the first honorary Senior Vice President of the Council with the Governor as President when the Council was formed on 1st August 2003.

This assignment was quite exacting for me for the first two years after the formation of the Council, during which time Shri Sushil Chandra Dobhal admirably shared this new burden with me in his capacity as the first General Secretary, which included drafting its Memorandum of Association and the Rules and Regulations. Thereafter, Shri Dobhal an outstanding human being as well as an indefatigable worker took over the entire working of the Council, giving me great relief. The new **Bal Bhavan** that was built in Dehradun entirely with the funding by the ONGC in 2008, would not have materialized without the foresight and hard work put in by Dobhal ji.

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At this point I must mention that my mother, Ija as we used to call her, who was living with my younger sister and brother in Mussoorie, fell down when she stirred out of the house for an evening walk and fractured her femur one evening in June 2003. This was a very painful event for Ija and she had to be brought down to Dehradun for the major surgery that she had to undergo, which entailed inserting a steel rod through the femur and the lower part under local anesthesia. Fortunately, since Uday Singh was there to take care of Ija and the whole process of medication and hospitalization etc, which took us more than a month, Abha and I were spared the rush of many a chores necessary for attending to this crisis. This had happened only a few months after my bye-pass surgery with Abha still having to nurse me in the stage of the post-operative care. I thus had a great deal of worrying to attend to during these critical few months.

This was soon to be followed by the death of my younger sister Nimmi in Mussoorie in November 2003. She had a quiet end one evening as she put her head on the dining table and breathed her last. Attending to her cremation and all the other rituals was indeed very taxing for both Abha and me, because in Abha's case nursing me was no less a headache for her. This was to be followed by the passing away of my dear mother, Ija on 24th October 2004 in the Doon Hospital, but mercifully I was physically feeling better than the previous year, though woefully incapable of

tending to her properly in her last days. However, I was manfully able to cope with all the rituals which were to be performed specially for one's mother during her last rites.

I did not have the energy or the fitness to go to Haridwar for the same and the cremation was performed at Lakhibagh in Dehradun. We did go to Haridwar after the **Asthichayan** in Lakhibagh on the third day and other **Shraddh** rituals were performed in Shanti Kunj. The **Dwadasha** or the twelfth day rituals and Gayatri yagya were performed at Waverley View, Mussoorie where Ija had lived most of her life and the **Terahwin**, the thirteenth day rituals and Gayatri yagya were performed at Shraddha Kunj in Dehradun by Shri Ram Sahay Shukla from Shanti Kunj. Both these events were followed by the ritual lunch – “**Prasad**”.

This was the final break with the older generation for Abha and me in our family. Both my parents had been model parents in every way and they had passed on a wholesome value system to us, Abha and me which is being carried forward beautifully by Lalit and Vibha as well as by Nikhil and Ruchi. It was during this period that I was exposed to Chapter XII of the Bhagwad-Gita on **Bhaktiyog** by the courtesy of the **Chinmay Mission**, Dehradun which became for me a constant companion and a perennial source of strength thereafter and which has seemed to power all my exertions ever since. After a year we duly performed Ija's **Varshik Shraddh** at Shanti Kunj.

A fortnight before this event I undertook to read the Bhagwad-Gita from cover to cover without bothering about the meaning of the **shlokas**. This is known as **paaraayan** and has a significance of its own, in the sense that even if no thought is given to the meaning of the **shlokas**, the music of the **Gita, the Song Celestial** itself is a source of great strength. I now do regular **paaraayan** every day throughout the year and have noticed a great deal of improvement in my spiritual development over the last few years.

My book of essays “कुछ तो करना ही होगा” ‘**Kuchh to Karna hi Hoga**’ which was completed by only its third edition as well as the quarterly magazine “ऋचा ऋतम्भरा” ‘**REACHA RITAMBHARA**’ were initiated through the ILB, Lucknow. The magazine however could not regretfully survive beyond my tenure as Chairman ILB which came to an end in July 2006. The last three years were very trying ones with a few members of the managing committee bent upon disrupting the normal working of the society and creating all kinds of crises, one after the other. Leaving ILB under the Receivership of the Chief Secretary of UP was thus a very painful experience after having nursed it to good health for six long years. However, I soon detached myself from the affairs of ILB.

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In February 2006 I was asked by the Uttaranchal state government to head an Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in the state. This was a piece of work after my heart and I plunged into it with all my zeal. What I did and experienced is partly captured in the article **“Twelve Months in Uttaranchal and Ten in Uttarakhand”** which appeared in Garhwal Post in November, 2007. This article was widely read and appreciated and I felt vindicated. The ARC completed its task in December 2007 and the report in five volumes in all was submitted to the state government well before the Commission’s term was over. I felt relieved that the best I could do for Uttaranchal first and Uttarakhand later had been done by me and future generations of Uttarakhand could derive the benefits out of it.

The year 2008 was important for me for two reasons. The first was that I resolved to go about in the neighbourhood telling every one to stop the practice of TRASH burning prevalent in Vasant Vihar as our humble contribution to counter GLOBAL WARMING. I made a special appeal to the housing society as well as in the meetings of the members to see that their gardeners do not resort to this practice. I was making this request through the forum of the society since the last few years. This however, turned out to be more difficult than I had imagined initially. So I undertook to visit every house from where I was able to spy the plumes of smoke coming out any where in the neighbourhood. Plodding in the heat of the summer or in the cold of winter day after day, month after month became a ritual with me, which began to cast an extra strain on my feeble heart. Heeding Abha’s advice, I began to communicate to the culprits over the phone as well, apart from using the internet as much as possible and also circulating a pamphlet with a rhyme prepared by Abha. Seeing my keenness, Abha too began to move around appealing to all and sundry to stop this practice. Arrival of Lalit from USA in March, 2009 did give me some respite and now he has taken over this mission from my old, weak and weary shoulders. The housing society, in the mean time was persuaded to take up converting the organic waste into compost for sale to the members which seems to be picking up gradually.

The second reason was the dastardly and daring terrorist strike on 26th November, 2008 in Mumbai, later becoming famous as 26/11. I had the same sense of outrage that I had experienced in October, 1962 when Chinese aggression took place in the North East of India and Laddakh. I felt very uneasy at the helplessness of the victims of 26/11. A few of us, Lieutenant General Kamal Khanna, Shri Rakesh Oberai and my self met on the following 3rd December in our house in Vasant Vihar to chalk out a strategy for the common man to counter such strikes in future. We planned to

hold a series of public meetings to address different sections of society in Dehradun to make them aware of what all they should be doing whenever confronted with this kind of a predicament. Shri Rakesh Oberai with his wide contacts was given the responsibility of organizing the public meetings, General Khanna undertook to explain what exactly counter terrorism should comprise off and I was to add the common man's perspective along with my understanding of the phenomena of terrorism as a social menace. These public meetings became a reason for us to evolve a pamphlet with a questionnaire with forty questions-twenty relating to individual attitudes, eleven relating to the system of governance and nine relating to the social attitudes to be circulated to the audience as a '**take home**' for introspection at leisure as to '**what had gone wrong?**'.

I resolved to circulate this pamphlet to as many email IDs as I was able to lay my hands on, apart from circulating the hard copy to as many people in India. Dr. Jyotsana Saxena was a great help to us in circulating this pamphlet to different parts of India in various conferences and seminars that she was attending or organizing. REACHA undertook to make this pamphlet accessible on its website through a special link which is reproduced here:

<http://www.reacha.org/local-files/action-ideas/safeindia.pdf>

I am tempted here to compare the decline in the political system in the **sixty years since independence after 1947** with the decline that took place in India during the **six hundred years from the 5th to the 12th Century AD**. The gradual decline in the central power soon after the Gupta period of history had led to the triggering off of widespread social upheavals in North India, which culminated in the invasion of Sind by Mohammad Bin Qasim in the 8th Century AD, who however was made to withdraw within eighty years or so. Mahmood of Ghazni was inspired to take up the thread, after another three hundred years in the initial years of the 11th Century AD to make forays, deep into India to plunder the riches of the Somnath Temple. It took him more than seventeen years to mount his 17th deep foray in 1024-'25 AD after sixteen earlier failed attempts.

Full cooperation in camping was extended by the Indian Raja of Multan, where he watered and provisioned his huge army of over 13000 camels after three weeks on reaching Multan, each mounted camel with provisions for a month under a trained and armed cameleer accompanied by four armed foot soldiers. The plunder of Somnath, this stark event of Indian history at the hands of Mahmood of Ghazni seems to come alive to my mind in my lighter moments, whenever I see the

exquisitely executed *“Tu nnach lay merey yaar”* dance sequence on the television by Madhuri Dixit in recent times as ‘Dance of Shiva – The ***Mahakal***’.

Mohammad Bin Qasim’s raid of Sind in 1712 AD could be compared with the Kargil mis-adventure of Pakistan in 1999 as a consequence of the **political decline in over fifty years in India since 1947**. The 26/11 terrorist attack in **Mumbai, the economic capital of India** in 2008, nine years after the Kargil mis-adventure, which too had a Multan connection, could be compared with Mahmood of Ghazni’s raid of Somnath Temple, the then cultural capital of India **due to the total inaction on the part of the Union Government of India for nine years, after the Kargil War was forced on India by Pakistan**. The story of the growth of terrorism in India since the decade of the eighties is a **story of stark neglect for over twenty years in the very essentials of governance by the Union government**. The story of mis-governance and mal-governance in India had already been initiated through the AYA Rams and GAYA Rams of Indian politics soon after the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1966 and there still seems no remedy in sight so far.

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The year 2009 was important for the family because Lalit and Vibha finally decided to return to India bag and baggage. The two of them along with Anusha, their eight years old daughter and Aditya, less than a year old son reached India on 24th March, 2009. That was a very courageous decision on their part and we welcomed them with great enthusiasm. Their settling down in Shraddha Kunj after being away to USA for eleven years was no ordinary feat. The next few months were difficult for them but they sportingly put up with their problems. It was specially so difficult for Anusha, to get adjusted in the Asian School, where she joined after her initial schooling in USA. On 21st June, 2009 the ***Yagyopavit Sanskar*** of Mudit and ***Mundan Sanskar*** of Aditya were jointly performed in Shanti Kunj in presence of all the family members and a large number of friends from Vasant Vihar, Dehradun. I used this occasion to send an invitation card to all my batch mates of 1961 who were still alive as well as all officers of the UP Cadre of IAS who retired long ago, with whom I had some association during my service in UP and also to over a hundred houses in Vasant Vihar with whom we were on friendly terms. It was a specially designed card with the spiritual significance of the two ***sanskars*** elaborated in brief, for the education of the recipients. The design of the card received acclaim of all those friends who carefully read it gratefully, with a word of special thanks for us saying, that they had not so far known their significance and importance. Of course, there were others too who scoffed at our naivete.

The outgoing governor of Uttarakhand Shri Sudarshan Agarwal, a year before leaving had placed a new responsibility on my shoulders in spite of my protestations, to become President of Himjyoti Foundation and Himalayan School Society and these two were my two important assignments till October 2009, to which I devoted my spare time as creatively as possible. This latest association of mine with school education had an interesting consequence which was most welcome to me, in the sense that this became a pretext for first Nikhil getting involved with Him Jyoti School and later Lalit too getting so involved. The first thing I did on the occasion of Mrs. Tanu Nayal, the new Principal's joining in November, 2007 was to give her a copy of **"Sameer Club Manual for Schools"** prepared by Nikhil in 1998, soon after his joining Manav Bharati India International School (MBIS) in New Delhi where he had experimented with Sameer Clubs.

Thereafter, I began to gradually interact with the teachers too on the methodology of **"learning by doing"** as an essential aspect of true education. Mahatma Gandhi had with the help of Shri Zaqir Hussain initiated the concept of **NAI TALIM** and **Buniyadi Shiksha** as vehicles of **"learning by doing"**. Fortunately, Mrs. Nayal began to like the whole SAMEER approach and that became the inspiration to her for initiating the process of setting up Self Management Committees (SMCs) of the students. I found her to be a great human being who was becoming a great school principal too. She had tremendous love for all the girls of the school and took great care of each one of them.

Mean while, Lalit's returning to India in March, 2009 for good from USA led him to Him Jyoti School, which he found to be an exciting experiment in education of girls. Soon he and his wife Vibha began to take classes of the girls in an honorary capacity and began to enjoy their association with the school. Even Anusha, their daughter is always excited to visit Him Jyoti School. Lalit and Vibha liked the concept of SMCs and prepared a scintillating power point presentation (PPT) of this experiment as practiced in Him Jyoti School (HJS). This PPT has since been loaded on to the website of REACHA <http://www.reacha.org> for dissemination to all who may care for true education. REACHA now is thus associated with two schools MBIIS in New Delhi and HJS in Dehradun for experimenting with new ideas in education.

In addition of course being Chairman of REACHA takes a good deal of my time, and advising Nikhil who is the main driving force is a most stimulating experience. Nikhil's recurring health problems in spite of his robust health as a squash coach too, do give us some thing to worry about

from time to time, which he seems to develop due to his extreme preoccupations with REACHA. I have described REACHA, my **GURUDAKSHINA** as an offering to Yug Nirman as I understood Gurudev in action. To me setting REACHA on a firm footing for the future is my highest priority now.

Interacting with Mudit, who has blossomed into a first rate squash player and is doing well in his studies too, is always a treat when we visit Ruchi and Nikhil in Chandernagar, Ghaziabad. Similarly interacting with Anusha, my young grand-daughter now studying in Dehradun after doing her initial schooling in USA, on various matters is very exhilarating. She is an exceptionally talented girl and we are keen to give her a sound value system. Vibha and Lalit's youngest child, Aditya is a year and half old delightful toddler, who is always keeping every one in good humour with his ever changing antics.

Interacting with Lalit on subjects like science, mathematics and spirituality with their inter connections is indeed very exciting. Some of the gems are: "Space (**Akash**) is a form of matter (the first of the **panch tatwas** to be created with the **Big Bang**) and time a mental construct. Space-time continuum is a meeting of mind and matter"; "Reality as we perceive it is a meeting of mind and matter, the space-time continuum"; "Shiva (the Cosmic Mind) is the Father and Shakti (Cosmic Energy) is the Mother of Creation. Energy and matter are inter-convertible : $E=mc^2$ ". He is deeply engrossed in making new software for learning mathematics and computer programming a joy for children.

The outgoing Governor Shri Sudarshan Ji also saw to it during his tenure, to appoint me as Chairman of the Managing Committee of the Uttarakhand Red Cross Society which was again an important assignment, to which too I devoted my time till the year 2009. This body though it existed theoretically since a long time since the undivided UP days, was really not active enough, and it was the guidance of Shri Sudarshan Agarwal, the Governor as its President which helped in reviving it. There is a tremendous scope for the Red Cross Society to work in Uttarakhand and I hope that it does justify its existence in future.

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My last major assignment was as Chairman, Administrative Reforms Commission for Uttarakhand from March 2006 to December 2007. The report of the Commission lies deeply buried in the labyrinths of the State Secretariat, with no visible signs of any follow up action, in spite of my repeated requests to the successive chief secretaries since then. I can only repeat the article

“Twelve Months in Uttaranchal and Ten in Uttarakhand” which was published in the Garhwal Post in November, 2007 and reproduce it here with some amendments to update it on the basis of my fresh information, to say that I feel the same way even after more than two years. I am also adding a few matters relating to the state of the civil services since 1966 after the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri. I have also tried to follow the advice of my friend Dr. Seth to include the gist of my world view such as it evolved during the years of my active life so far. The broadly secular aspects are covered in this Chapter and the broadly spiritual in the concluding pages of Chapter IX.

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Twelve months in Uttaranchal & Ten in Uttarakhand

These twenty two months have been a great learning experience for me, an ordinary retired civil servant now entering his seventies. During my entire service in the state government of Uttar Pradesh I never had an opportunity to serve in these parts though as an officer deputed to Government of India from 1964 to 1968, I was posted in Joshimath for three years. I then had an opportunity to tour extensively in district Chamoli for up to 26 days in a month and occasionally visited Dehradun, Almora and Pauri Garhwal. During the first six months of my tenure as Chairman, Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), I took the opportunity to visit all the thirteen districts and hold public hearings of the Commission as well as have intense dialogue with all the state government employees and the officers posted in the districts.

I must have heard over a thousand persons which included a large number of government employees and officers in addition to a select group of pro-active and vocal non-officials in all the districts. What I had missed during the service period was more than made up by this experience. Briefly, I will only say that I was enchanted with what the future holds for Uttarakhand but not so enchanted with the manner in which we seem to be going about it. The governmental system seems to be failing the state.

There were great officers in the districts who lifted my spirits once in a while. GK Dwivedi was one such officer and others Rakesh Kumar, Amit Negi and GS Joshi were examples which gave me a lot of hope. I do hope they retain their flair for public service as they advance in seniority and postings. The service takes a heavy toll of such officers, though their devotion to duty earns them great public esteem. In spite of this very few retain it beyond ten years of service. A friend of mine, late Shri Atulesh Chandra Sharma had a beautiful, telling and graphic expression for this phenomena – **“HIGHER the KAYAR”**, applicable to all government servants. **This means that as an**

officer advances in service he progressively acquires cowardly traits. Pandian who was CDO in those days in Almora and who impressed me a great deal and Purushottam SDM in Kashipur were busy innovating on their job. Harak Singh Rawat SDM, Srinagar is a PCS officer and a class by himself. What he has done to keep Srinagar clean is worth emulating.

I have always felt that an IAS or PCS officer, who cannot innovate on his job in hand, not merely for the sake of change but for the better, is no good. **To me a civil servant who is sworn to the Constitution of India has no problem in becoming a social activist for the preamble and PART IV of the Indian Constitution as well as to the fundamental rights and duties. No power on earth can harm a civil servant who works with this ethics in mind; people solidly back him to the hilt.**

I have had the privilege to work with politicians of various shades during my long service career. Naming some of them would be simple – Chaudhary Charan Singh, CB Gupta, Kamalapati Tripathi, Narain Datt Tiwari, Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, Ram Naresh Yadav, Ganesh Datt Bajpai, Sripat Mishra, Banarsi Das, VP Singh, Ammar Rijvi, Sayyed Sibte Raji, Sanjay Singh, CPN Singh, Vir Bahadur Singh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Chaudhary Devi Lal, Nitish Kumar, Balram Jakhar, Salim Shervani, AR Antulay to name a few. With the exception of Shri AR Antulay none of these politicians tried to harm me though I was inconvenient to many of them for which I was transferred from the job I was doing. But they all continued to remain friendly with me including Shri Antulay. With hind sight, even the harm that came my way in the shape of heart trouble, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I had a heart attack followed by a bypass surgery with five grafts and I am still kicking around at the age of seventy two years, making up for what I had missed out in Uttarakhand earlier.

I cannot leave this piece without commenting on the state of the bureaucracy in Uttarakhand. I think the best of the lot came to Uttarakhand from UP. The part of the bureaucracy at lower levels which was in Uttarakhand when it was a part of UP has proved to be a big liability with exceptions. Even the good practices of UP days seem to have been given up under the new dispensation soon after the state was formed. There was a reasonable level of delegation from LUCKNOW, down to the commissioner and the district level in those days. All that evaporated when the new state was formed. I was appalled to learn that even a cabinet note was presented to the State Cabinet to do away with the post of the “Divisional Commissioner”. Considering that the office of the Commissioner has such a glorious tradition in Uttarakhand if we remember Trailles,

Ramsay, Whyndham and a few others, it is surprising that the idea of abolishing the post occurred to the senior civil servants in the state.

In fact, the Commissioner needs to be declared the Development Commissioner of the Division with powers of HoD for all departments. Apparently, good political sense prevailed and that proposal fell through. However, that did not stop the powers that be to concentrate all powers and functions of governance in the State Secretariat. The Commissioners and HoDs were systematically emasculated. With new found political power coming easily to many rising politicians of the level of Gram Pradhans and Block Pramukhs becoming MLAs and ministers, the state began to witness a queer model of governance.

There was political over-governance with the government orders changing faster than the speed with which they issued, the State Secretariat bogged down to working out what was the latest GO of the day; HoDs sitting listlessly waiting on the ministers, Commissioners not knowing what was the latest from Dehradun and DMs frantically providing VIP escorts to 56 odd ministers of all shades and variety touring all districts, from the point they entered the district to the point they left the district. Of course, the police and all government servants were merely escorting all the ministers who were issuing orders left, right and centre without the State Secretariat knowing what the latest order of the concerned minister were.

During the VIP season matters become even worse with VIPs from other states demanding attendance of the high ranking district officers from the magistracy and police in the name of protocol. Literally, all decision making was centralized in Dehradun Uttaranchal Secretariat and people had to rush to Dehradun for the smallest matter. It was often told to the ARC that Lucknow was closer to many parts of Uttaranchal than Dehradun, that they were better off in UP days. The state government had provided government vehicles with red-beacon lights to 150 odd politicians who could waylay any government officer any where and get orders issued according to their wishes.

In short, there was no civil governance worth the name in the state but plenty of **political mal-over-governance**. The state of the gram panchayats was even more shocking. There was a cold war between the gram pradhans and the khshetra samiti members as well as between the block pramukhs and the MLAs. So, the Panchayat Raj system was effectively neutralized as per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The District Planning Committee (DPC) chaired by the Cabinet Minister belonging to or assigned to that district, had no representation from the Panchayat Raj bodies, in

total violation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, 1992. Measures outlined in the 74th Amendment to provide financial and organizational resources to the Panchayat local bodies had not seen the light of day.

It was only after the newly elected state government which came to power in March 2007 that saw to it to bring a newly drafted bill in the state assembly and the Uttarakhand District Planning Act, 2007 was formally passed in July 2007. In other words for full seven years after the new state was formed the District Planning Committee (DPC), the only planning body which has a place in the Constitution, had no representation from the Panchayati Raj bodies. I understand that the government order to implement this piece of legislation was to take another two years for the Uttarakhand Secretariat to issue, even under the newly elected state government which had legislated for it. The full implications of this deliberate and outrageous constitutional and administrative lapse on the part of an elected state government for over seven years are simply beyond comprehension.

This should be a fit case for a PIL in the Supreme Court of India to call the state government to book. The consequences were apparent, in the sense that the ARC found a total mis-match between what the people desired as development and what the state government was delivering as development. That apart, there seemed to be no proper coordination, between the different engineering departments, doing the same kind of development work. The DMs were busy with the VIPs or coordination meetings with officers, all most throughout the month, leaving no time to meet people for their day to day problems. The engineers had an alibi because they were attending some meeting called by the DM or the HoD in Dehradun, not to inspect the works assigned to them wherever and whenever the quality of such works was questioned. Most district level officers who had their families in Dehradun left the district headquarters on Friday evening to return the next week, the DM not knowing who all were left behind in the district to attend to such disasters that may visit the district without notice.

The working of the State Secretariat was far from being orderly. Each portfolio under a minister comprising of many departments must have a proper distribution of work between the minister and the Secretariat officers according to the **“Rules of Business”** of the state government. The ARC kept on asking for these distributions of work but not a single one was shown to the ARC. I can only presume that they did not exist. In other words, all work of all the departments was being literally ordered by the minister in-charge including the battery of advisors each of whom

was a confidant of the minister, without perhaps ever having been sworn on oath of allegiance to the Indian Constitution, not envisaged under the west-minister system of governmental functioning. All initiatives shown by a number of secretaries in the early years of the formation of the state were scotched at the earliest at higher levels to leave the ground free for arbitrary decision making.

This style of functioning was in total violation of the **“Rules of Business”** of the state government which have a constitutional validity and deviating from each rule is supposed to have the approval of the Chief Minister. Even the Chief Minister is not supposed to permit any deviation from the **“Rules of Business”** of government which may be interpreted or construed as unconstitutional. With lot of promotions given to undeserving persons in the State Secretariat, the secretarial support to each Secretary was of the lowest possible standard and the private secretaries to senior officers leaving no stone unturned to prevent people from seeing the Secretaries or talking to them on the phone, made matters worse.

I cannot stop without mentioning some of the good things that have happened, since the state came into being on 9th November 2000. The state's Forest Policy is a considerable advancement from the UP days but there is much that is lacking in its implementation considering that one third of the area shown as forests is without trees. The discipline of working plans seems to be on the decline though there were a plethora of instructions to implement them. Growing of fodder grasses in the Chir forests is a must if rain water has to be conserved in the state but little seems to have been done in this direction. Utilizing pine needles for making small check-dams could convert pine forests into mosaic forests at a very low cost.

I would like to salute Ms. Jyotsna Sitling for what she did as Director of the Nanda Devi National Park – her example needs to be emulated by other Forest Officers as well as other officers of the state. RN Jha, Conservator Nainital impressed me a great deal – the manner in which the High Altitude Zoo there is being looked after and the care given to all the wild life in the Zoo is an example of devotion to duty, rarely seen in Uttarakhand. The concept of FRDC is a bold initiative at the highest level and needs to be followed up with at least six more groupings of departments having similar or allied functions. Similar groupings would be required at the HoD and district levels as well. This would also facilitate introduction of e-governance in which the state is sorely lacking and could be left far behind other states if it does not wake up in time. **The fact of the matter is that e-governance alone is now capable of paving the way for enabling good**

governance and delaying it would delay advent of good governance in the state or in India for that matter.

Organic farming is yet another bold initiative though the Horticulture Department seems to be resisting it with determination. Use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in the plain areas and the valley areas of the state is supposed to be big business for the State Marketing Federation and they too seemed to be loathed to go organic. Their devotion to chemical fertilizers and pesticides could spoil the show in an otherwise laudable initiative. The initiative relating to herbal plants is also a bold one, though the loose ends are still to be tied up. A local newspaper described this initiative as *“Birbal ki Khichdi”* – such is the confusion in the public mind about it. About one third of the forest area in Uttarakhand is without trees, which appears to be a well kept secret. Why these cannot be developed into pastures to begin with and then afforested again with a large number of timber species which can bear fruits, in order to keep the monkeys inside the forests, instead of their daily forays into human habitations for food? The cost of afforesting them in this manner would come down drastically.

The state has a new progressive Cooperatives Act which needs to be promoted in order to become a reality, as it is a genuine enabling mechanism only. There is a talk of amending the State Cooperatives Act of UP days – they could draw upon the Model State Cooperatives Act sent by the Ministry of Agriculture in the year 1994 to all the states. **Considering that no two Indians can agree on anything, would it not be desirable to have “Family Cooperatives” which would have some semblance of cohesion and could also help in saving the “Joint Family” which seems to be in disarray due to “Nuclear Families”?**

The Doon District Hospital has improved a great deal and traffic in Dehradun is quite an improvement on normal days but not during Uttarakhand bandhs, which are quite frequent. The surroundings of Mussoorie have become greener but Mussoorie town is in a mess. Nainital, in contrast has improved a great deal, perhaps thanks also due to the presence of the Hon’ble High Court there. The Bhumiadhar ridge continues to be barren and so do slopes before approaching Almora which are full of Euphorbia, a sure sign of advancing soil degradation. Almora town is a monumental mess which seems to defy any improvement. Kosi River seems to be drying up and ARC tried to help prepare a Kosi Augmentation Project.

Pithoragarh town is one of the most unplanned ones in Uttarakhand and I was told that in parts of the town the dead have to be carried vertically as lengthwise there is little space. In

Lohaghat the drinking water source is located near the cremation ground and the Peysa Jal Nigam water-supply is thus not capable of giving potable water. Similar is the case for the Jal Sansthan Water Supply in Pithoragarh.

The ARC has given its report to the state government to enable it to take sound decisions in order to lay a system of working which will enable the state government to deliver good governance to the people of the state. The report is available on the website gov.ua.nic.in/arc for any conscientious citizen of the state. The work-culture of the state needs drastic improvement. The new state of Uttarakhand is out there for grabs and unless the state government wakes up in time the whole state would be bought up by some one or the other. Beyond the so called regulated authorities or local body areas, there seems to be no restriction on construction anywhere in the state.

With large scale migration taking place from remote villages to district headquarters and from district headquarters to Dehradun and Haldwani, cultivable lands are being left fallow and are open for sale to the highest bidder, which is not so high in remote areas. The millionaires with a guilty conscience and some **Baba** in tow, who want to have a resort deep in the mountains in **Dev Bhoomi (Simply – Heaven)** have free access to such migrants through dalals located in each district head quarters. Soon, the original land holder is reduced to becoming a mere chowkidar or orderly in these resorts. Estate prices **nami** (legal) as well as **benami** (illegal) in the plain areas of the state including the hill areas around Mussoorie and Nainital are already sky rocketing and most areas have been bought up and many built up as well.

Unless the state promulgates a law like Haryana where the whole state is a regulated area, things will go out of hand in no time. Such a new law for Uttarakhand needs to associate the Land Management Committee (LMC) at the Panchayat level in the regulatory process to be made user friendly by making it on-line and interactive. The Holy Ganga coming from Gaumukh is grievously sick in **Dev Bhoomi**. With heavy flow of coliform (from sewerage) into Bhagirathi at Gangotri and Alakhnanda at Badrinath, with 100% sewerage of Dev Prayag and 60% of it in Rishikesh and Hardwar entering it neat, the **RIVER OF INDIA** which has for ages washed the sins of its people, now thanks to the “Ganga Action Plan 1986” presents a pathetic sight. The **Babus** of the state government and the **Babas** of **Dev Bhoomi** continue to be abettors or silent witnesses to this flagrant violation of the Environment Protection Act as well as the people’s faith by a state agency. (The original article as updated is concluded).

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The civil services, the instrument of the State to carry out its writ, seem to be in shambles today. On 28th November, 2009 Harminder Raj Singh, Principal Secretary, Department of Housing, government of UP shot himself late in the night after receiving a call from an unknown person, bringing to an end the precious life of a civil servant known to be upright. The Department of Housing was entrusted the task of building the monuments by the state government, which had been stayed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. The state Chief Secretary had to apologise to the highest court for not stopping this construction work.

The state government of UP had, a few years ago when the new government was sworn in, taken the unprecedented measure of appointing a Cabinet Secretary who was to be other than the Chief Secretary, for the first time in the history of the civil services in India. That this unprecedented step by the state government of UP did not even attract any notice of the Union government is the biggest surprise in the annals of governance in India. It is not known if the Cabinet Secretary so appointed had ever taken an oath of allegiance to the Indian Constitution, by which every civil servant swears at the time of joining his service in the IAS.

The sixtieth year after the Indian Constitution was written and completed on 26th November, 1949 was first visited by the 26/11 episode in Mumbai at the beginning of that year on 26th November, 2008 and that same year was climaxed by the suicide of an upright IAS officer on 28th November, 2009 in Lucknow, almost exactly after its end to the day. **Under the present circumstances it is not clear who is precisely responsible and answerable today to provide good governance to the people of India!!!**

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Now when I look back for arriving at conclusions or lessons on the interpretation of many a major event of which I was a witness, I have been pondering for a while on one of the famous lines of the philosopher poet Mohammed Iqbal who had described Lord Ram as *Imam-E-Hind*. "**Quchh baat hai ki HASTI mitt tee nahi hamari**" – "कुछ बात है कि हस्ती मिटती नहीं हमारी", meaning "**There is something special to be said for OUR enduring durability**". The freedom struggle on the Indian soil in its more visible aspects for nearly a hundred years was the greatest socio-cultural and political phenomena witnessed by human history which signaled the decline of Western imperialism the world over and was climaxed with the tragic partition of India as a deliberately

planned parting kick from them to ensure a troubled future for the sub-continent. Mahatma Gandhi who had painstakingly shaped this great humanistic movement in its final stages was the last surviving great stalwart of a leader of this earth-shaking momentous human effort. He could not have continued to survive the polity that was to unfold in free India which was to soon substitute the word “**classes**” in the Indian Constitution with “**castes**” within a quarter of a century and was assassinated on 30th January, 1948 at the hands of Nathuram Godse. His last words “**Hay Ram**” may well have been addressed to Nathuram, his assassin to deliver him.

For over fifty years after independence I was of the view that the partition of India could have been avoided provided our leaders had practiced the necessary proverbial patience. But, now I am convinced that this event was unavoidable due to the then on-going hidden, **but now quite in the open, evil alliance between the Western imperialistic powers and the Wahabi sect of Islam.** Extracting an India with a strong centre to consciously steer the centripetal social, cultural and political forces generated by the freedom movement to counter the most likely future parochial centrifugal tendencies with past history was the only solution left. The integration of the then Indian states which was patiently and skillfully steered and brought about by the far sighted Sardar Vallabhai Patel **only because of a strong centre**, would always be remembered by a grateful nation.

The completion of the task of Constitution making by the Constituent Assembly on 26th November, 1949 encapsulating the ideals of the freedom struggle was a great achievement for which our leaders would also be rightly remembered for ever. The stewardship of India in the hands of Jawaharlal Nehru for the first seventeen years and then in the hands of Lal Bahadur Shastri till 11th January, 1966 ensured that the system of governance that had been ushered in by them would reasonably take care of the people of India. That was not to be. **Lal Bahadur Shastri was to die of heart failure, succumbing to the pressures of Kosygin in Tashkent to return Haji Pir Pass to Pakistan after the 1965 War with Pakistan, as a price for the elusive peace with that country.** The polity crafted by these two stalwarts of free India, which was meant to take care of its people in a truly democratic set up, was not to survive them for long and the decline in it soon started thereafter, to drive the country’s democracy waywardly to the present morass in which it helplessly finds itself today. **At the beginning of the sixtieth year after the creation of the Indian Constitution on 26/11 in 1949, the dastardly 26/11 episode of 2008 was perpetrated on the hapless Indian soil in Mumbai at the behest of a neighbouring country, with which India always sought peace.**

There is no doubt that having done their best in framing the Indian Constitution they, our wise leaders of the freedom movement seemed to have failed the country in ensuring its geo-political interests by taking advantage of the narrow window of opportunity that history had provided them. India became free on 15th August, 1947 and the new emerging Chinese republic was to take shape a few years later in 1949. China has always been an expansionist nation during its long history and a strong believer of what all it can get away with and the emerging Communist China would be no different. This should have been clear to Jawaharlal Nehru who had a real sense of world history. Tibet has never been a part of China in its long history, but India looked the other way and let her be gradually gobbled by the expansionist China.

The geo-political lesson and logic of British rule over India for 200 years would have been to have a free Tibet on India's Northern borders and this could have been ensured between 1947 and 1949 by recognizing Tibet as an independent nation. Sardar Patel, the pragmatic first Deputy Prime Minister's letter of 1950 to the Prime Minister regarding the Chinese designs relating to Tibet is well known by now. Even as late as 1954, Dr. BR Ambedkar, the Law Minister in the Nehru cabinet is reported to have made a speech in the Lok Sabha advocating recognition of Tibet as an independent nation. Nehru later went to the extent of stating in Parliament that **"not a blade of grass grows there"** when referring to the areas within Ladakh encroached upon to construct the Aksai Chin Road which was first noticed by an Indian patrol party in 1959.

Instead, Jawaharlal Nehru signed the Panchsheel Treaty in 1954. Panchsheel or The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence which were a series of agreements between the People's Republic of China and India. Here is an extract from the Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Series II, Vol. 29, Minutes of meeting with Soviet Leaders, Moscow [Images], 22 June 1955, pp. 231. The conversation between Nehru and Marshal Bulganin, who was Prime Minister of the Soviet Union from 1955 to 1958, reads as follows:

"Bulganin: While we are discussing the general international situation and reducing tension, we propose suggesting at a later stage India's inclusion as the sixth member of the Security Council.

Nehru: Perhaps Bulganin knows that some people in USA have suggested that India should replace China in the Security Council. This is to create trouble between us and China. We are, of course, wholly opposed to it. Further, we are opposed to pushing ourselves forward to occupy certain positions because that may itself create difficulties and India might itself become a subject

of controversy. If India is to be admitted to the Security Council it raises the question of the revision of the Charter of the UN. We feel that this should not be done till the question of China's admission and possibly of others is first solved. I feel that we should first concentrate on getting China admitted."

The casual observer might wonder whether Nehru was India's prime minister, or China's. Besides, the Chinese have now repaid all this past support. India insisted that India should not be in the Security Council until China was in the UN, too. Now China insists that India should not be in the Security Council until Pakistan is in it, too. Seems fair, doesn't it? Such are the ironical quirks of international relations with the passage of time! It is difficult to comprehend the chronic myopia of the most important, tallest and learned leader India had on the world stage in those days with an influence far out of proportion to India's strength. The saving grace was that the Dalai Lama was given permission to take refuge in India with his devoted band of followers when he fled from Lhasa in late February, 1959 to reach India in March, to keep the flame of Tibetan aspirations alive for ever.

They arrived on 9th March and India welcomed him and his followers with open arms as has always been her tradition throughout her long history to welcome those who seek refuge in her bosom. **Nehru had to bow before the Indian public opinion.** India has still not been able to recover from this foreign policy debacle of the first decade after her independence and the future too does not seem to bode too well.

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So much for the lessons of contemporary history to the extent divined by me, which I feel I must express clearly for posterity, in whose safe hands India's future would inevitably lie. I would like to venture a few conclusions of a personal and societal nature that I have arrived at from personal experience, which happen to be shared by my better half Abha as well, much more so in practice.

My one conclusion of a personal nature assumes that God Almighty or if you do not believe in HIM, Existence or Nature or such **"powers"** that be are perpetually striving to bring **"order"**, in view of the usual sloth which tends to promote disorder around us. If you in your personal or official capacity have always striven to ensure maximum **'orderliness'** in and around your surroundings in every possible way, personal, societal as well as organizational, then in times when you may be helpless due to the myriad forces of circumstances or due to personal indisposition or

for any other reason, the **“powers”** that be would see to it that **you are not inconvenienced in any manner**. This is going to be the inevitable reward from the **“powers”** that be to you, because you have always in the past, striven sincerely to do your best to extend full cooperation to bring about **‘orderliness’** in your area of influence, to those **“powers”** to the extent that you could. This has been my personal experience as well as that of Abha.

The type of **“orderliness”** meant here is not the one that is forced by a superior over-arching authority by **terror** or **pain of punishment**, but the one which would emerge of itself amongst all the people around you, voluntarily from an environment of **‘justice’, ‘equality’ & ‘fraternity’**, the inspiring principles of the French Revolution. **It must also be understood that social honesty practiced by the majority of people wielding power for all to see transparently, alone can make the much sought after intensely desirable social stability, truly sustainable.**

This has implications regarding the life you have led or are proposing to lead. It calls for a total devotion to the practice of voluntary **“orderliness”** and **“transparency”** in thought, word and deed at all times. Working backwards, this lesson has ramifications for the way you bring up your children, the way you have relations with your friends and the way you conduct your affairs, personal as well as societal. One would need to think out carefully for oneself, what all is expected from him or her and strive to do that sincerely in a spirit of thanks and gratitude to the **“powers”** that be. **“Ahsan Faramoshi”** – “अहसान फरामोशी” – ungratefulness was a word of severe condemnation in Gurudev’s vocabulary.

In other words, you would be called upon to have a closer look at your own value system in its entirety, which may perhaps be tuned to only caring for **“big things”** and merrily believing in continuing to ignore **‘small things’** as unimportant. It is the way **‘small things’** are addressed in childhood under the loving and watchful parental care, which trains us to start learning how to address **“big things”**, when they would inevitably confront us in later life. The parents are the child’s first teachers and their value system is going to be imbibed by the child both consciously and sub-consciously. When you tell your children not to speak a lie, but they see you lying the whole day, they get seriously confused about what is right and what is wrong and become cynical in the process. This is the biggest damage you could unconsciously do to your child for ever. Mahatma Gandhi’s insistence on choosing the right means for the right ends must not be ignored and has to be thought out carefully in performing every action.

Another conclusion, this one more of a societal nature than a personal one, I must tell here. Whenever adversity strikes you, there is a temptation to blame one or the other, who may appear to have brought that adversity about. This creates a cycle of social bitterness which keeps on festering and mounting. So, the lesson is not to let this bitterness which hurts you most and first, against any one smite your visage. **The fact is that it is a set of circumstances which may conspire against you, never an individual or a group of people**, however much they may appear to be doing so. So, beware of **'friends'** who may be eager or tempted to add fuel to fire. Listening to them with an attitude of **'I-know-nothing'** would be best, but deliberating on what to believe would call for a fine sense of discrimination and patience. In any case, a state of keeping an open mind would always be essential to think freely without prejudice. Investigating a situation to analyse it with an open mind calls for finding out **'WHAT'** and **'HOW'** it happened before finding out **'WHY'** it happened. If the order of questioning is reversed there is a strong possibility of your going astray.

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Gurudev was of the view that it is time to mend the social fences, not to divide them by senseless acrimony, the favourite practice of our present day politicians. Indians need to learn to cooperate, not dwell on only ***"Aham Brahmasmi"***, meaning ***"I am the supreme Brahm"***. This would call for a frame of mind suited to follow rules of conduct calculated to promote social harmony and orderliness. It would be well to remember what Lord Shri Krishna said in verse 61 of Chapter XVIII of the Bhagwad-Gita. The remedy too follows in verse 66 of the same Chapter. **Reading, reciting and reflecting deeply on these two verses of the Bhagwad-Gita daily would provide a good diversion from your sense of bitterness which may still like to invade your peace of mind.** Some diversionary creative work, if taken in hand too would be helpful.

I cannot do better than to close with ***"Never be casual in whatever you do"***, the piece of advice given to me relating to my official work by my first district magistrate Bishan Narain Tandon, when I was leaving Meerut in 1964 after my first posting there in 1962, which applies equally well to unofficial work too. An attitude of feigned casualness – ***"sab chalta hai"*** to drive your hidden agenda would not do and you would be soon found out to the detriment of your precious moral authority for ever!!! Moral authority is after all, the only real authority which matters most in private and official dealings and survives the vicissitudes of life, both in and outside office, at home

and among friends, though it may take quite some time and effort to build and develop sufficiently to be noticed by all and sundry.

Lord Shri Krishna's command mentioned in verse 47 of Chapter II is the surest guide to each one of us always – **"To action alone hast thou a right, never at all to its fruits. Let not fruits of action be thy motive, neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction"** according to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's translation. Gurudev had a beautiful one liner for right action – **"It is better to do something worth writing about than to only write something worth reading"**. Gurudev gave four pillars of a sound value system – (i) **"samajhdari"** – **"समझदारी"** meaning right comprehension; (ii) **"eemandari"** – **"ईमानदारी"** meaning honesty and integrity in thought, word and deed; (iii) **"zimmedari"** – **"जिम्मेदारी"** meaning accountability and a keenness to assume responsibility; (iv) **"bahaduri"** – **"बहादुरी"** meaning courage to act when called upon. He elaborated four simple steps how to practice this value system – (i) be joyful, keep occupied usefully; (ii) share your happiness and go to the aid of the needy; (iii) share your pleasures; (iv) respectfully seek advice from every one.

Gurudev's words are worth remembering:-

"Jeewan ka arth hai, samay. Jo jeewan se pyar kartey hain, unhen apna samay barbad nahi karna chahiye" – **"जीवन का अर्थ है, समय; जो जीवन से प्यार करते हैं, उन्हें अपना समय बर्बाद नहीं करना चाहिए"**. This implies – **"Life means the time we have. Those who value life should not waste their time"**.

Chapter IX – The Years Before I Met Gurudev

Part I – My early childhood & education

Reflecting on what Gurudev had once told me that the kind of relationship that our family had with him was traceable to past births as well, because such a relationship cannot grow in one life time. This tempts me to attempt a plausible interpretation of my life before I met Gurudev on 6th March 1979 when I was over 40 years old. My birth month **Margshirsha** and year 1937 happen to coincide with the birth of Akhand Jyoti, the mouth piece of the Mission though there is no apparent relationship between the contents of Akhand Jyoti and my humble contributions to the Mission. My first encounter with anything resembling spiritual development took place when I came in close touch with Swami Brahmanand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath in the year 1950-51. That was an experience which completely swept me off my feet almost like the one on meeting Gurudev the first time.

I am not quite aware of any contact between Gurudev and Swami Brahmanand Saraswati and neither has Gurudev mentioned any thing to this effect in his writings. But at the same time, this cannot be ruled out because a great deal of Gurudev's life in the Himalayas or elsewhere was never revealed by him to any one. Ideologically, Swami Brahmanand was a very orthodox Sanatani who was very critical of Arya Samaj, while Gurudev while being a Sanatani had won over the Arya Samajists of Mathura from where he began his Yug Nirman Yojna. This subsequently led to Arya Samaj accepting him in the early years of the Mission, though I understand that in later years Arya Samaj too became very critical of him.

For that matter, Gurudev also had to face opposition from the orthodox Sanatanis as well who did not like the simplifications introduced by him in the rituals which had been thrown open to women and to all castes. Amongst the prominent disciples of Swami Brahmanand Saraswati Maharishi Mahesh stood out after Swamiji left his mortal frame in 1953 seated in **Padmasan** in his Ashram in Alop Bagh, Allahabad, about a month prior to the **Pran prathista** of Gayatri Tapobhoomi in Mathura. I read with considerable interest a certain reference in the biography of Gurudev by Dr. Pranav Pandya and Jyotirmay that the position of Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath was offered to Gurudev when Swami Brahmanand Saraswati left his mortal frame in 1953,

provided he took sanyas. I am aware that Swami Brahmanand had indicated the name of a certain **grahasth**, a house-holder as his successor in his will, provided he took sanyas. This would imply that Swami Brahmanand Saraswati was aware of the work Gurudev was doing. So, my falling under his spell before I fell under Gurudev's spell in 1979, almost thirty years earlier was certainly no accident.

Among the prominent disciples of Maharshi Mahesh, Shri Shri Ravi Shankar Maharaj is regarded as the fastest growing guru the world over, who has a substantial following for his teachings on **"Art of Living"**. Perhaps, Swami Ramdev may have overtaken him by now. Dr. Deepak Chopra is yet another of Maharshi's prominent disciples who acquired fame through his books on spiritual development. My only recollections of Maharshi Mahesh are related to the time when I used to visit Swami Brahmanand's ashram or where he was camping in Mussoorie. We used to see him in white from top to bottom, silently giving instructions to fellow ashramites. The colour of his attire from head to toe even then usually was all white, which he maintained right till the end. By no stretch of imagination could I associate these images of Maharshi Mahesh with his subsequent fame and glory, though I did hear from some close disciples of Swami Brahmanand, that a special technique of meditation, which later became famous as **"Transcendental Meditation"** had been passed on by Swamiji to the then Shri Mahesh, as we called him, before the former shed his mortal frame.

My University days in Muir Hostel also now known as Dr. Amarnath Jha Hostel and the Allahabad University were memorable in many ways and I am glad to say that I did not fall into any disreputable company, which is usually the ruin of many a promising young man and woman. I did reasonably well in my studies in that I figured in the University merit lists of BSc and MSc results. I regard those spells of success to the impact on my whole being and personality which I experienced under the influence of Swami Brahmanand Saraswati for three years from 1950 to 1953. Such was the magnetism of Swami Brahmanand that I was, at one stage keen to take the **diksha** of **Sanyas** from him.

It was only the intervention of my mother and cajoling by my father, that I could do greater service to the country if I could make it to the IAS at the conclusion of my university education, did I give up the idea of **sanyas**. This aspiration to join the IAS too became the motivation to do well in my studies in Allahabad. It was after completing my BSc that I took to playing squash racquets under the guidance of my best friend in those days, Parvesh Swani, who himself was a very good

player from his Doon School days. This love for the squash racquets game now seems to run in the family with Nikhil and my grandson Mudit too both taking to it pretty seriously.

In May-June 1957 I was part of a mountaineering expedition sponsored by the Mountaineering Club of Allahabad University, which visited Pindari glacier and other glaciers in Kumaon. Our party comprised of Major Sajwan, a Reader in the Department of Military Science as our leader, BD Misra, a lecturer in the University, Suman Modwel, Surendra Singh, Parvesh Swani, VK Sinha and my self. I vividly remember that when our KMOU bus taking us from Kathgodam to Bagheshwar climbed up the steep entry into Kausani and came to a grinding halt on the highest point of the road, the first view of the Himalayas, of the peaks Nanda Ghunti, Trishul, Nanda Devi and others that we got, simply mesmerised me and that was the real '**love at first sight**' for me with the Himalayas, which was to be a greater part of my destiny thereafter.

Mountaineering was to grow into a passion for me and I as Secretary of the Allahabad University Mountaineering Club after Suman Modwell, was to organize an expedition to Milam Glacier and the Unta Dhura Pass to cross over to Malari and Joshimath the very next summer in 1958. We could not proceed with our plan beyond reaching Milam Glacier, because Joshi, the Company Commander of the Special Protection Force (SPF) dissuaded us from going towards Unta Dhura Pass. Now we know the reason. The Chinese incursions had begun to plague the Sino-Indian relations by then.

During one outing in the snow at about an altitude of 14,000 feet in the expedition of 1957 when I was all alone, I had a strange spiritual experience which filled me with intensely bright light and I was lost in reverie for a considerable length of time. The subsequent feeling of bliss within me lasted for a few days thereafter. I could never quite explain this experience, but have often reflected that whether it was Dada Guru's presence somewhere around that area, which could be the likely reason for this experience and in turn would imply some connection with Gurudev. The time was about the same or a little later when Gurudev was organizing the ***Sahastr Kundi Yagya*** in Mathura to generate the Yug Nirman movement. This experience was somewhat quite similar to the one I experienced in 1984 when I reached Tapovan and experienced a touch on my two eyes and again later in June 2006 when I stood before the Deity in Badrinath Temple and lost consciousness for some time. I would analyse these experiences as equivalent to losing ones earthly identity momentarily, as if it were a brief merging into the infinite Reality also described as

Brahm. This could be Gurudev's way of ensuring that I do not get lost in the glitter of the world around me.

In order to recount my childhood of which I have a clear memory, I would have to go back to the time we first arrived in Mussoorie. Babuji left Almora to come to Mussoorie in 1942 or thereabout and we started living in a locality called Hussainganj from where Babuji used to walk to Cainville School which he had joined as Bursar. We soon shifted to a set of quarters in Cainville which had four rooms with a verandah projecting in front. There were all sorts of ghost stories about the various bridle tracks leading to Cainville. There was a Devil's Corner which we avoided in darkness. But soon we learnt to co-exist with all the ghosts. I joined school in the kindergarten in Cainville and was liked a great deal by the teacher Miss Swanton who was very tall, lean and sweet and very considerate to me.

The Principal Miss Wilson was a dour looking lean bespectacled lady who was quite firm and was feared by all in the school. One girl Billy Devi was a great rival of mine in sprinting and always stood first in all races. I was very fond of a friend Edgar who was son of the Bishop in the Church in Library Bazar. I passed Class III in 1947 and then joined Ghananand Government College in Class VI. Entering a Hindi medium government school with all the riff-raff of Mussoorie was quite an experience. If I have had a flair for the common touch throughout my life, it is due to my education in Ghananand College. Hemant Kumar Joshi, Lallo as we called him, who was a relation as well, was also a class mate who made my entry into Ghananand quite easy during the first few months of my joining the school. Shri SP Thapliyal, the Vice Principal had been a class mate of Babuji and they were friends. He kept a special eye on me and was also widely feared and respected in the school.

Two of the most vivid memories of my childhood were seeing Mahatma Gandhi in 1946 and seeing the Tricolour being unfurled for the first time in Mussoorie on 15th August 1947 at the local Katchery ie, the SDM's Court. The first of these events related to Gandhi ji's visit to Mussoorie in 1946 and his public meeting at what was then known as the Sylverton Hotel ground. My father and I were on the main road opposite the Picture Palace, pressing against the railing with a milling crowd behind us and pushing us towards the railing. In spite of the milling crowd, as soon as Bapu began to speak there was pin-drop silence. The first words spoken by Bapu were ***'Kya meri awaz sunai de rahi hai, yadi han to sabse door ped par baitha व्यक्ति अपना हाथ उठाए'*** – 'क्या मेरी आवाज़ सुनाई दे रही है, यदि हाँ तो सबसे दूर पेड़पर बैठा व्यक्ति अपना हाथ उठाए' meaning 'Can

you hear me- if yes the person at the farthest point sitting on a tree may raise his hand’. No sooner he uttered these words in Hindustani there was a forest of hands which jutted out from every corner of the ground and every tree-top on which people were perched. Such was the instant and electric response to Gandhi ji’s words.

The second event was witnessed by my father and me when on 15th August 1947 we were on the Mall Road opposite the Hakmen’s Hotel. While the Tricolour was being unfurled, the procession which was going past us had a group of Sanskrit scholars in it, who were chanting **Veda mantras** in a most melodious voice and there was a slight drizzle which seemed to sanctify the whole proceedings. My father and I stood wondering in ecstasy while we viewed the whole scene. The next memorable event five months later turned out to be the shocking news of the death of Mahatma Gandhi on 30th January 1948 at the hands of an assassin, which was brought by the chowkidar of the Cainville School Thepar Singh, early next morning and I remember that every one around was shocked to hear it. Who could be his enemy, was the question on every lip, along with tears in all eyes? **The saga of Gandhi ji’s life was later to be a subtle influence over my entire value system all my life.** Here it would be well to remember Gandhi ji’s list of seven blunders of the world that lead to violence – **“wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice and politics without principles”**.

We were a simple orthodox vegetarian traditional Hindu family and Babuji observed all the customs of the hills with great strictness and devotion. After my **yagyopavit sanskar** in 1950, which lasted for three full days all meals were taken sitting on the floor of the kitchen on wooden chowkies, wearing only a white **dhoti** which was washed daily by me. **Ija**, my mother did the cooking and had also to wear only a washed white **dhoti** every time she cooked. This habit was to give her arthritis in her old age due to the severe cold of Mussoorie in winter. Religious festivals were observed with great fan fair. Daily **sandhya** morning and evening was a must for Babuji and me. My parenting was done quite strictly, though I had the freedom to do what I wanted to do. Babuji was very meticulous in every thing he did and he expected the same from all members of the family.

I noticed the same streak in Gurudev when I met him later in life. My style of studies after the high school was about the same as Gurudev – I left nothing to chance and read all the text books cover to cover and often knew too much to answer the examination papers precisely. I did

my matriculation from Ghananand Government Inter College and then went on to St. George's College where I did exceedingly well in my studies, which I attribute to my meeting Swami Brahmanand Saraswati in 1950. The credit for this has also to go to the three finest teachers I have ever come across in life. Shri Rulia Ram, whom we called Munshiji and who taught us mathematics, Shri Mathura Dutt Pande who taught us chemistry and Shri Jitendra Nath Dey who taught us physics. They not only were concerned with our studies but kept a vigilant eye on our value system as revealed by our answers to their searching questions in class. In St. George's College the new friends like Vishwakant Pandey, Arun Pratap Singh Chauhan, Sat Pal, Prem Krishna and Girdhari Lal 'Gogs' were to become life-long friends on whom I kept stumbling on and off, more so after my retirement from service.

In many ways the family traditions were similar to what I came across when I came close to the Yug Nirman Mission, and I am often at a loss how this could have happened with no formal contact with Gurudev. Surely, this could only be through our association of previous births. All in all, my childhood was a happy one, but I had a great fear of death. It was, perhaps this fear of death and dead bodies, that I was driven to a search for something more permanent in life when I came in touch with Swami Brahmanand Saraswati in 1950. The *Kalyan Visheshank* of the year 1951 brought out by the Gita Press, Gorakhpur was a very interesting one with the title "*Bhakt Charitank*", meaning tales of all the major and prominent devotees of the Lord down the ages. Reading this had a profound impact on me and this volume too appears to have been the inspiration for my wanting to take *sanyas* in those days.

Part II – Family history & early years in IAS

My grandfather Shri Chandra Datt Pant and his younger brother Shri Rudra Datt Pant left their ancestral village in remote parts of the present day district Bageshwar in the first decade of the twentieth century to come and settle down in the city of Almora. They bought a sizeable piece of property with a huge house on it, now called Rudra Bhavan. As the name suggests it was named after the younger brother who was apparently more ambitious and dominating. Family members who are grand children of my younger *tau ji* live in a part of this house while a part owned by my elder *tau ji* was sold by him long ago. In my childhood days we often visited the two *taus* and their families and I have pleasant memories associated with this house. I make it a point to visit these relations and Rudra Bhavan whenever I happen to be in Almora. The symbolic replica of the deity of *Nau Lingju*, our *KUL DEVTA* in the ancestral village was supposed to have been established in

this house after due **pran pratishtha** at a place of worship on a high point to the east of the house by Shri Rudra Datt Ji when he arrived in Almora from his village. Very often offerings are made and **puja** is performed in this family temple on our behalf and the **Prasad** is brought to us wherever we may be.

To this day, there is a Dhuni or Sacred Fire known as the Dhuni of Baba Gorakhnath which is still burning bright some where in these parts of the then district Almora of which Bageshwar may have then been a patti or tehsil. I am led to believe that the two brothers were inheritors of some sort of the cultural and religious legacy of Baba Gorakhnath, who has to this day considerable influence in large parts of India. The village from which the two brothers hailed may have well been known once upon a time as Gorakshpuri and the **Kul Devta** was "**Naulingju**" ie, a group of nine **Shiv Lings** or may be nine headed **Shiv Ling**. Baba Gorakhnath was the leading **Nath Panthi** of India. Sant Gyaneshwar of Alandi in Maharashtra, born on 15th August on **Janmashtmi** day, also a **Nath Panthi**, a disciple of his own elder brother, Nivratti Nath was to set in motion a major cultural renaissance in India in the twelfth century. This cultural renaissance ultimately gave rise to the freedom movement that liberated the country from foreign rule on 15th August 1947. Dr. Sohan Lal Seth tells me that **Nau Mukhi Shiva** or nine-headed **Shiva** is his **Kul Devta** too and that this implies that **Shiva** in this form controls the **nav grahas**, the nine zodiacal planets. Dr. Seth was later to be such a close associate, while in service and thereafter even after retirement too and I am reminded of Gurudev's words about our present association of this kind, being related to previous births.

My father had his early education perhaps, in the village primary school and later completed his matriculation in Almora. His schooling may have also been done partly in Pauri where his eldest brother Shri Nand Kishore Pant was posted in the post office for some years before being transferred to a post office in Almora. Apparently, the eldest brother was taking care of his two younger brothers Shri Ram Chandra Pant and my father Sri Trilochan Pant, who was the youngest of the three. They had a sister as well whom we called **Buaji**. Babuji must have lived in Nainital too with his elder brother in his childhood, because he used to tell us that he had thrown his favourite woollen coat of Manchester tweed into the bonfire in Nainital, when Gandhi ji gave a nationwide call to boycott British goods. I can trace my patriotism to Babu ji for whom till the last day of his life, India was a burning obsession. I can humbly assert that this may have been the primary reason for me too to be obsessed with the vision of a resurgent India. Shri SP Thapliyal, the Vice Principal of Ghananada College must have been Babu ji's class mate in school in Pauri, while in Almora his

class mates were such distinguished people like Shri BD Sanwal, ICS and Shri Sukhdeo Pant, husband of the famous Hindi literator Gaura Pant “Shivani”.

I was born in Almora in Rudra Bhawan on **dwitiya shukla paksh** in the month of **Margashirsh**, that is 4th December, 1937 and my mother used to tell every one that I was delivered in a sealed bag, which had to be opened before I could breathe fresh air, in **mool-naxatra** which is supposed to be inauspicious. My grandfather Shri Rudra Datt Pant was also an astrologer of repute, who gave a ruling that the **mool-naxatra** in which I was born were not inauspicious, but were known as **Patal mool**. My mother, however, held that she lost a brother soon after I was born, and therefore my **mool-naxatra** had some impact which cannot be called entirely auspicious.

My Nanaji Shri Prem Ballabh Joshi who lived in Ranidhara which was also our mamakot, a place where one’s mama lives, was son of Shri Dharmanand Joshi who was Deputy Collector of Pauri, then may be a tahsil of the then district of Almora, some time in the early years of the twentieth century as my mother used to tell us. He had constructed a public water-point known by the name of **Dharm Dhara** to quench the thirst of the people of Almora at a point near the Nanda Devi Temple in Almora town. My official date of birth however was 4th December, 1938 as was the practice in those days of saving a few years, may be to gain advantage in regard to the date of retirement, or may be to provide for inevitable failures in a few classes once the child began going to school.

My qualifying in the IAS exam of 1960 with my name getting announced over the radio as a successful candidate within the first fifteen positions in the merit list was a major breakthrough for the family and was, in a way a fulfillment of Babu ji’s ambition in life. To me it was a grand opportunity to serve the country in a position where I could hold my own on my own terms, to a considerable extent. With hindsight, considering that Gurudev entered my life soon after I got into the super-time scale of the IAS in February 1978, which is the level when one begins to wield considerable power in the government, I am now led to believe that my success in the IAS exam in 1960 could not have been but for the handiwork of Gurudev who was then still gearing up his Yug Nirman forces in Mathura.

He was to leave Mathura for good in 1968 when I was posted as district magistrate, still a position of great power in the IAS, for the first time in Hardoi. Mathura was Gurudev’s **karm bhoomi** to lay out a plan for his Yug Nirman Yojna. Once that was achieved ie, the preparation of that plan, he left that place and now it appears to me that he saw to it that I was inducted to a

position of power in 1968 to carry his plans forward. I now have a clear perception that the kind of smooth passage, in spite of such hiccups that cropped up occasionally to test my mettle, right through the university days leading up to the IAS exam, could not have been but possible without a patron saint some where above or around, who was constantly steering my way and me through all sorts of vicissitudes and tribulations.

In service too, in spite of the kind of intolerant person I was, who could not put up with any nonsense of any kind from any quarters my passage to the point when I met Gurudev in March, 1979 would not have been possible without such a divine protection. And who else but Gurudev could have been ensuring it, specially when he once told me that our relationship just did not begin when it appeared to begin, and that our association went back to many previous births as well. When Vandaniya Mataji appeared as a vision that morning in the IIPA Hostel, New Delhi a month or so before the heart attack on 22nd February, 2003 and conveyed to me that when I die she would take me safely to the next destination and I finally survived the heart attack as well as the bye-pass surgery with five grafts, I was led to believe in those days that I **(the self which is not-Self)** must have been Mataji's son in some previous birth. This would match my own experience of availing Mataji's over-flowing affection, whenever I met her in Shanti Kunj or New Delhi.

In any case, these are subjective matters and I can not say beyond this, why I have written so as my conclusions in hind sight when I look back on my entire life. An average reader would not hesitate to call me superstitious or even assert that what I have written is not credible. The Advaita Philosophy to which I subscribe does not flinch when it asserts that the **Jagat**, the world I perceive as **jeev**, the soul the living entity as me, is my reality however subjective, and that for me there cannot be another **Jagat**, another world of experience, my idea of reality. **Every one's Jagat may or may not match as it can only comprise of the 'apparent reality' to that observer, as against the 'empirical reality' which is supposed to be commonly experienced by all and is therefore verifiable.**

The training as IAS probationer from 1st June 1961 to May 1962 was one of the most intensively lived period of my life which included the foundation course of first four months during which all IAS, IFS, IPS and Allied Services' probationers lived together in the Academy. The Army Attachment, the Bharat Darshan as well as making friends with almost three hundred best young



The Hiking Club group in
NAA, Mussoorie which
received training in
rock-climbing from
instructors of HMI,
Darjeeling (1961)

minds of the country was a unique experience which was to last for the rest of our lives, and even now when a batch mate Shri SN Mathur, one of the Indian Railways' officers sent a directory of addresses and phone numbers of the surviving officers of the 1961 batch, it was a great moment to realize that we could talk to each other even now after a decade or more of retirement.

The lessons learnt and the values imbibed during that one year have been with me during all the years of service and I can say now that they were almost a distinguishing feature of our batch mates. The batch made over all, a very good impression wherever these officers were posted and I would like to attribute these special features to two of our directorial staff, Shri Aditya Nath Jha the Director and Shri RK Trivedi, the Deputy Director of the then National Academy of Administration (NAA), which later became the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) Mussoorie when Shri Rajeshwar Prasad became the Director. JM Lyngdoh became the Chief Election Commissioner and distinguished himself while Tejendra Khanna and Vijay Kapoor became Lieutenant Governors of Delhi one after the other and Hamid Ansari became the Vice-President of India.

When we parted company in May 1962 from the Academy three of my closest friends were Som Nath Som, Moni Malhoutra and Ram Updesh Singh, while generally I was friendly with nearly all the batch mates who also reciprocated my feelings. I was to exchange hand written long letters with Moni and Som till long after we left the Academy and Ram Updesh is still doing valuable work for PFI (Population Foundation of India) in Bihar and Jharkhand relating to population stabilization. Ram Updesh blossomed into a great poet and writer in Hindi while still in service and has since written quite a few books, which he never hesitates to present to his friends. RU and I keep meeting each other due to the courtesy of PFI whenever they organize seminars or conferences in different parts of the country. Such conferences then become occasions for RU and me to dwell on the past golden memories also, apart from catching up with the latest family news of each of us and others in the batch.

My first posting in June, 1962 was as Assistant Magistrate in Meerut and this experience of living independently all by oneself in a totally strange place was definitely most disconcerting to begin with. But gradually, one got used to it as well as to the grind of official life in the district, which was far from being as glamorous as the kind of picture we had of the service before entering it. Shri BB Sahai was District Magistrate when I joined Meerut, who after a month left and was succeeded by Shri Bishan Narain Tandon. Mr. Tandon was Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of

Home Affairs and had handled all the dossiers of the new entrants of our batch in the IAS. When he met me the first time I was doing some office work in a dingy room in the Collectorate of Meerut, while he was taking his first introductory round. He expressed great delight on meeting me and said **“Jagdish I can’t teach you anything, but I can make you work – are you prepared?”** I simply said “Yes”, not realizing the implications.

The next two years were going to be the hardest working days of my career, which literally shaped and hammered me into a near perfect IAS officer with Bishan Bhai never giving me any respite. During those two years I was also SDM Hapur for about a year and a half and had the rare experience of organizing the massive Garhmukteshwar Fair on **Kartik Purnima** in which a few lakh bullock carts loaded with rural families participated. It was then that I realized why Gandhi ji had decided to suggest to the Indian National Congress, which was spearheading the freedom movement, to have a **“pair of bullocks”** as its symbol. Such was the sheer power of the caravan of bullock carts which not only brought lakhs of people to the mela, but also raised such a storm of dust that visibility was reduced to may be 10 feet. Managing this traffic was the most difficult part of the management of the mela for the SDM as Mela Officer. All the dust was unconsciously inhaled during the mela by me as Mela Officer and for the rest of a good part of the month I was only spitting dusty saliva. Organizing this mela was indeed a valuable experience for a young IAS officer, who would never in later life in his service career hope to see anything even remotely resembling any phenomenon like it – such was its power of rural grandeur.

It was during my posting as SDM Hapur that I also took six weeks leave to do the Advanced Course in Mountaineering from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), Darjeeling on my own expenses. I had earlier done my Basic Course in Mountaineering from HMI in April-June 1959. Bishan Bhai appreciated my spirit of adventure very much as even in those days this was a rare trait amongst IAS officers. I can say with certainty that the Basic and Advanced Courses in mountaineering from HMI Darjeeling steeled me for the most challenging events of my life and had a tremendous impact on shaping my entire personality.

The highlight of the Basic Course was trekking and climbing mountains with the ever smiling Shri Tenzing Norgay, the first man to climb Mount Everest on 29th May, 1953 who was a remarkable human being. The highlight of the Advanced Course was that we were trained to organize a mountaineering expedition to climb a 20 thousand feet high Koptang Peak under the leadership of Shri Nawang Gombu. The head of our rope (a group of four climbers tied to one



General Sitarawala
pinning ice-axe replica at
passing out of Advanced
Course in mountaineering
from HMI, Darjeeling
(June 1964).

rope) the famous sherpa Ang Temba of Everest fame soon began calling me ***'Mussoorie pahar ka hira'*** meaning **'diamond of the Mussoorie hills'** to my utter embarrassment.

An episode of this course is worth relating here. While we were descending from the summit of Koptang, I sprained my ankle at about an altitude of 18000 feet, and was completely immobilized. Nawang Gombu, the leader of the expedition was livid with rage and shouted at me **'Mr. Pant – we cannot carry you down to the base-camp and would have to leave you behind if you don't get up'**.

Spending the night at this altitude all alone in freezing cold was nothing short of a death sentence since it was already getting dark. That was the day I realized – **"what is will-power?"**. With a supreme effort of the will I got up and willed that my sprained ankle was going to be OK. I banged my sprained foot on the hard ice by the heel and then put my full weight on the toe pressing as hard as I could, taking a step down the steep slope and then another step and so on with Gombu giving me an appreciative glance as if he wanted to forget that he had been extremely insensitive and discourteous to me in my suffering. Descending the remaining 4000 feet or so to base camp at a slope of nearly 70 degrees was indeed a torture I put up with smilingly and would never forget. Doing these courses on one's own expenses was not a common practice amongst the youth even in those days and I can attribute such a tendency in me only to the spiritual guidance I had received consciously or sub-consciously from my childhood.

I must not omit a few events of contemporary history of India which occurred during my stay in Meerut. In October 1962 India was invaded by the Chinese Army and that was the most agonizing moment of my life till then. Subsequently of course, the 26/11 episode in Mumbai in 2008 was a similar experience. I was so incensed that I walked up to the District Magistrate, my boss and told him that I would like to offer myself to fight the Chinese Army. He patted me on the back for my sentiments and counselled me to be patient. He told me that he would need my services to set up the civil defence structure in the district which did not exist till that date. I was soon drafted to go about this in all earnestness to divert my enthusiasm. I still remember the broadcast to the nation made by Pandit Nehru when Assam was threatened by the Chinese forces. We heard a disillusioned Nehru who felt betrayed and whose words were dripping with sadness and pathos. I was told later that these words of Nehru were to become a cause of resentment amongst the Assamese, who thereafter began to nurse a feeling of alienation from the rest of India.

Fortunately, for some inexplicable reason the Chinese Army decided to retreat and go back from where they had come. Assam was thus saved but Pandit Nehru was not to live long after this major set-back to his foreign policy. He passed away on 27th May 1964 to the shock of the entire nation. We just could not imagine India without Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister. An era of reconstruction and rebuilding of a modern India as a Nation State had passed away, almost for ever, never to recover till date, so it appears now. Thereafter, India just muddled through its successive five year plans, more so in routine fashion, rich and high on promises, but abysmally poor in practice and implementation.

Governance in India has ever since been rapidly sliding down particularly after 1980 to the present dismal state, when it seems that the country has no proper system of governance worth the name. In June 1964 I was posted out as SDM Lalitpur and I soon left to join my new assignment. Before leaving Meerut, I met Bishan Bhai to thank him and ask him for his parting advice. He said **“Jagdish, never be casual about your official work”**. This was a piece of advice I have never forgotten. Before leaving for Lalitpur I spent some time in Mussoorie with the family to recuperate after the gruelling time I had spent in Meerut. Saying good bye to friends in Meerut was full of nostalgia, as I had developed from an innocent grown up boy to a young tough IAS officer there.

Lalitpur was supposed to be an independent charge and the SDM was known as Joint Magistrate – Junt Sahib. There was a huge sprawling official residence of the SDM of which I could only occupy a few rooms. Lalitpur was the biggest sub-division in UP and had two tehsils in those days, Lalitpur and Mahrauni. Now it is a full fledged district of UP. Balwant Singh ie, Ballu who was SDM there, my predecessor had come under some cloud and was not getting promoted to the next stage of senior scale as was usually expected. So he had resigned from the IAS. That created some kind of a storm in the official tea cup in those days.

It was widely expected in Jhansi, the district headquarters that I would have some problem taking over charge from him. Since Ballu was a friend from the Meerut days where we had stayed together in a suite in the Stadium, I had no problem and Ballu warmly welcomed me to the position of SDM Lalitpur. Man Singh the head orderly was the Jeeves for all SDMs and the man around the house, who seemed to manage every thing and he soon got the house going for me as well. The Chairman of the Municipal Board of Lalitpur Dr. Shadi Lal Dube was a Socialist party man and one of the finest politicians I have ever met. We were soon friends and did many useful things

for Lalitpur together. The Club in Lalitpur was a good meeting place for socializing and there was plenty of tennis and bridge to keep members busy.

Jhansi the district headquarters was a good ninety kilometers away and the DM there usually left Lalitpur to the care of the resident SDM. The Commissioner Jhansi in those days was Shri MS Das, an amiable officer who was known to be generally very supportive. I had called on him the first time when I arrived in Jhansi on my way to Lalitpur before joining there. I had then got down from the GT Express at the Jhansi railway station and taken a tonga, a horse driven carriage to the Collectorate of Jhansi where I thought I would call on the DM. As he was out of station I called on the City Magistrate, Shri Har Govind Dabral who welcomed me and offered to keep my baggage in his retiring room while I went to call on the Commissioner Jhansi Division.

That was the first time I had met Shri Das. When I told him that I was on my way to Lalitpur to take over charge of SDM, he became very apprehensive, saying Balwant Singh would not hand over charge to me. I told him that I had spoken to him and that there would be no problem. He felt mighty relieved and instantly my stock went sky high in his eyes. There were three weeks during my posting in Lalitpur when I had to officiate as District Magistrate, Jhansi and the DM officiated as Commissioner. Shri MS Das was then good enough to let me stay in the Commissioner's official residence while the DM Shri Athar Hussain, as officiating Commissioner stayed on in the Collector's official residence during those three weeks. We often had to face the funny situation of the Commissioner's *mulaqatis* or visitors coming to see me in the Commissioner's residence where I as officiating Collector was residing and I would then divert them to the Collector's residence where the officiating Commissioner was staying and vice-versa.

In July 1965 a little over a year after my arrival in Lalitpur from Meerut, I got a phone call from Shri Athar Hussain DM Jhansi that I must go to New Delhi and call on Shri LP Singh, the then Union Home Secretary, after which I would be expected to proceed to Srinagar in Kashmir and that I should leave within the next 48 hours. This bolt from the blue was a most exciting piece of adventure for me and the most important part of my winding up would be writing my 20 odd pages Charge Note for my successor. That was the hallowed tradition for civilians in those days. I had to burn midnight oil to do the task along with packing my luggage to be tucked away in one of the rooms of the SDM's huge house, which would surely be occupied by my successor whenever he would soon arrive.

The extent of my unconventional nature as a civilian can be judged by the fact that I did not insist with the DM that I must have written orders of the state government before I could leave. With hindsight I am surprised how the DM who was far more experienced than me let me go on to an uncertain destination, without formal written government orders from the state government. This lapse was to prove quite an embarrassment to me later when my absence from the state government for about four months without any formal orders had to be regularized. There was generally, quite a good deal of dismay in Lalitpur itself at my unceremonious departure from where normally in the past officers were posted as a district magistrate. As far as I recollect I had heard that I was to go on central deputation to Government of India from the state to join what was then known as SSB in the capacity of Area Organizer which was a senior scale job with a deputation allowance, and hence sufficiently attractive.

Part III – A strange adventure for an IAS officer & the districts

I caught the evening train from Lalitpur for New Delhi and a large number of friends were there to see me off into an uncertain future. In New Delhi I always used to stay with my elder sister Champa in those days, who lived in Karolbagh with her family. I found my way into the chamber of Shri LP Singh who looked quite surprised to see me. Apparently, he did not expect anyone to turn up so promptly from the states as it appeared that quite a few young officers from a number of states had been summoned. After exchange of a few pleasantries he asked me to see Shri Ashok Sen the Joint Secretary in-charge and also rang him up. Shri Ashok Sen too was surprised but gave me the necessary tips to buy a small suit case and some warm clothes for braving the cold weather of Srinagar. I said I had no money for all this.

He first suggested that I take an Air Force flight to Srinagar but then he himself said that if the plane was shot down by the enemy gunfire, my family would not get any compensation and therefore it would be better if I took an Indian Airlines flight to Srinagar. This only heightened my excitement and I welcomed his wiser counsel. He promptly gave me some cash and took a receipt from me. I do not remember how much it was but it was sufficient for my air ticket to Srinagar as well as for buying a suit case and some warm clothes. Shri Ashok Sen rang up Shri Sushital Banerjee, the Additional Chief Secretary of J&K about my departure from New Delhi and that he should take adequate care for my stay arrangements, board and lodging etc. at Srinagar. I left his chamber in high spirits realizing that I was going to fly in a plane for the first time in my life and would be visiting a theatre of Indo-Pak live conflict so soon after getting into IAS. J&K had been in

the news for the past few months and there were reports that large-scale infiltration had taken place from the Pak occupied Kashmir into the Indian side, bringing down normal civil government to a near halt in large tracts of J&K. I was supposed to be one of half a dozen or so young officers from different states who were being drafted to bolster civil administration in J&K by rendering such assistance as the state government may need.

The plane landed in Srinagar Airport on time at about 8 am and I rang up the telephone number of Shri Sushital Banerjee. He himself picked up the phone and gave me an assuring welcome and asked me to take a taxi and come straight to his residence. He greeted me warmly and offered me a welcome hot cup of tea. He told me that a room had been allotted to me in the Srinagar Tourist Complex where all the board and lodging arrangements would be made and asked me to report to the Control Room of the State Secretariat as soon I had washed and got ready. I was in the Control Room by about 10 am and found it almost deserted. Apparently it was manned for 24 hours and the night shift had left only some minutes ago and the next shift had not moved in. It was also an index of the work culture of the J&K State Secretariat, abysmally lackadaisical. Soon, the officers on duty began to stream in and I introduced myself to all who came. Nobody seemed to understand why I was there as no body had been told why I was called from UP. The other such officers of other states who had been drafted began to trickle in during the next one week or so by road. We all really had no idea what exactly we were supposed to do and waited for the briefing which we expected soon.

The flight of Indian Airlines which brought me to Srinagar was the last flight from New Delhi after which hostilities between India and Pakistan broke out on 31st August night and the same gathered momentum by 1st September. Other officers who came from other states had to come to Srinagar by road from Pathankot. The Control Room was the nerve centre of the theatre of 1965 War between India and Pakistan and I saw and heard with my own eyes and ears what all is involved in fighting a war and how the civil administration deals with various matters which unexpectedly crop up from nowhere during hostilities.

Shri Mir Kasim was the Chief Minister of J&K in those days while Shri DP Dhar was the Home Minister. We saw them every day in the Control Room and attended meetings addressed by them. I was particularly impressed with Shri DP Dhar who was a polished man and had the courtesy of talking to me, a pretty insignificant member of the whole assembly inside the Control Room, and gave me such instructions as he thought appropriate for the given occasion. It was during my stay

in J&K that I had the privilege of experiencing the highs and lows of a bloody war. There were anxious moments when a major Pakistani offensive at what is known as the Chicken's Neck severed connection of J&K from the rest of India and spirits were down that evening in the Control Room. Next morning we heard that the Prime Minister of India Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri had given a go-ahead to the Indian Army to march into Lahore, which immediately compelled the Pakistan Army to withdraw from the Chicken's Neck, and the link between India and J&K was restored forthwith. There was jubilation and a great deal of chest thumping the next morning in the Control Room with Mir Kasim and DP Dhar beaming and praising the statesmanship and leadership of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Cease fire was declared after about a week of fighting between the two armies and our role in the Control Room became less rigorous. I remember visiting Haji Pir Pass which had been captured by the Indian Army as well as a large number of villages which had been deserted because of infiltration by Pakistani troops and other paramilitary personnel. Life gradually was returning to normal and I began to contemplate returning to my state of UP. I had made quite a few friends amongst the officers of the J&K government and they urged me to stay on and get an extension in my stay. The state of governance in J&K was nothing as compared to what we were used to in UP in those days. Perhaps what UP and Uttarakhand, now call governance these days, was the state of governance in J&K in those days.

How could such an incompetent administration win the hearts of the general population of J&K was the question that began to haunt me and getting away from that scenario was the easier way out. It is indeed, a tragedy of history that Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which was meant to safeguard the autonomy of J&K became the biggest stumbling block to the inflow of all progressive ideas of governance that were emanating from the then Government of India in New Delhi to all the other states of the Indian Union in those days.

So I took leave of the top brass in Srinagar and took the next flight to New Delhi, perhaps after a stay of about a little over three months there. In New Delhi I called on Shri PN Kaul who was Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry or was it in the PMO. I told him all that had happened with me during the last three months. Shri Kaul was reportedly the last Consul General in Lhasa when the Chinese troops forced India to close its Consulate there in 1957. He heard my story but could not believe it as I had no written orders from any where to do what I had done. He only assured

me that he would find out and advised me to straight away report to Shri DK Bhattacharya, the Divisional Organizer SSB at Ranikhet.

So I caught the next train to Lucknow, reaching there the next morning to first to ascertain my posting orders. From there I learnt that I was supposed to join as Area Organizer in SSB at Ranikhet. I reached Ranikhet the next day in the afternoon and called on Shri Dilip Kumar Bhattacharya, a senior IAS civilian of UP cadre. He welcomed me and enquired sarcastically from me where all I had been, as he was expecting me a few months ago. He was also astonished to hear my story and advised me to give him a full report on my whereabouts, during the last three months and all that I did lest I be declared an absconder for three months with a break in my service record. He promised to get this period regularized and to treat my deputation to SSB from the time I reported for duty in Srinagar, J&K. My stay arrangements were made in the Forest Inspection House in Ranikhet where I ran into JL Bajaj who had recently joined as Area Organizer Almora.

Next morning when I called on the Divisional Organizer, he asked me to get acquainted with what I was expected to do and also to prepare to leave for Mahabaleshwar, near Pune for a six weeks training course. These six weeks of training in SSB in Mahabaleshwar were to be physically the toughest six weeks of my life so far as well as ever afterwards. That itself is a long story which I will not narrate, but suffice it to say that Dada Guru who was Gurudev's Guru had hailed from Pune in Maharashtra and was known as Swami Sarveshwarananda about 700 years ago for his work on propagating the ***Gayatri mantra*** amongst the eligible youth of the day.

There apparently is no connection between me and this piece of history, but there were quite a few occasions during these six weeks when I narrowly escaped from certain calamity a number of times and got the kind of help on some other occasions which cannot be easily explained. I have already narrated my experience in the high Himalayas in May-June 1957 when I was suffused in blinding sunlight and I am now led to believe that Dada Guru or Gurudev were being kind to me and were blessing me and saving me on a number of occasions without my even suspecting the same.

I completed my six weeks SSB training in December 1965, and returned to Ranikhet. The Divisional Organizer told me that I had been posted as Area Organizer (AO) Chamoli at Joshimath and that I may accompany Shri KN Daruwala who was the AO Chamoli to get my briefing on the job that I was expected to do in Chamoli. I told Shri Bhattacharya that I had been away from home for

over a year and would like to see my parents in Mussoorie. He replied that from Joshimath, before formally taking over as AO Chamoli I may go to Mussoorie.

My trip to Joshimath with Keki N. Daruwala was most instructive. We left for Joshimath in the afternoon to reach Narainbagar SSB Camp at 9 pm, where we met the Camp Commandant Colonel BS Rawat and after a quick meal, crept into a sleeping bag and slept in one of the alpine tents. Leaving for Joshimath the next morning we reached Joshimath that evening. We were welcomed by Mrs. Daruwala, a charming lady who gave us a hot sumptuous dinner inside their humble residence. The next morning when we woke up in Keki's make shift shelter we learned that Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Prime Minister of India had died in Tashkent. I remembered the moments in the Control Room of Srinagar Secretariat when we had applauded Lal Bahadur Shastri for his leadership of the country and the news of his death was like a personal loss.

During his seventeen months of premiership of India he had stood out as a great leader after Pandit Nehru and we remembered his call to the nation to forgo one meal every week on Monday evening as a token gesture to counter the prevailing foodgrain shortage in the country. I remembered that when we visited Pune during the Mahabaleshwar training only a few months after this call was made and found all restaurants were closed on Monday evening. Such was the electric effect of his call to the nation because it had been made by an honest, humble leader who felt for his countrymen. After a week's stay in Joshimath, we left for Ranikhet, by road and from Birahi we started trekking past Kuari Pass and were then picked up again at a point on the main road leading to Ranikhet. This trek was the one I wanted to do a long time ago but now when I was doing it, I was far from being well and somehow made it. I had begun feeling un-well right from the start of the Mahabaleshwar training over six weeks ago and thereafter I was somehow dragging myself along every day. By now however, I had a good idea about the work I was expected to do as Area Organizer and after spending a night at Ranikhet, I left for Mussoorie.

Reaching home after over a year and a half and after over six months of ceaseless wandering from Lalitpur to Srinagar in J&K to Delhi, Lucknow and Ranikhet to Mahabaleshwar and back to Ranikhet, then Joshimath and Ranikhet again and now to Mussoorie was indeed a great relief. I was tired beyond words and very ill and took to bed for an extended period the very next day. Doctors were called, one from Dehradun, an old Sikh gentleman in addition to Dr. Jwala Prasad, the family doctor in Mussoorie. After blood and other tests, dry pleurisy and acute hepatitis were diagnosed and complete rest and heavy medication were prescribed. One advice of the Sikh doctor

from Dehradun which I always remember was **“give him the rotten banana which you are about to throw away”** as a remedy for my weakened liver. It was to take me six weeks to recover and gather enough strength to go by road to Joshimath by March 1966. I was to receive daily medication and weekly injections for a year. I was told not to undertake any strenuous exercise with all kinds of dietary precautions that had to be observed. I was advised, much against my wish to start eating meat and eggs to make up for the protein deficiency.

This sudden physical and mental breakdown was after all not really so sudden, but was gradually building up since the winter of 1963, when the local doctors at Lalitpur had cautioned me about a likely tubercular infection in my lungs. It had then passed away after a few injections of vitamin B and I had begun to gain strength gradually. Periodic fever with breathlessness on exertion was again noticeable in early 1964. I seemed to have completely forgotten about it during my Srinagar adventure, but the same symptoms surfaced again during the Mahabaleshwar training and subsequent trek from Birahi over the Kuari Pass in Chamoli district. It was most fortuitous that this physical and mental break down occurred when I had reached the safety of parental care and consideration in Mussoorie. This was nothing short of a divine dispensation. I spoke to Shri Anadi Sehgal, Area Organizer (HQ) at Ranikhet about my illness and he advised me that I may move a formal medical leave application to the Divisional Organizer which I did promptly. The following six weeks gave me the much needed physical, mental and spiritual relaxation.

After six weeks convalescence and recuperation I felt much better and I left Mussoorie for Joshimath by the official Jeep of Area Organizer Chamoli, which used to come down to Dehradun for its once in two months servicing, as there were no such facility in those days north of Dehradun. The only petrol pump in Chamoli district was in Peepalkoti. My first night halt was in Srinagar, Garhwal where now the head office of the Garhwal University is located. I stayed there in the PAC Mess which served the PAC Battalion stationed there under Shri Kali Shankar Tripathi IPS as Commandant. The Directorate of SSB in Uttarakhand is now located at the same place and I had occasion to visit it during my stint with the Administrative Reforms Commission while touring the districts in the year 2006. I was to make my acquaintance with Shri Tripathi for the first time and so was quite keen to establish a working rapport with him, since the Area Organizer's (AO) work in those days required adequate cooperation and coordination between the Commandant and the AO as absolutely essential, almost alike to the civil governance where this rapport is essential between the district magistrate and the superintendent of police. Since then, the Area Organizer's role has been dispensed with and the volunteers that were trained in the first ten years in the

Areas in the North were further trained and organized as SSB Battalions to guard the India Nepal borders. They are now called the Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB).

The next morning I left for Joshimath. The route was familiar to me as I had visited Kedarnath and Badrinath with my friend Vishwa Kant in May 1961 before joining the Academy in Mussoorie. Near Nandprayag my jeep crossed the jeep of Shri Mohan Chandra Joshi, Sub Area Organizer (SAO), Joshimath and we stopped and exchanged pleasantries. We were meeting after the university days in 1958 when he was doing his post graduation in Allahabad University and I was doing my MSc in mathematics. In those days I used to call him Mohanda. I reached Joshimath in the evening and entered the make shift tin structure that was going to be my residence for the next three years. I had already spent a week in that residence as guest of Keki Daruwala and his gracious lady wife in January that year. While I was the master of all that I surveyed I asked Gulab Singh, my personal attendant to set up house and get it going. Much had happened after I last stayed in a proper house in Lalitpur where too Gulab Singh kept house for me. Living from a suitcase with nowhere fixed to stay for the night for well over a year, was now mercifully a thing of the past. I looked forward to a quiet and peaceful posting in Joshimath and took it as a reward for the tribulations of the last few years.

I do not intend to give more than a paragraph of narration per posting henceforth till I met Gurudev in 1979 because the purpose of this narration is really to explore the hand that was guiding and protecting me at every critical juncture and saving me from certain pit falls, which would have been for me nothing short of disasters. The first foolhardy adventure was the one I set upon in August 1966. In spite of the strict injunctions from the doctors that I was not to go out on any high altitude adventure, I planned a dangerous high altitude trek from Govindghat near Pandukeshwar, which is at an altitude of 5000 feet above sea level, via Valley of Flowers, over the Bhyunder Khal at an altitude of 17,500 feet, then down to Gamsali at an altitude of 11,000 feet, a route which passed over very steep snow and icy terrain full of treacherous crevasses. We left Joshimath one rainy morning by jeep to Govindghat from where the trek was to start. The whole trek was covered in the next five days as planned and I breathed a sigh of relief when we reached Gamsali on the fifth day before sunset. Some divine power had seen us through. Fortunately, my physical condition bravely survived the extreme cold and high altitude breathing problems very satisfactorily, which helped me to come out of my disability syndrome induced by the last long illness as well as the advice of the doctors following it.

My three years in Joshimath helped me to regain physical strength and this high altitude trek gave me back my much needed confidence. Due to my weakness before and during my illness doctors had advised me to start eating meat regularly. Thus, much against my wishes I turned non-vegetarian and soon began to relish non-vegetarian food, mostly plain mutton which was being cooked once a day by Gulab Singh. These three years enabled me to explore the then hill districts of Uttar Pradesh particularly Chamoli, though I could not visit all the district headquarters besides Pauri and Almora. Joshimath, being situated en route to Badrinath, one of the most important pilgrimage centres in India, turned out to be a busy station with VIPs and lesser mortals flocking to visit Badrinath and the AO usually had a guest staying and eating with him almost every day of the year. The jeepable road from Joshimath to Badrinath was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi that year only, in the month of June. As a bachelor, I enjoyed offering hospitality and made a number of friends during this period.

This posting also gave me a wonderful opportunity of seeing the district governance from outside and I must say, I was sorely disappointed with the aloofness of the governmental system from the people they were expected to serve. Also, working in an organization which was still evolving gave me a golden opportunity to learn to innovate and lay down working systems to enable routine work to get disposed off easily. These were to prove immensely beneficial to me later when I held high office in the state government as well as in Government of India. The difficult Mahabaleshwar training for six weeks and the SSB posting were indeed God sends, which strengthened the moral fibre in me and also gave me lot of ideas on how things really happen or can be made to happen in the field. This developed a problem solving mindset in me, to innovate how any problem needs to be addressed by a governmental system which is progressively degenerating and becoming unusually impervious to the felt problems and needs of the common people.

It was during my posting in Joshimath that I got married to Abha on 10th July, 1967 at Jodhpur, and after a short honeymoon in Dalhousie, we had an extended honeymoon in Joshimath itself. Of course, the change from Jodhpur to Joshimath for Abha, from the hot sands of Rajasthan to the cool heights of the Himalayas was nothing short of a trauma, but she gradually adjusted to her new life very bravely. Her first drive in a Jeep from Mussoorie to Joshimath after we returned from Dalhousie, for two long days was indeed nothing short of a torture but she faced it all very sportingly. I must mention here that it was during our stay in Joshimath that Shri BD Sanwal and his



Abha's parents Shrimati
Bhagwati and Shri Shiv Dutt
Pande (Jodhpur, 1987).

wife Hema ji visited Gona Lake and we also joined them to look after them. Gona Lake was to get washed away in the Belakuchi floods of 1970 when the waters of Gona Lake spread havoc as far downstream as Srinagar. Shri Sanwal invited me to join a cooperative housing society in Dehradun by depositing Rupees ten thousand only with Shri SS Raturi, the Honorary Secretary of the society. I was quite a novice at things like acquiring a piece of property and must have given Sanwal sahib a blank look. He was aware of my innocence in such matters and assured me that there was nothing hanky-panky about it and that I should not hesitate in accepting this offer.

That is how I took the first step in having a house of our own at Dehradun-‘**Shraddha Kunj**’ in Vasant Vihar. This house was built by my late father brick by brick in 1977 to 1979 for which he came down to Dehradun from Mussoorie every day for two years. SS Raturi used to say that every brick in this house has the signatures of Babu ji. Raturi was later to be posted as ADM Saharanpur when I was DM there and his daughter-in-law Nalini was to give birth to his grand daughter Archie, the first child to Girish and Nalini in the district hospital, Saharanpur with Abha present there. The completion of the house and my meeting Gurudev on 6th March, 1979 were almost simultaneous.

To me ‘**Shraddha Kunj**’ is a “*Prasad*” from Gurudev, which means a boon given to me to further the objectives of Yug Nirman Mission in the form of REACHA. I had to take a loan of Rs.70,000/- from the state government, the maximum allowed in those days. To this was added a loan of Rs.1,25,000/- from my father’s savings and a loan of Rs.15,000/- from the LIC (the Life Insurance Corporation of India). The house was constructed with a total expenditure of Rs.2,40,000/-. The rest Rs.30,000/- came from my paltry saving till then, after 17 years of service in the IAS. The loan from the LIC was repaid by the due date and that of the state government was repaid by the 31st December 1996 on my retirement. I repaid my father’s loan with interest of 10% till long after his passing away to *Ija*, my mother.

We bid goodbye to Joshimath on 31st March, 1968 and I took a long leave before getting reverted to the state government to await my posting orders. We went to Mussoorie and awaited the arrival of our first son Lalit, who was born on 27th April, 1968 in the Community Hospital, Landhour under the supervision of a British lady doctor by the name of Dr. Aldrich. I was to be district magistrate in four districts between the years 1968 and 1974, Hardoi, Raebareli, Saharanpur and Meerut. I joined Hardoi in July 1968 and took over charge of district magistrate for the first time from Shri BK Joshi. The first district posting for a civil servant is always very special and in that sense Hardoi became such a special district for me. I had great predecessors who had

their first posting in Hardoi, naming a few of them, the then Chief Secretary Shri BB Lal and Shri M Varadarajan. Working as district magistrate in those days was indeed a unique experience with so much power and prestige that one could easily lose his or her balance if one was not mature enough. I saw this happening to quite a few outstanding young civil servants who came to grief because they lost their head too soon. Fortunately my experience as Area Organizer for three years in Joshimath had primed me properly to listen to the silent voices of the people and I went about my job with as much firmness and integrity as I had myself experienced during my two years stay in Meerut, under the watchful supervision of Shri Bishan Narain Tandon. Eleven months stay in Hardoi made me wise about the district magistrate's job and its pitfalls.

One fine morning I got a call from the then Chief Minister Shri Chandra Bhanu Gupta that the date of election for the Adhyaksh of Zila Parishad needs to be changed. I refused him point blank and got my transfer orders the next week to move to district Raebareli as District Magistrate. I was to understand why I had been chosen for Raebareli quite sometime later. Raebareli happened to be the constituency of Smt. Indira Gandhi who was then Prime Minister of India and I came to know later that her relation with Shri CB Gupta, Chief Minister of UP were not as cordial as the PM expected. So to give her a taste of a tough district magistrate I was considered very suitable. As luck would have it, Smt. Indira Gandhi the Prime Minister was a picture of grace and tact and I had no problems with her as well as her representative Shri Yashpal Kapoor during my stay of one year in Raebareli. In fact, I came to be regarded as one of the most successful DMs of Raebareli. One interesting episode when I was there came about during the visit to Raebareli by Chaudhary Charan Singh Chief Minister of UP, when he expressed his dissatisfaction on certain arrangements made for his public meeting. I happened to be sitting next to him and having only recently read his book on farming in India I mentioned it and suggested that it is in English and should be translated into Hindi to make Chaudhary Sahib's ideas known to the Indian masses. So dramatic was the change in his mood that he began to question me about the farming problems of Raebareli which were well known to me. He was terribly impressed and his sour mood lifted instantly. He began showering praise on me during his address to the crowd assembled there, to the surprise of Shri Sripat, the Commissioner, who had earlier divined his sour mood from a distance. This funny incident raised my stock in the eyes of the Commissioner who was expecting a banging from the Chief Minister when he expressed his annoyance. Such are the fickle changes in the life of a civil servant.

I must not fail to mention that our family size went up by one in Raebareli when Nikhil was born on 27th February 1970. His arrival completed the family size for us and the two boys have proved to be wonderful sons to both parents. Abha however, had some uncomfortable post-natal problems as she developed breast abscess which forced her to go to the hospital every day for a month or so to drain out the pus, which was getting formed along with the breast milk. So in the process, Nikhil was denied the mother's breast milk for the next few months.

When he was two months old he rolled over in his cot and had a fall to bang his head on the floor. There was a big concussion on the spot where he had been hurt in the head. This head injury was to be a cause of much concern to us later till Gurudev assured us that he had taken due care. My mother, *Ija* had come down to Raebareli from Mussoorie to be with Abha before she was hospitalized for the delivery. Less than two year old Lalit, who suddenly began to feel lonely when his Mummy went to the hospital, got the soothing company of his Dadi for a week. His forlorn look at that moment with tears in his eyes was to be etched in my memory for long. I have always felt since then that the arrival of the second child is quite a traumatic experience for the first born.

From Raebareli I was transferred to Saharanpur not because of any problem in Raebareli but because Chaudhary Sahib felt that I should be better utilized in some western district of UP from where he hailed. Both Hardoi and Raebareli were districts where our stay was short but where we became very popular with the people and they would come visiting us long after our departure from the districts as dear friends. My stay of three and a half years in Saharanpur was to be for me and our family the happiest period of my entire IAS career both professionally and personally.

My thoroughness in official work was only getting sharper and more refined. In every district of posting I would inspect every tahsil, every block, every police station and every municipality every year which gave me an excellent idea of what was going on in the district and how I should be regulating my interventions, if and when necessary. I was also going out on what were known as Monsoon tours and winter tours regularly which took the DM to the remotest parts of the district. I noticed that while the structure of the district administration was nearly the same in different districts, yet each district had a unique personality of its own. Due care needs to be exercised in similar situations, in order that one may not react automatically in a stereotyped manner to an experience of the previous district without careful scrutiny. It was a religious duty with me to see every letter which we received in the DM's office or residence and to mark the same to some one or the other of my officers who could be best relied upon to dispose off that problem. If there was

an important letter from any where that would receive my pointed timely attention, and I would dispose it off in a time bound manner in the most appropriate way.

This is in sharp contrast to what I notice now in Uttarakhand where a letter to a government functionary never elicits a response with of course honorable exceptions. This is true of most government offices in India today and is a clear enough indication of the state of governance available to people. Saharanpur was close to Mussoorie and I could visit my parents there quite conveniently. Being situated in the doaba of Yamuna in the West and Ganga in the East, Saharanpur commanded a very important position in all fields of development ie, Agriculture, Horticulture, Floriculture, Pisciculture, Animal Husbandry, Education, Culture, Religion and also from the Army and Air Force point of view. Leaving Saharanpur after three and a half years for Meerut was a rather painful experience – such was the affection that we began to command amongst all sections of the civil and military society. Both Lalit and Nikhil spent three valuable happy years of their early childhood in the pleasant atmosphere of Saharanpur in a great environment and Lalit even began his early schooling in the Pine Wood School of Mrs. Talibuddin. He initially began to go to school very enthusiastically but seemed to get a fright on a mere mention of it because of the strictness of the Principal. We visited Saharanpur on and off thereafter and always felt that it was some kind of a home for us that we still cherish.

My tenure in Meerut was a turbulent one right from day one. My predecessor had earned quite a bad name on various counts and I was succeeding a controversial officer. The rowdy elements who had been encouraged by him and who had plotted his exit too began to try and dominate me, but I was hardly going to oblige any one of them. So life became very tense for me and streamlining the functioning of the district administration was just not picking up because of the small time politicians of the district. Within three months of my arrival a major students' agitation got going because of the kidnapping of a young girl student and failure of the police to apprehend the culprits. So a riotous situation was created which was diffused only when the girl was recovered after a week in Jammu, not by the police but accidentally.

This episode, however, raised my standing in the district in the eyes of the students, whom I had heard very patiently whenever they met me during the agitation and with whom I frankly sympathized. The police officers specially the senior ones however, felt I had let them down which was not true. If the police came out in a bad light in that incident, it was their own fault and failing, not because I had done anything consciously to damage their standing. In fact, my handling of the

situation helped in restoring normalcy fast enough. However that be, a communal riot broke out within the next three months, this time after about five years in Meerut. As District Magistrate I was transferred from Meerut after six months, under the specious argument that two riots had taken place during my short tenure, so there should be something seriously wrong with me while in fact, for no fault or failure of mine, which any one could or even tried to point out. In fact, my successor Shri TN Dhar remarked a few days after taking over charge that the state government had over reacted in a hurry.

Such are the vagaries of a civil servant's life where logic has no place. I was also to begin understanding the official definition of '**secularism**'. The daily report after the riot which was sent to the state Home Secretary had to contain the number of Hindus and Muslims that were arrested irrespective of who was the offender. I got a telephone call one fine evening to advise me that this should be equal in order to appear '**secularly correct**'. To me this kind of falsehood was intolerable. We know now what damage this official definition of secularism has done to India over the last few decades and more. Thus, the Meerut posting was to be my Waterloo as a field officer and I was posted as Joint Secretary in the State Secretariat in Lucknow in the Department of Industries.

The bubble of JC Pant as a successful officer had at last been broken. This was a blessing in disguise from the on high, because soon the general elections were to be held which would have further taxed me and having experienced the rough and tumble of district postings for six years, I was sorely in need of some respite. At one of the farewell parties, when adulatory references were being made about my '**great**' qualities, I responded by saying that I had done the work of ten years within six months in Meerut. This surprised everyone with a questioning look as if to say '**we didn't mean you were that great**'. I quipped back "**normally one riot takes place in Meerut in five years, but two of them took place within six months only**" during my tenure. The other notable blessing of my Meerut posting was my meeting the learned Shri Shivanandji, the Principal of Devanagari Inter-college, also known as "**Gita-Marmagya**" whose contribution to the propagation of the eternal message of the Bhagwad-Gita has literally been unmatched. He has also written a number of commentaries on quite a few Upanishads. He and his family are my only surviving links with Meerut.

Part IV – Postings in Lucknow & years up to 1979

The six years in the districts taught me that every district in India is unique in many ways though the systems of governance are quite similar. The varied experience that a civilian gets in the district is so valuable that his or her reactions and perceptions in later postings always keep these lessons in the back of their minds and there is a certain level of maturity in decision making at such higher levels, where a wrong decision could easily spell disaster. **This, in fact is the uniqueness of the IAS that there is no substitute for this experience.** Unfortunately, the service of late has come to disrepute due to quite a few black sheep, but the presence of these black sheep should not deter the powers that be from ensuring that this service continues to be really the backbone of governance in India and denigrating it would be a costly mistake.

If India after the expiry of foreign rule in 1947 did not revert to the chaotic state of Sub-Saharan-Africa, it is primarily due to the sterling role of the senior officers of the ICS and the successor service the IAS, at least as the new civil services were till the decade of eighties. **To me a genuine civil servant has a justification only if he or she is an innovator as well as a social activist, to promote the social values of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution and the fundamental duties, which have no pronounced guardians in the Constitution itself.** It should not be forgotten that each one of these officers swears on oath his or her allegiance to the Indian Constitution, at the time of joining the service. A civil servant who is falling short of this criterion, to my mind is equivalent to deadwood of which there is no shortage in the Indian bureaucracy from top to bottom.

From 1974 to the year 1990 I was to be posted at Lucknow only, in one job or the other. While I have already covered the period up to 1979 and thereafter in the previous chapters, I would confine myself now only to the years 1974 to 1979, during which I was in the State Secretariat as Joint Secretary Industries from February 1974 to July 1975 with Shri PK Kaul as the Secretary of the Department of Industries. Just as the Meerut posting with Shri Bishan Narain Tandon, had steeled me into the rigours of the district posting this secretariat posting, with Shri PK Kaul revealed to me the mysteries of the secretariat working in the state government. Shri Kaul was a very rare and dynamic and visionary civil servant, who could pick up an idea from any where and utilize it to initiate a meaningful creative programme. This is what, of late is called **lateral thinking** and PK Kaul was a master of lateral thinking. This year and quarter spent with Shri Kaul, then became a great learning experience for me.

Simultaneously, I was also getting familiar with the entire State Secretariat with its numerous departments. One remarkable feature of the Lucknow Secretariat till I was in the state government, which was only jocularly mentioned was that a **'file can never be lost in it'**. I would not like to venture a guess that it is still so. In the Uttarakhand State Secretariat, a file getting lost was common news, with no questions asked, while I was doing my ARC assignment a few years ago. The computer variation of this was that the file got deleted from the PC accidentally.

After this posting I was transferred as Managing Director, UP State Sugar Corporation with headquarters at Lucknow. This posting took me to all corners of the state of UP where all the sick sugar factories of the Corporation were located. Visiting each and studying the problems of each sick sugar factory was a rewarding and learning experience and I acquired considerable knowledge and experience of the functioning of the public sector industries. **I was to learn that even "sickness" of industries is a major vested interest in India and how it is practiced as an art.** This posting also gave an opportunity of setting up some new sugar factories, developing their cane areas etc apart from selecting suitable technical personnel for them. This three years' tenure in the Corporation was indeed a very creative one for me and all the problems of industries and their labour relations became familiar.

It was during this time that I happened to meet Deoraha Baba in Deoria, who inspired me to turn vegetarian. In any case, after the Joshimath days, particularly after Abha entered my life, the regularity of eating meat gradually came to naught especially because Abha is vegetarian. But then even casual meat eating in hotels or in other peoples' dinner parties was also given up by the year 1977. I regard this as a preparatory stage before I was to meet Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya in 1979. Thus, to my mind Deoraha Baba prepared me spiritually to meet Gurudev when I first met him. I must mention here what Deoraha Baba once told me out of the blue – **'Jagdish bachcha, tu musalman hai'** meaning **'Jagdish child, you are a Musalman'** I protested 'No Baba – I am a Hindu Brahmin'. He said – **'Do you know what is the meaning of Musalman – it means an honest person; you are an honest person'**. That was a huge compliment from Baba.

I must mention briefly at this point of time the various influences that worked upon me before I met **Acharyasri**. Apart from Swami Brahmanand Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath the other powerful inspiration which initially fired my imagination was the personality of Swami Vivekanand and Vivekanand was to be my life long obsession, specially his quote from the **Kathopanishad – "Uttishat, jagrit, prapyavarani bodhat"** – **"उत्तिष्ठत जागृत प्राप्यवरानिबोधत"**

meaning **“Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached”**. After the passing away of Swami Brahmanand his successor Swami Shantanand Saraswati was a guide to me. He taught me the cardinal principle of the Upanishads **‘never believe what you have not experienced’** which was very similar to Buddha’s dictum **‘appa dipo bhav’ – ‘be a light unto yourself’**.

The Perennial Philosophy of Aldous Huxley was my constant companion for a number of years. **Bhagwadbahini**, the English rendering of the Shrimad-Bhagwat by Satya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi fascinated me no ends. Sai Baba of Shirdi was too an influence on me specially his brief emphasis on **‘shraddha-saburi’** ie, **‘faith and patience’**. Acharya Rajneesh held my admiration for a number of years and I feel sorry that he was labeled a sex-guru, while he was farthest from it. I regard Rajneesh as one of the best Hindi prose writers very close to Gurudev.

In many ways I regard that Acharya Rajneesh was a precursor of Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya who smothered the apparently sexist aspects of the former’s approach and replaced it with a wholesome approach approximating to what Yogeshwar Vasudev Shri Krishna called **“Dharmaaviruddho bhuteshu Kaamosmi” – “धर्माविरुद्धो भूतेषु कामः अस्मि...”**. Translated this means that Shri Krishna is saying **“I am desire within the hearts of all living beings which is sanctioned by Dharma”**. The life-affirmative aspects of Gurudev’s approach to satisfaction of one’s desires were in tune with what the **Ishawasya Upanishad** described as **‘tain tyaktain bhunjeetha’** – **‘तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा’** ie, **‘enjoy with a sense of detachment’**. I must not forget that Mahatma Gandhi was a major influence on me in the most subtle way and I owe to him my love for khadi as well as my basic approach in my entire service period of not compromising my conscience, come what may.

One of my favourite characters is the Khoja, Mulla Nasiruddin whose parables are priceless and a joy to read. I must also make a reference to Swami Jayendra Saraswati of whom I first heard when he was walking from Kanchi in the South to Kedarnath-Badrinath in the North and I happened to be DM Saharanpur from 1970 to ‘73. Shri Varadarajan rang me up for ensuring proper traffic management while Swamiji’s pedestrian cavalcade passed through Saharanpur on its way to Kedarnath-Badrinath, which comprised of elephants and devotees singing bhajans and also dancing occasionally. I was again to make such arrangements while Swamiji’s cavalcade made its way back to Kanchi when I was posted as DM Meerut a few months later. Needless to say this odyssey of Swami Jayendra Saraswati moved me deeply. Both Abha and I had the privilege of

calling on him when we visited Kanchi shortly before I retired from service when we went to the South on a kind of farewell pilgrimage.

This narration of main events of my life before meeting Gurudev brings out the fact that even under extremely adverse situations I was being steered and guided to safety and relief. As I have mentioned earlier, I could not find any specific connection with Gurudev's life before 1979, yet when Gurudev said this in all seriousness that our relations were since earlier births, I am inclined to believe this period prior to meeting him was a period of preparation for me so that when I finally met him he would find me in a ready position really to pick up all that he intended to pass on to me and he would not have to waste too much time and effort of his on me. I am also now inclined to believe that I may have been his son in some previous birth because the level of affection I often experienced was that of a parental variety, not just of a Guru dictating to his disciple. This appeared so with Vandaniya Mataji as well, I mean this feeling of being their son in some previous birth. This belief is further strengthened by a conversation I once had with Gurudev after Gurudev had penned his book "मेरी वसीयत और विरासत" '*Meri Vasiyat Or Virasat*'. It became widely known thereafter, that in three of his previous births he was chronologically Kabirdas, Samarth Guru Sant Ramdas and Shri Ramakrishna Dev respectively.

There was considerable speculation in the Gayatri pariwar that if Gurudev was Shri Ramakrishna Dev, who is Vivekananda in this birth. A parijan or two would quietly come to me to tell me that Gurudev had confided in him that he is Vivekananda. I of course took these claims with a pinch of salt. When I raised this question indirectly all that Gurudev said "**All my writings are Vivekananda**". I have care fully examined this statement of Gurudev after studying a great deal of what has been reported by many persons about the personality of Swami Vivekananda. I would like to assert that I have really found it to be so and Gurudev's writings in Hindi that I have read so far, do elaborate all that Swamiji did and said and wrote in English in his active years after he set out on his odyssey in the year 1886 from the Baranagar Mutth, Calcutta now Kolkata. My source is a publication in Hindi of Advaita Ashram, Mayawati, Champawat in Uttarakhand; website: <http://www.advaitaonline.com>, first edition brought out in July, 2002, with the caption "**Swami Vivekananda Or Unka Avdan**". I would elaborate in the following paragraphs by describing what all has been stated by many authorities about Swami Vivekananda, as briefly as possible.

Dr. AL Basham, the historian was of the view that Swami Vivekananda could be compared with *acharyas* like Shankar and Ramanuj for the magnitude of changes he brought about in the

Indian mindset and the way they began to think and believe after he left. At the same time, he did not start a new sect nor did he stress on mere revivalism of the ancient glories of India. He pioneered the movement in thought and beliefs of Indians to forge a healthy balance between the ancient and the modern way of life, more than any one else in contemporary India. He taught Indians to adopt the healthy practices of their own culture in spirit, without getting bogged down in the obscurantist rituals of the past. He advocated adoption of the ideas from the West without in any way diluting the basic tenets of Indian culture and injected a spirit of self confidence and optimism to replace the sense of inferiority in being Indian, which seems to have permeated amongst the elite of India of those days. Vivekananda would also be remembered for initiating a dialogue in a spirit of love and understanding between all the leading faiths of the world and a movement of a marked decline in inter-religious hostility was initiated in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago through his world wide tours. This could all well be said of Gurudev's life's work too.

Sir Jadunath Sirkar's article in this book quotes Bishop Haibar's letter to a friend regarding the heartlessness of Hindus towards their fellow country men due to the taboos of the pernicious caste system which has been mentioned earlier in this book. He was of the view that Swami Vivekananda fashioned the Sri Ramakrishna Mission on the lines of the Buddhist monasteries to counter these aberrations of Hinduism and to restore it to the pristine purity of the **Vedic** traditions. It is for this reason that Swamiji had a great admiration for Buddhism and he and Sister Nivedita carefully studied the Buddhist literature for adoption of their relevant practices in the Mission.

Gurudev had described Lord Buddha's ministry as the first phase, the '**purwardh**' of '**Vichar Kranti Abhiyan**' and his own '**Yug Nirman Yojna**' as the second phase, the '**uttarardh**'. He had fashioned Shanti Kunj after the Sabarmati Ashram, Paunar Ashram and the Pondicherry Ashram of Shri Aurobindo who had advised Hindus to be called "**Arya**" in the context of Arya Samaj, the first major social reform movement in India, once approaching him to address them. This may have been due to the history of early Arab interactions with India for trade, who contemptuously called the Indians of the **Vedic** traditions living on this side of **Sindhu** River as Hindus.

Gurudev had resolved in Yug Nirman to make every human to evolve into a "Brahmin", the highest level to which each human could grow, to counter the scourge of the caste system in India. Swami Vivekananda had given a similar call when he roamed around the country to study its

problems after he left the Baranagar Mutth. The most perceptive article in this publication is that of **Rastra Kavi** Shri Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', with the caption **"Karmath Vedant-Swami Vivkananda"** some salient features of which I would mention here. According to Dinkarji the three main tasks that Vivekananda addressed were:

(i) To redefine the paradigm of religion or **"Dharma"** in such a manner that it may not interfere with secular pursuits of daily needs and existence of Indians. This was specially so for Hindus, the Indians of the **Vedic** traditions, who had got their religion mixed up with their dear "superstitions", laced with hocus-focus and mumbo-jumbo of so called ancient obscurantist rituals, with the unsavoury result that an unlimited scope for charlatans masquerading as **sadhus** had opened up to mislead the naturally ever gullible simple Indians. Swamiji was surprised that "how was it that India had the largest number of **sadhus** preaching righteousness in the world and yet India had the largest number of crooks practicing their trade on simple people?". (ii) At least Hindus should begin to have pride and faith in Hinduism, which had declined due to the new found Brahmo Samaj movement and the craze for things English that had begun to sweep India in those days. (iii) Indians should develop self confidence and not be carried away by the glitter of the West. He had proved Rudyard Kipling wrong who had said **"East is east and West is west and never the twain shall meet"**. He asserted that the West and the East would meet just like young Narendra met the sage Sri Ramakrishna Dev in India. The West needs India's spirituality and the East needs the science and technology of the West. Are these objectives not what Gurudev worked for and wrote on, during his entire working life? His writings in Hindi elaborated Vivekananda in precise and great detail and are like **'fire'**, in his own words, just like the fiery words that escaped the lips of Swamiji when he addressed gatherings all over the world.

I once wanted to question Gurudev on the revelations about his previous births made by him in the book **"Meri Vasiyat Or Virasat"** and he promptly shut me up as if he would not welcome any questions on them, saying he expected me to review as critically as possible all the work that he had done in this life. On another occasion he had compared me with late Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. Was he by any chance hinting that I was a Muslim in some previous birth? Deoraha Baba calling me Musalman was intriguing too! One fact stands out in my experience that I was very fond of all Muslim friends and acquaintances that I came across in life and they all invariably fully reciprocated my affection. But then I was also fond of my Christian friends as well as friends from other faiths. Would that imply that I was a Christian too in one of my previous births? My tryst with Literacy House, **Saksharta Niketan** in Lucknow did some times give this far fetched idea to me.

Getting involved with Literacy House since the early eighties fairly intimately, while I was Secretary and Principal Secretary to the government of UP and then for six years as Chairman of ILB from year 2000 to 2006 after my retirement was no ordinary association during this life. In fact a person's religion or caste did never matter to me; I was always on the lookout for good people and went out of my way to befriend them. When I met Gurudev the second time in 1979 he gave me the eight volumes of the four **Vedas** as well as the three volumes of **Gayatri Maha Vigyan** and the manner in which he sought my promise to read a page every day was like a father cajoling his son to listen to him. I would however, not like to enter the realm of any further conjecture beyond this as it would serve no real purpose and would in fact promote wagging tongues for idle curiosity of many, which Gurudev always abhorred.

Part V – The years of glorious uncertainties ahead

To me, in the evening of my life now REACHA which had the full blessings of Vandaniya Mataji herself with tears in her eyes is an instrument which is being managed very competently by Nikhil for furthering Gurudev's work relating to Yug Nirman on this planet. Very often, I have felt Nikhil speaking the language of Gurudev and this only confirms my belief in the efficacy of REACHA as an effective organizational forum which would galvanize the new elite, the precursors who would bring about the desired social change in our society to make it more humane and civilized with the aid of the tools of modern science and technology. Our elder son, Lalit who has already made a substantial contribution to REACHA financially as well as in drafting its STRATEGY for social change and also in the realm of technology, has finally come back to India from USA and would hopefully further join in this endeavour of peaceful social change with the necessary technological and other inputs. That would indeed, be a fitting fulfillment of my life which I would cherish dearly. When Gurudev once asked me years ago that I should prepare two persons like myself, I am sure now that this dream which I cherish must have been in his mind. I must confess that when Gurudev gave those directions to me I began looking around in my circle of friends and colleagues and also began testing those who could be relied upon and found no one, to my deep regret and then began exploring members of my own family. That is when I zeroed on to Lalit and Nikhil.

I often feel that Lalit represents my right brain which is usually addicted to flights of fancy in the realm of philosophy and the arts and sciences, while Nikhil represents the left brain which is the guiding inspiration for me in the realm of action, of which there has been plenty in my life so far. In many ways the two brothers compliment each other. The area of strength of one is the area

of weakness of the other, or we may say that what one excels in the other gives less importance or is able to spare less time for it. Both are undoubtedly remarkable human beings and Abha and I both feel very proud of them.

If and when they do begin to collaborate in support of Yug Nirman, I am sure Gurudev's blessings would come down streaming on their efforts to make REACHA a truly universal vehicle of Yug Nirman. As for me, whenever I plan to take it easy I get a message from Gurudev – '**Utho Paarth, Gaandiv uthaao — Mahabharat jaari hai**' – 'उठो पार्थ, गांडीव उठाओ — महाभारत जारी है' meaning '**Arise Paarth (another name of Arjun), pick up the Gaandiv bow — Mahabharat War is very much on**'. The Bhagwad-Gita in any case is constantly giving me new meanings of its verses as I read it every day. Whichever verse may be relevant in a given situation comes to the fore and that is enough hint to me regarding the course of action I need to take at a given moment. To me the Bhagwad-Gita is a '**Manual of self-less action**' which would lead to Yug Nirman. Gandhi ji called it the "**Gospel of self-less action**".

Dr. Sohan Lal Seth wanted me, for the benefit of the readers to give a broad gist of conclusions of my life towards the end of the book. Very hesitatingly, while on secular aspects I have done so in the concluding paras of Chapter VIII, I agreed to do so regarding spiritual aspects at the conclusion of Chapter IX. To me imparting true Education is an activity nearest in approximation to practicing spirituality, if it is not to become the mere humbug we generally find both education and spirituality to be around us. The world-wide accepted four AIMS of Education (i) Learning to **KNOW**; (ii) Learning to **DO**; (iii) Learning to **BE**; and (iv) Learning to **LIVE TOGETHER** have been assiduously worked upon by REACHA since its inception in 1992.

The schools are the cradles of the new millennium, but unfortunately the school system in India could not or did not think it worth while to even try to heed Mahatma Gandhi's recommendation on **NAI TALIM** and **Buniyadi Shiksha**. Noticing this tragedy very early on and since the existing school system which evolved after the famous **Macaulay minutes** of 1886 cannot be wished away, REACHA evolved a module on "**learning by doing**" to be plugged in to the existing system in order to conveniently set this anomaly right. This approach takes care of the first two AIMS of Education mentioned earlier. The successful compliance of the first two AIMS takes care of the third AIM "**Learning to BE**" which then goes on to facilitate the achievement of the fourth AIM "**Learning to LIVE TOGETHER**". Chapter IV which describes my adventures in education in UP has

covered this approach and how it was evolved gradually from 1986 to 1988. Fortunately, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has recently taken a bold initiative in this direction and some good results are expected to follow in due course. I am reminded of the couplet of the well known poet late Dushyant Kumar ***“Kaun kahta hai aasma main suraakh ho nahi sakta? Aik patthar to tabiyat se uchhaalo yaaro”*** – ***“कौन कहता है आसमा में सुराख हो नहीं सकता ? एक पत्थर तो तबियत से उछालो यारो”***. ***“Who says a hole can never be bored through the sky? At least try throwing a stone upwards O’friends, with all your hearts’ earnestness”***.

I have practiced this piece of advice of the poet very earnestly since as long as I can remember, even long before I had heard this couplet. I admit that I have been very impatient when results were inevitably slow in coming, which may have been the prime reason for my fretting and heart trouble. **Gurudev taught me to be patient.** “If you have done all that you could do to implement your honest resolve, you only need to wait patiently for the results, **do not fret!!**” was his advice. He regarded ***‘sankalp shakti’***, an individual’s ***‘power of resolution’*** as invincible, provided he or she was prepared to pay the price for it. I have always been prepared to pay the price of my ***‘sankalps’***. Swami Vivekananda’s quote ***“Any thing that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison. Truth is strengthening, Truth is Purity, Truth is all Knowledge”*** was one of my earliest inspirations and is so till today. The well known Urdu couplet ***“Khudi ko kar buland itana ki har taqdeer se pahale, KHUDA bande se KHUD puchhe bataa teri raza qya hai?”*** – ***“खुदी को कर बुलंद इतना कि हर तकदीर से पहले, खुदा बंदे से खुद पूछे बता तेरी राजा क्या है”*** has too been quite often, an inspiration to me to develop my ***‘sankalp shakti’*** and to adopt fresh ***‘sankalps’*** from time to time.

In spiritual development what really matters is how patiently you are prepared to apply yourself to the practice of ***“choiceless observation”*** of the thoughts that may be invading your mind, as Osho Rajneesh would say, during the practice of daily regular meditation, which he described as really trying to do ***“NOTHING”***. Regular recitation of the ***Gayatri mantra*** during the daily ***sandhyas*** is a must for a serious spiritual practitioner. The daily recitation and reflection on the verses 61, 62, 63, 65, 66, 72, 73, 76, 77, 78 of Chapter XVIII, verse 17 of Chapter VI, verses 7 and 27 of Chapter VIII, verses 22 and 27 of Chapter IX, verses 9 and 11 of Chapter X, verse 5, and 55 of Chapter XI, verses 7, 8, 12, 14, 16 and 19 of Chapter XII, verse 22 of Chapter XIII, and verses 37, 47, 52, 54, 55 and 56 of Chapter II of the Bhagwad-Gita provide a fairly comprehensive scheme

of spiritual reflections and practices in daily life while doing your normal work and would further vet your appetite for more.

The English translation of the Bhagwad-Gita by Dr. Radhakrishnan has appealed to me most and the Hindi commentary by Swami Tejomayananda of Chinmay Mission. The **'Anulom-Bilom'** pranayam with minimal **'kumbhak'** and **'kapalbhati'** with proper balanced simple vegetarian diet advocated by Swami Ramdev combined with daily walks is an excellent practice to take care of your physical fitness right till old age. To me Swami Ramdev is admirably carrying on the unfinished work of Gurudev, both in words and deeds and fortunately he is creating the right waves. He has roused universal interest in real **Yog** to make it an essential and simple part of daily routine. There is nothing to beat Gurudev's one liner on how to eat – **"roti peeyo pani khao"** – **"रोटी पीयो पानी खाओ"**. The first verse of Kalidas's **"Kumar Sambhav"** – **"कुमार संभव"** which is a tribute of the poet to **"Devatatma Himalaya"** – **"देवतात्मा हिमालय"**, also called the **"Third Pole"** is worth reciting every morning to remember that it is the Himalayas which would dictate the future of the planet Earth. The verse in original Sanskrit is quoted here –

अस्तुत्तरस्यां दिशि देवतात्मा हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः ।

पूर्वापरौ तोयनिधिवगाह्य स्थितः पृथिव्यां इव मानदण्डः ।।

Gurudev was emphatic that the best service you could render to humanity was to **"correct your faults"**. This would call for an attitude of looking inwards to initiate correction of outward situations, which would inevitably take their time to ease out. This would then call for patience and imagination to do other diversionary positive activities in association with those around you. Developing capabilities would be the surest way to make one self indispensable. **"Fretting, worrying and despondency are all different aspects of the same defect"** said Shri Aurobindo. These tendencies would not invade your peace of mind if you have already set out on the path outlined by Gurudev.

"मन में रहिणा, भेद न कहिणा, बोलिबा अमृत वाणी; आगिले अगनी होइबा अवधू, तो आपण होइबा पाणी" **"Man main rahina, bhed na kahina, boliba amrit vani; aagiley agni hoiba avadhu, to aapan hoiba paani"** said Baba Gorakhnath meaning **"Be mindful, do not divulge your mind, speak sweetly; if the fire of anger confronts you O' Avadhut, you become water"** to put out the fire of anger. **"Avadhut"** was Baba's way of endearingly addressing the seeker before him and the

spiritual practitioners in general. Doing your daily chores **“mindfully”** is like meditating while in action and helps develop the inner strength of the practitioner many folds. **“Not divulging your mind”** is wise counsel because there is no real need for it in daily life. **“Speak sweetly”** is definitely the done thing to get on in life and to attract others to cooperate with you. **“Pouring water over the fire of anger”** is a most desirable initiative in such situations to bring about peace and order in your surroundings.

I have already done some thinking to evolve REACHA’s strategy for social change in contrast to the leading politicians of the day who seem to imagine and mislead gullible people that capturing political power by them would enable them to bring about fundamental changes in society. This note is given at the end of this chapter for ready reference. In fact this slogan of **‘CHANGE’** has become an attractive ploy to convince people that such politicians alone can change the lives of people for the better. Nothing can be farther from truth. Real social change would only come about when each one of us decides to change himself or herself positively from one’s inner core of one’s being and this is not possible if an outside agency tries to persuade us or compels us to do its bidding. In other words, any attempt to change others from outside is always going to be fraught with violence and should therefore be avoided.

Gurudev utilized the power of **Dharma** in its purest form, like Vivekananda did before him as some thing closest to the heart of every human being without distinction of caste, creed or colour of one’s skin, to look within and realize that each one is unique and possessed with some thing special, which needs to be brought out for the benefit of the entire humanity. This is how a fundamental change in society could be brought about. Yes, with changing times the language of **Dharma**, which does not merely mean **religion**, the vocabulary of righteousness may change and this message of fundamental change may have to be so conveyed through the medium of modern science and technology that the cob-webs of past prejudices which have plagued humanity may be by-passed. A few more articles of mine find place in these pages as they represent my latest thinking on relevant issues as well as much of the future work of REACHA too as I see today.

Appendix

(i) REACHA'S Strategy for Social Change

It is well understood that the **LAW** of the world which sustains it is **SACRIFICE** for love. The mother's sacrifice sustains the family; the father's sacrifice takes the family forward. The sacrifice of saints, martyrs and heroes saves the society and takes it forward. When one begins to identify with more than one as happens in a state of love, then giving up something that was attractive till yesterday for the other becomes almost natural. With the wave of consumerism engulfing humanity the power of advertising through the household television sets is exciting every one's ego to consume more and more, thereby diluting the sense of sacrifice of the common person. The result is less and less concern and consideration for the other, thus evaporating the innate sense of sacrifice which each human being naturally possesses. So, while there is a greater hypocritical show of compassion and concern there is less substance if any, in actions that follow, in comparison to what happens as a result of genuine compassion. These displays of mock compassion are expressed through token public gestures which soon whimper into nothing substantial. **CHANGE** is also emerging as a convenient slogan for politicians to beguile gullible people into voting for them. Political means of bringing about change may result in superficial modifications in the status quo, but such measures cannot go far enough. Real change can only come about when it is addressed by genuine efforts with love in one's heart as well as with a clear-cut programme of action. Sincere efforts would then need to be made to appeal to the hearts of the people, for them to change themselves to become better human beings as well as to collaborate in the programme of action proposed. That is a long haul which would require patience and perseverance. There is really no shortcut to **CHANGE**. What then is the way out in the short run?

The major revolutions of the world which brought about quantum social changes in human society in the past few centuries have all petered out. The Indian freedom struggle which triggered the freedom movements all over the world has also petered out. The one major social revolution initiated by Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya after the Indian Independence movement, the **Vichar Kranti Abhiyan** to trigger a Yug Nirman movement, a movement to rebuild human civilization too,

all but appears to have petered out after his demise in 1990 and after the demise of his consort Vandaniya Mataji in 1994. This may have been due to the vacuum in the leadership of the movement and inadequate follow-up actions, though the embers of the movement are very much alive and what institutions **Acharyasri** set up during his life time are mercifully still stoking these fires diligently. The **YAGYAGNI, the sacrificial fire** is burning bright and the **Vichar Kranti**, the change in the way people think and behave is nevertheless proceeding at a snail's pace. The seeds sown by **Acharyasri** are however, sprouting all over the world, because the ground prepared by him during 65 years of his active life the world over, is still very fertile and the embers can still be lighted up into the flames of Yug Nirman. What is likely to happen is that every where the sprouted seed would draw sustenance from its immediate environment and adapt itself to the needs of that particular community and social setting and such embers that are near by would hopefully ignite the flames of Yug Nirman later. What would be the common traits of these saplings when they grow up into full grown trees and what would need to be done to create a critical mass of the embers and to establish a network of such vibrant growth centers and the flames of Yug Nirman? This is what REACHA endeavors to determine in order to catalyze such sprouting seeds.

Yogeshwar Vasudeo Shri Krishna propounded the Bhagwad Gita as a treatise on the **"mysticism of action" – Karm Yog**, as the beginning of the individual's quest for self realization and fulfillment. He declared **"To action alone hast thou a right, never at all to its fruits; let not fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction"**. Later in the Middle Ages, Sant Raidas gave the concept of **Sukarm** (सुकर्म) and **Sukriti** (सुकृति) denoting **action without attachment** and **skillful action** respectively. Consequential Right Action alone is a justification of any spiritual awakening and it can hardly qualify to be called so, if it merely results in hollow sentimentalism, passing for devotion to the God Almighty. REACHA's philosophy of action envisages every active member to do his or her bit to promote the desired social change wherever they may be standing. This would be possible in collaboration with all the progressive minded individuals, groups, voluntary associations (VAs) etc who would be acting as autonomously as they wish. But should they need sustenance of some kind and if the same is forthcoming, it would add to their effectiveness. REACHA would strive to work in the direction of becoming such a provider of ideas and such other resources which it would endeavour to leverage to make such dispersed efforts more effective and meaningful. REACHA believes that since its inception it had the full blessings of Vandaniya Mataji in person with tears in her eyes. Such efforts by REACHA and similar other organizations to galvanize the new vibrant growth centers sprouting all over the world as

well as to rekindle the flames of Yug Nirman from such embers that are continuously being stoked by Shanti Kunj and Gayatri Tapo Bhoomi, is the only manner in which the Yug Nirman movement can be accelerated and carried forward. This would of course be in addition to whatever success in this direction, which current efforts of Shanti Kunj and Gayatri Tapo Bhoomi may surely bring about in good time.

The evolution of SAMEER (Social Action Movement for Education & Eco-Restoration) CLUBS and later the Students' (self) Management Committees (SMCs) in schools and other institutions to mobilise their best elements as well as MAITREYA CLUBS in neighbourhoods and housing societies to mobilise concerned parents, as nurseries of the sprouting seeds and saplings of the new generations has been achieved as two workable models during the last fifteen years by REACHA. These models provide the cutting edge of our strategy of social change that is being proposed here. What this strategy holds for the future, only the future can reveal, but the basics of the strategy are now being fine-tuned as we go along in our quest for perfection in action, which hopefully would attract similar such efforts to join hands with REACHA. These two models are REACHA's work-horses which are performing beautifully and can be plugged into any on-going effort in any institution or neighbourhood respectively, to bring about the desired CHANGE according to the wishes of that particular organization or community. Fortunately, the tools of science and technology today make it possible for any number of organizations to collaborate functionally no matter where they are located. REACHA has evolved a methodology of interacting with students, parents and teachers to promote time-tested social values wherein **"learning by doing"** is involved and the worth-while values get imbibed sub-consciously in a joyous format. The counseling takes care of their physical, mental and metaphysical development needs in such a manner that the whole environment where these activities are conducted changes almost miraculously and visible social change takes place within a few months. This simply highlights the concept of **"mysticism of action"**- *Karm Yog*, without recourse to any sanctimonious rituals which tend to prevent people of different faiths from participating in such activities. It is children in schools, adolescents in colleges and institutions and both in their homes who are going to change the world for the better or worse in the next ten years, and what finally happens would depend on what they, their parents and teachers are going to do right NOW. REACHA's strategy takes care of all four, the parents, the teachers and the children and adolescents. The **"Long March"** of the Chinese Revolution in the decade of thirties of the last century (1930-1940) began with a hundred thousand communist volunteers but only ten thousand could reach the "Caves of Yunnan" their

destination, all the rest were killed on the way by the enemy as well as by the vagaries of nature. The beauty of REACHA's strategy entails a non-violent process of change of heart, wherein if ten thousand were to set out on the **"Long March" of Yug Nirman**, this creative process of rebuilding human civilization through love, then a hundred thousand and more could reach the destination in far less than ten years.

What is the destination we have in mind and how do we plan to reach it? Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya had laid out an elaborate picture of the new age, **Nav Yug — नव युग** which would take shape as his 100 point Yug Nirman Yojana would unfold and be underway (**Volume No.66 Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya-Sampurn Vangmay**). A plain reading of these hundred points reveals that they are a hundred broad flexible processes of personal and social reforms which provide for enough individual initiatives and if adopted according to one's inclination, individually or collectively would result in the evolution of the kind of just society we dream of. We need to work on these 100 points' reform processes to achieve Yug Nirman – **Nav Yug-नवयुग** in the spirit of **"सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः" "Sarvey Bhawantu Sukhinah"** remembering all the while that honest and fair means alone can take us to the noble goal we cherish. The process itself is important and has to begin with each one of us doing one's best mindfully every moment of one's life and if this happens, then we are bound to feel the presence and push of **Acharyasri** guiding us subconsciously. He was a revolutionary *"par excellence"* through and through, in the garb of a common householder, for whom every one who set out on this **"Long March" of Yug Nirman** was dearer to him than himself.

Let us all the while keep trying to identify positive persons in society where we live. They are valuable. **Every ray of hope has to be worked upon diligently**, **"न पूछो अकेली किरन क्या करेगी, तिमिर में अकेली किरन ही बहुत है"** – expressed in roman script – **'Na poocho akeli kiran kya karegi, timir main akeli kiran hi bahut hai'**. Every practitioner of Yug Nirman has to bear in mind that merely dreaming of it would not be enough and that each moment and each day has to be invested in it. The moment on hand is all we have, the one which has gone past is lost forever and the next one is yet to be. It is the same with each day of our life. Whatever can be done whenever, can never be done! What can be done now and today is all we can be sure of doing. The energy wasted in procrastination, in putting off what can be done today can be easily used to do the same now and today. Putting off doing what needs to be done now can, can also lead to altogether forgetting to do it, which would never happen if the same is done now and today. Yug Nirman

entails “हम बदलेंगे, युग बदलेगा, हम सुधरेंगे, युग सुधरेगा” i.e. expressed in roman script – **“Hum Badlengay Yug Badlega, Hum Sudharengay Yug Sudherega”**. Only a reformed individual can set out to bring about positive social change, not by coercion, but by one’s own example and by **“Walking the Talk”**.

Generating good will and starting with addressing the felt needs of the families constituting a community where one resides or works has to be the strategy of initiating social action wherever resistance is likely to be the least. Thereafter, the strategy of mobilizing the community would be evolved in consultation with the community. Patience and perseverance are a must in this whole process of Yug Nirman. The **“Panch Sheel”** of (i)-Purity; (ii)-Cheerfulness; (iii)-Spirit of service and helpfulness; (iv)-Efficiency and friendliness in conducting personal and family relations; as well as (v)-Promoting equality amongst all sections of society in a spirit of Unity in Diversity has to be an essential part of the work culture of REACHA, in order to beget trust and goodwill from all and sundry. It is then alone that **“mysticism of action”** would begin to show its magic of positive social change to be perceived by the whole REACHA family as well as whosoever comes in contact with an active volunteer of REACHA. In such an environment, positive change begins to become infectious. This, in short, is the strategy of social change that REACHA now proposes to adopt. We invite and welcome all aspirants of positive social change to adopt this strategy and become partners in this enterprise of Yug Nirman and do their bit to the best of their abilities and resources by devoting one hour a day or one day a week to Yug Nirman through REACHA within their own sphere of activities. This is a movement for creating a just and happy social order to ensure that our children find the world a better place than what we found it to be when we grew up. Do inform us what REACHA can do for you within its limited resources and to explore help for your initiative, please keep visiting REACHA’s website at <http://www.reacha.org> as often as possible.

*

Manav Bharati was a very precious part of my memory and is still so in the present, with Nikhil and Mudit as the links between the two generations. Nikhil is Student Counsellor in the school and Mudit is receiving his education there. Hence, this piece here for posterity too. REACHA functions from the Manav Bharati School in New Delhi and has the blessings of Vishwa Kant, my dear friend from childhood.

(ii) MANAV BHARATI – down the memory lane

Babuji, as we called my father passed away on 8th April, 1989, which was the third ***navratri*** of the ***Chaitra*** month, after a short illness, of three months through carcinoma of the liver. The ***Dwadsha*** or the 12th day ***Gayatri yagya*** was about to begin at Waverley View, Mussoorie where we had lived since 1949, when I walked a tall old man, Dr. Durga Prasad Pandey, the founder of Manav Bharati to join us for the ***Dwadsha*** condolence ***Gayatri yagya***. He had been a close friend of Babuji and the whole family and so his presence was a great balm to ease the pain of Babuji's loss for all of us. Incidentally, MANAV BHARATI too had moved into the Old Dumbarni School in 1948-49 from Rajpur, where it had been founded by Dr. Pandey in 1941-42 or thereabout. As was my wont after I met Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya in March 1979, I began visiting Haridwar and Mussoorie almost every two months from Lucknow where I was posted in the State Secretariat. After passing away of Babuji, this routine had to be observed more meticulously to enable me to see my mother as often as possible, who was gradually recovering from the shock of Babuji's departure. It was an established practice with me to walk to MANAV BHARATI from WAVERLEY, whenever I visited Mussoorie right from the university days down to the time we left Mussoorie for good in the year 2006.

It must have been six months after Babuji's departure that I was making my constitutional visit to MANAV BHARATI when I learnt that Dr. Pandey was conversing in the ante-room of the Principal's office with Shri Kanahaya Lal Misra Prabhakar, the famous Hindi writer and a close friend of mine from my Saharanpur days where I was posted as District Magistrate for over three years between 1970 to 1973. Dr. Pandey must have divined my presence in the Principal's office and so sent for me immediately. I was over-joyed to meet both the eminent men who also happened to be over joyed at "this accidental meeting". To me, both were fatherly figures for whom I had great respect and affection. After exchange of usual pleasantries and news of respective families, and work stations I rose to beg my leave of the two venerable men. Dr. Pandey held my hand for a long time and solemnly said to me "Jagdish, I want a promise from you". I told him – "the promise is given but you will have to tell me precisely what you want me to do". He said, "Please look after MANAV BHARATI and VISHWAKANT". I assured him that I will always bear his instructions in mind, more so because Vishwakant and I were "bum chums" from the school days.

While the promise had been given to Dr. Pandey in July 1989 when I was posted in Lucknow, I learnt from Vishwakant later when I met him in New Delhi in 1990 that Dr. Pandey too passed away in late 1989. I could recollect the significance of his tight hand-shake when we last parted company, for he must have had a premonition that he would be departing soon. In early January 1990 I received a call from the then Union Cabinet Secretary Shri Vinod Pandey whether I would be willing to leave “my beloved LUCKNOW” for a posting in New Delhi. I promptly gave him my consent and soon thereafter, I received my posting orders to Krishi Bhawan as Additional Secretary. I joined Krishi Bhawan on 13th February 1990 and found lodging in UP Sadan, New Delhi which was to be our residence for the next six months or so.

I was vaguely aware that Vishwakant was somewhere in New Delhi but had no idea of his whereabouts. I think it was late in February of that year, that I received a call from Vishwakant who, perhaps picked up my phone number from my mother from Mussoorie. So we met soon thereafter to each others delight after, may be a decade or so. Last time we met was in Lucknow when he was posted as Chief Security Officer in the Indian Explosives Limited, Kanpur, and was visiting Lucknow for some MANAV BHARATI matter in the State Secretariat. It was when we met in New Delhi after a decade in 1990 that Vishwakant informed me of Dr. Pandey’s sad demise. Our bond of friendship was thus further strengthened with both of us loosing the precious paternal umbrella in such quick succession within a year. Frequent meetings between us in New Delhi were then revived in 1990 again which was a great soothing experience for both of us. However, I really had no idea of how I would be fulfilling my promise made to late Dr. Pandey, but that the opportunity for the same was close at hand, was gradually becoming more than obvious.

It was in August 1991 that Shri VP Singh, IFS, then a director in the Krishi Bhawan who was working with me in the ministry came to bid me goodbye as he had been reverted back to his parent IFS cadre in West Bengal. While doing so he also broached the idea of floating a voluntary association (VA) which would devote itself to addressing issues relating to agro-forestry, horticulture, rain-water conservation etc. I encouraged him to go ahead with his idea, but he insisted that I should agree to head it. I was reluctant, but offered, to give him all help in drafting the “Memorandum of Association” as well as the “Rules and Regulations” for the proposed VA. While he was quite adamant in his insistence on my participation, I was lukewarm to it, but decided to do my best to do the drafting work. Shri VP Singh kept flitting between Kolkata (then Calcutta) and New Delhi and always made it a point to revive his insistence as often as he met me

on each of his visits to the ministry. The drafting work was complete by December, 1991 and we began to explore the possible names for the VA. We finally settled on **“Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture and Agro-Forestry”** – REACHA for short which appeared to be a reasonably attractive acronym as well – **ऋचा** – also standing for the verses in the ***Vedas***. The next task was to find seven associates each of whom was to shell out a handsome amount of Rs. 5000/- (petty by present standards now but quite handsome in 1991). It was at this stage that I began to nurse the idea of heading the VA because mustering the support of six more friends would not have been possible without my first shelling out Rs. 5000/-. This wasn’t too easy but we managed to get five such friends who gave the cheques with the sixth friend making a promise to do so. He, “blessed be his soul”, never kept his promise and we had later to designate him as an Associate Member. The formal registration of REACHA, New Delhi took place on 9th March 1992 and the registered office of the VA was made at CII/10, Motibagh, New Delhi where we were residing. This was hardly a satisfactory arrangement, but there seemed to be no alternative. However, by 1996 when I retired I mentioned my dilemma and Vishwakant offered that MANAV BHARATI be made the registered office of REACHA New Delhi. Thus began the means of my fulfilling my promise to late Dr. Pandey to look after MANAV BHARATI and Vishwakant. REACHA’s association with MANAV BHARATI has literally sealed the fate of these two VA’s to work together. Nikhil’s joining MANAV BHARATI in November 1997 seems to have perpetuated the destiny of these two organizations to work together in a constructive manner for the next generation as we see it today.

Our family’s association with Vishwakant’s family and MANAV BHARATI began in 1949 when we moved away from Cainville School to Waverley. Meeting Dr. Pandey as he walked past Waverley gate to MANAV BHARATI was quite common and we were frequent visitors to MANAV BHARATI for any event of consequence there. Meeting Vishwakant and Karuna, his cousin on the cricket ground either at MANAV BHARATI or the Survey of India Ground in Landhour was quite common. Subsequently, Vishwakant and I walked nine miles to College and back together every day for two years from Waverley to St. George’s College at Barlowganj. This association was not only good for our friendship but was also very good for our physical stamina. Vishwakant later joined the army and then sought voluntary retirement to assist Dr. Pandey in running MANAV BHARATI while I joined the IAS in 1961. We were to meet again briefly in 1986 at LUCKNOW and of course after my posting to New Delhi in 1990 our friendship and association has been revived most constructively through REACHA’s association with MANAV BHARATI.

The following article by the author was published in the English daily '**Northern India Patrika**', brought out from Allahabad a few months before the 26/11 episode of 2008 and is relevant to the distortions that have crept in the Indian polity after independence and the remedy thereof.

(iii) The Parsi Community Of India

(A critique of Minority-ism)

Has it ever been heard that a member of the Parsi community is or has been involved in a violent incident of rioting or in any manner of terrorist related violence in India? They are a minuscule of a minority community in India. Has this never occurred to anyone as to how or why it is so? Well, the most significant fact which comes to notice is that the Parsi community **has no leaders who have sponsors abroad** or in any political party in INDIA. They are a community which has been and is making its contribution to the national good in many ways through their whole-hearted participation in all major areas of national endeavors and at the same time they invest a great deal of effort, finance and time to the welfare of their own community ie, **they have an attitude known as enlightened self-interest**. Every incident of such violence only involves members of those communities some of whose selected leaders have sponsors abroad or amongst the political parties in the country. These foreign sponsors are to the north, east, west and south of India and also amongst political parties and some business houses who control the mass media inside the country. They are known to most of the important people in authority in India as well as to such leaders of all the communities involved in such incidents of violence. Apparently, all that happens suits all such leaders because such incidents of violence please their sponsors who are the first ones to condemn them after each incident. Any invitation to these community leaders by government for a dialogue is spurned by them because it would not suit their sponsors.

What is the solution to this problem? The straight answer is "**INDIA HAS TO BECOME STRONG**", physically, intellectually and spiritually. Fortunately, India is strong in the last two of these areas and is growing in physical strength day by day. **What will make INDIA STRONG?** Concerted effort by all right-minded Indians to concentrate on only undertaking creative activities needs to be addressed. They need not waste their precious time in crab-like leg-pulling or making fun of fellow Indians, who may be trying to be creative. The rest may be left to Yogeshwar Vasudev Shri Krishna whose message of the Bhagwad-Gita is for the entire humanity. The prominent feature

of his message is **‘To action alone hast thou a right, not at all to the fruits thereof. Let not fruits of action be thy motive, neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction’**. Those having faith in the Guru, Lord Jesus Christ or Allah or Ahura Mazda or any other name representing the Divine may leave the results of their creativity to the Divine, since we have no control over the results. There are innumerable instances in India throughout its length and breadth where examples of people engaged in fundamental creativity can be seen to be taking practical shape. The external sponsors of violence in the country must be told very clearly **“HANDS OFF!!”**. All the leaders involved would also understand this language and would decide to withdraw inside their respective cocoons. These are difficult times and one must not lose faith in the inherent strengths of India which have enabled her to survive with dignity, continuously for the past thousands of years. If my readers are looking for some creative ideas they can find plenty of them in our website <http://www.reacha.org>

Now let us come back to the Parsi community. Why cannot other minorities adopt the ways of this community? What is the most prominent aspect of the Parsi community? It is **‘Live well and let others also live well’** and this dictum seems to extend to all fields of national endeavors, with Parsis excelling in all fields. It has never been heard that any one in India has discriminated against the Parsis. They have never demanded reservation in jobs, schools, technical and other institutions, but have made their way to the top by improving their own abilities. What do the masses of other minorities gain by their selected leaders trying to propagate the falsehood that India is not safe for the minorities and that they are being discriminated against? Why don’t these masses stop listening to such selected leaders? These leaders have only amassed wealth at the cost of their respective communities. The minorities who depend on their own strength of mind and heart do not need political leaders to steer the welfare of their masses. The PARSIS do not have any political godfathers, so can other minorities prosper in India without political godfathers.

Let us recollect the names of prominent Parsis in contemporary India. Bharat Ratna JRD Tata stands out as an outstanding Indian who not only was an eminent captain of industries in India, but was also the father of civil aviation, being the first Chairman of Air India International as well as the Indian Airlines. His dream of a prosperous India led him to found what has now blossomed into the Population Foundation of India dedicated to stabilization of India’s population. The House of Tata’s is the only industrial house in India which has adopted the Gandhian Principle of Trusteeship in its management and has adopted a stringent code of ethics for all its employees so that their conduct does not bring a bad name to their industrial house. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw is a

well known national hero whose exploits in the battlefield are already part of our folklore. Other prominent Parsis who can be named today are General Satarawala, Lt.General R.K. Nanavatty, the Indo-anglian poet Keki Daruwala, musician Pinaz Masani, astrologer Bejan Daruwala, politicians Feroze Gandhi, Minoo Masani and a host of other prominent Parsis whose names I am unable to recollect readily, not forgetting the prominent Parsis in India's history.

Suffice it to say that this community has proved what an intelligent minority community can achieve in an atmosphere and environment that India makes available to all its children who care for their motherland. This is not to say that there have not been many national heroes belonging to other minority groups, but these heroes are not the ideals of those selected members of the minorities who are engaged in promoting terrorism and forced religious conversions in India. How can anyone help any minority community whose talented selected members are not hesitating to shed the blood of innocent members of other communities or are using devious means to convert people of other faiths when every citizen of India has total freedom in this regard. The flow of foreign funds for these activities is not hidden from anyone in India. These selected members of the minority communities are the agents who raise such issues as human rights of terrorists and other underground outfits in the media to divert attention of all concerned to the main problems facing the country. They choose to be conveniently oblivious of the human rights of the innocent victims of their nefarious deeds. The distinguished members of these minority communities who are in the pay of external forces have no hesitation in compromising the fundamental issues relating to the basic welfare of the mass of their respective communities because they owe their loyalty only to their foreign sponsors. They seem to have mastered the art of manipulating the media and political leaders of their dispensation to do their bidding to come out with carefully tutored versions of current events and their fallouts. They would soon have to recognize the inherent strength of the Indian ethos which cannot be misguided indefinitely and they would be compelled by circumstances to let go of their hidden agendas and to stop their nefarious activities so that their masses do not continue to be misled by them.

It would be of interest to my distinguished readers if I were to take them back in history to trace the story of the initiation of the poison of what now-a-days passes for communalism practiced in the garb of minorityism by the ruling establishment which seems to have forgotten the mantra ***"Satyamaiv Jayatey"*** meaning – **'Only Truth Prevails'** inscribed in the logo of the Government of India. This concern relating to minorityism is also practiced by a host of other political parties too to further their prospects in the periodic elections. Even the hated **JAZIA TAX**

imposed by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb on the Hindus could not provoke a violent response from the local people, but the East India Company had brought about the first communal riot in India within less than hundred years of the Battle of Plassey won by their army without firing a single canon in 1757 AD with the help of their deceitful ally Mir Jafar. This was in 1836 AD on the occasion of mourning relating to Moharram observed by the Muslims during the procession which was passing through a narrow street in a Hindu mohalla and the TAZIAS which are normally carried high above the shoulders and which are not supposed to be lowered while in the procession, happened to get obstructed. That was pretext enough to launch a massacre of Hindus in that mohalla. This was the new face of Islam in India, the WAHABI SECT who had been encouraged to practice their brand of Islam by the East India Company.

That has been the story of these riots right till the now infamous GUJARAT RIOTS sparked by the gutting of a railway bogie transporting karsewaks from Ayodha in Uttar Pradesh. Pakistan as a nation has been following the tenets of this sect of Islam as their state religion since its formation and the Muslim League which was encouraged to bring about the division of India to create Pakistan was doing so before 1947 AD. It was the infamous massacre of Hindus of Bengal on 15th June 1947, the day of DIRECT ACTION, a call given by the Muslim League to force the partition of the country when the streets of the city then known as Calcutta were painted red with the blood of innocent people, which convinced even Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad that partition of India was no longer avoidable. It is another story that it is the Muslims of undivided India themselves who are the biggest sufferers of the creation of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Otherwise Muslims would not have been a minority in undivided India by now.

Contemplating that eventuality, keeping in mind the state of terrorism in the name of Islam today which was actively promoted by the British since the twentieth century, would be an interesting exercise for those western powers who brought about India's partition and who would have had to contend then, with their latest concern for tackling the global face of terrorism (earlier promoted by them only), not to mention the likely fate of the Christian minority, their latest other concern, in such an undivided India. Such are the quirks of history!! Both the minorities, Christians as well as Muslims are safe in India today in spite of all the provocations that the foreign sponsors of selected members of their respective communities are promoting assiduously ever since India became an independent nation in 1947. In fact, India was and continues to be a paradise for all shades of minorities of all faiths as well as for all its sons and daughters on account of an unbroken

tradition of inclusive ideas, religious thoughts and cultural practices going back to over 5000 years of its recorded history and springing from the **Vedas**, the **Upanishads** and the **Puranas**. An average Indian (I do not count the highly educated and very rich Indians as being part of the average) is naturally living the twin perceptions of '**Atmawat Sarwbhuteshu**' – 'आत्मवत सर्वभूतेषु' meaning '**all living beings are like me**' and '**Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam**' – 'वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्' meaning '**The World is a Family**'. It is India which has to give to the world an inclusive culture which she has herself practiced and which alone would help create a climate for genuine WORLD PEACE. This has to be the vision of all concerned Indians for India's role, once she becomes a WORLD POWER, the vision 2020 AD.

India longs for the Christianity of Lord Jesus Christ, whose message of love and service was adopted by Swami Vivekanand to start the Ramakrishna Mission. His Master as the Swami used to call his Guru Shri Ramakrishnadev had described Christ as Krishna Chetna and had himself done his sadhana as a devout Christian also. The intensity of missionary activity in India during the last 200 years can be gauged by the fact that as early as by 1820 AD the Holy Bible had been translated into 27 Indian languages. Even the Indian Constitution framed in 1950 had only 8 languages which had been initially scheduled though this number is now 22. The poor of India are not starving to avail Christian charity but need assistance to stand on their own feet while keeping intact their self-esteem. The Christian charity of the missionaries would have them eat out of their hands and forever make them dependant, in return for converting them to their faith. Here lies the rub; this attitude is what sows the seeds of conflict; this is how misrepresentation of Hindu deities and subterfuges of various kinds, generates violence attributed to the Hindus of the area concerned. Even Mahatma Gandhi had cautioned the missionaries of various faiths of his day regarding their techniques. The Methodist Bishop Fischer of USA who had invited Mahatma Gandhi after the Round Table Conference in London in 1931 AD (which invitation the Mahatma declined due to pressing calls from India) and who was later to marry the lady who became famous as Mrs. Welthy Fischer for her work in India in the field of adult literacy, gave up his church on the issue of conversions in India. The Bishop contended that India was a country where people were naturally religious and don't need to be converted. This was also the view of the German Philosopher Max Muller who contended that the missionaries in India need to understand that India was not the same as the African Continent because people here are instinctively religious philosophers. Even Al-Beruni, a native of Uzbekistan who came to India in 1017 AD with Mahmood of Ghazni had felt

that Hindus were natural philosophers a thousand years earlier. His *“Indica”* – *“Tarikh al-Hind”* written in 1030 AD on his return to Afghanistan for telling his compatriots in Islam about the Hindus as he found them, was a masterpiece of scholarship. The raid on Somnath was to take place in 1024.

Similarly, India longs for the Islam of the Prophet Hazrat Mohammed, as brought by the Sufi saints Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia and his disciple Amir Khusro and later carried forward by Sheikh Farid and his disciple Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer right till the time of Aurangzeb. While the deposed President of Pakistan, Mian Musharraf was prompt to offer a chadder at the Muslim Shrine, the Dargah of Khwaza of Ajmer when he came to India to attend the Indo-Pak conference at Agra on Prime Minister Vajpayee’s invitation, he had no qualms in regard to the cross-border militancy that he had sponsored like all his predecessors as a proxy war against India, at the behest of his patron ally the USA who had played an active role in enabling Pakistan to acquire a nuclear arsenal enough to destroy all the cities of India. It was the same USA which decided to befriend China in the decade of seventies of the last millennium, when Henry Kissinger was actively engaged in scheming on how to encircle India. I am sure my readers would be a little wiser by now as to who all are behind the mayhem that takes place periodically in India when serial blasts or Naxalite or ULFA related underground activities take place all over India killing innocent people, and the government of the day pledged to *“SATYAMAIV JAYATEY”* continues to be a silent spectator, and only confines itself to condemning the violent incidents from the highest quarters and announcing cash compensations which are seldom disbursed to their real victims. I feel a further peep into India’s history would be of interest to my readers who must be wondering that, after all from when and where did the story of India’s misfortunes begin.

Dealing with this matter chronologically backward I must take my readers to the times of Mughal Emperor Akbar who made a determined effort as an article of state policy known by the name of *“SULAHKUL”* to bridge the Hindu-Muslim divide perceived to be the most pernicious of divides in India right up to the present times, since the arrival of Islam in this country in the eighth century AD initially and later in strength in the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD. It may be of interest to know that it was in the reign of Akbar that Hindi as a link language of India came into its own in addition to flowering as a language of literature to which both Hindus and Muslims and still later, the Sikh Gurus made valuable contributions. Akbar’s favorite Subedar Abdur-Rahim-Khankhana who was a close friend of Goswami Tulsidas had described the famous literary creation of the latter, based on the life of Lord Ram and known by the name of

Ramcharitmanas as equivalent to the **Vedas** of the Hindus and the **Koran Sharif** of the Muslims. Right to the present days the illiterate folk both Hindus and Muslims of east UP sing the verses of **Ramacharitmanas** while going about their daily chores nonchalantly. One would like to know the fate of the grave of Abdur-Rahim-Khankhana in old Delhi today. It is neglected with no one to care for it, not even by the Archeological Survey of India under the government of India which is supposed to look after such historical monuments of the Mughal period. Why is it so? The self-styled leaders of Muslims in India right since the days of Emperor Akbar have not forgiven Rahim for his alleged blasphemy by calling **Ramcharitmanas** as equivalent to the **Koran Sharif**.

Such has been the intolerance of the so-called leaders of this minority community after Akbar the Great. All the successors of Emperor Akbar not only reversed his policy of **"SULAHKUL"** but even adopted a policy of persecution of the Hindus of the day. The persecution of the Sikh Gurus, who were initially only propagating harmony amongst all faiths was carried to such an extent that by the time of the tenth Guru Govind Singh Sikhism had become the **KHALSA**, which was dedicated to defend the faith of the faithful by violent means if necessary. It was the first war of independence in 1857 AD that for the last time the Hindu-Muslim divide was forgotten under the leadership of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah **'Zafar'** when all the people of India were united to fight the forces of East India Company. Even a formula for resolving the Ram Mandir dispute of Ayodhya was reported to have been hammered out by an agreement for handing over the whole complex to the Hindus after the conflict was to be over. That was not to be. The first war of independence was lost and Bahadur Shah **'Zafar'** was banished to die in captivity in Rangoon in the then Burma in the Mandalay prison. The British saw to it that the Ayodhya dispute would continue to fester by not allowing the agreement to go through.

The story after that is almost contemporary history. India became an independent nation dedicated to secularism in 1947 AD, though in the process it suffered vivisection which is now regretted by the Muslims in India. My complaint against the Muslim leaders who bravely decided to stay back with India is – **'Why did they not do enough to mainstream the psyche of the Muslim masses when the going was good and India was being led by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru for 17 years after 1947'**? Panditji was a staunch secularist and was an undisputed leader of India in whom Muslim masses had implicit faith. Even in the time of Pandit Nehru Shri Ram Manohar Lohia, a prominent socialist politician and a firm adherent of the policy of secularism, had asked Panditji to issue a statement that India will not tolerate any mischief from a small section of Muslim leadership with links with some countries in the Middle East, which was still busy in their divisive

game, a game which had earlier created Pakistan; and Pandit Nehru did do so, but it appears that the same was not followed up seriously enough by the majority of Muslim leadership which was with the ruling Congress party. Why? We would never know.

The result is what we see today in India, with this small minority of Muslims who have the slogan '**Lar ke liya Pakistan-Lar ke lenge Hindustan**' – 'लड़ के लिया पाकिस्तान, लड़ के लेंगे हिंदुस्तान' on their lips, which small minority then leads the Muslim vote-bank by the nose. It is only the Muslim clerics of the Bareilly School who have since disowned the extremist Wahabi sect of Islam. The Taliban claim their allegiance to ***Darul-Ul-Ulloom*** of Deoband (in Saharanpur district of UP) though Deoband now denies this for obvious reasons. So the hard-core of Muslim clerics are still wedded to the Wahabi extremist sect in India and this mindset continues to hanker for the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb as their role model; they support the terrorist activities of their lunatic fringe while outwardly denouncing the same and at the same time utilize the unsavory fallouts of such terrorist attacks to further their separatist designs, through adoption of their policy of shouting for the feigned grievances of the minorities. This is from where the foreign sponsors of terrorism and the Muslim leadership of the day pick up their inspirations from time to time and the major political parties banking on Muslim votes fall in line. **They would have to change their attitude if peace has to return.**

There is no political solution to this problem in sight now, so terribly are the issues mixed up with petty power politics where capturing power any how is the order of the day. The phenomena of competitive minorityism and casteism between political groups has so complicated the electoral power equations that political parties find it impossible to come out of the vortex of their political calculations. Those in power want to make as much money while in power and their sole objective is to save for the rainy day, for they have no hope of winning in the next elections. **Those out of power are busy making schemes with their moves, to come to power any how as early as possible.** The politicians of the day have no stomach for reforms, political, electoral, administrative or even social.

There is an urgent need for constitutional reforms, which would seek to correct the serious defects of Indian democracy for which a serious public debate needs to be triggered. This debate would need to address all the four areas of reform mentioned here to enable people to have faith in the political process. The only solution for the discerning citizen lies in what I have hinted

already in the suggestions made in the earlier paragraphs of this article ie, adopting a corrective and creative process by which the best elements of all concerned groups including all the minorities, begin to get together in a nationwide effort to give the right social values to the younger generation which is still free from the weight of past history. This is going to be a long and tortuous process for which honest efforts would have to be made by all concerned in a spirit of genuine camaraderie. **The cream of Indian genius, which is on the verge of retirement or has retired from their active career-oriented lives in the recent past, need to put their heads together, for they have the time as well as energy enough to pull India out of the morass in which our leaders have landed her during the last 60 years. They have the vision of the Founding Fathers of the Indian Constitution still fresh in their minds. The yawning deficit in the country's leadership needs to be filled in by fresh enlightened young statesmen. With improved health care facilities in the country, the longevity of average Indians has gone up considerably. At the age of sixty most people are physically fit to start a second innings of social activity right from their families and neighbourhood. This they must do for the sake of their next generation, which would not forgive them if they fail to do so RIGHT NOW.**

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(iv) Celebrating the Girl Child Also

The recent Regional Conference on Health, Population and Social Development held in Chandigarh under the auspices of the Population Foundation of India (PFI) in October 2008, ended on an optimistic note that a socio-cultural movement in the country is now in the offing to begin celebrating every child-birth as an event which would in time signal the arrival of a new generation of Indians who would do their country and society proud. At long last the specter of population explosion that had been haunting the Indian planners ever since 1950 is now gradually receding and the social activists engaged in demographic concerns can now look up to reordering their priorities to begin a new series of advice to different states according to the stage of demographic transition that each state in the Indian Union may find itself in.

It was felt that this transition was likely to be multi-dimensional and broadly would have four distinct directions which were capable of multiplying as the transition progressed in each state. These could be stated as (i) new health issues such as rapid increase of problems of caring for the old due to longer life expectancy (such as in Kerala), child obesity due to lack of exercise to children leading to diabetes (nearly all over the country) and concerns relating to extending "health for all"

due to greater health seeking behavior of the emerging population; (ii) new emerging reproductive and child health issues which would need to be addressed in tune with the demographic transition that each state may find itself in; (iii) the new socio-cultural responses that would become necessary to address the old prejudices in order to smother them and sublimate them to make way for an inclusive mindset conducive to social harmony. This would in turn call for a multidimensional approach to social discourse on population issues with special emphasis on also celebrating the arrival of a girl child in every family and last but not the least (iv) the legal issues arising out of the implementation of the Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act or PNDT Act in short, the resort to Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act as means of family planning and the efficacy of the system of compulsory civil registration of every birth and death to deal with female foeticide. An interesting input came from a representative of a participating state government that an attitude of pro-active state intervention in population issues could have negative fallouts in the sense that the role of civil society would tend to get subverted in the long run and strangely, the civil society representatives in the conference seemed to disagree with this point of view. This article would explore these ideas one by one beginning from the last point relating to an attitude of pro-active state intervention and its perils.

The Sample Registration Survey (SRS) figures released by the Registrar General of India every year have been revealing for the first time after India's independence that the rate of growth of population began to decline continuously after 1996. This happens to coincide with the change in the policy adopted by Government of India in relation to the Family Welfare (FW) programme with effect from that year i.e. adoption of a TARGET FREE approach to the sterilization (vasectomy and tubectomy) programme including the methods of contraception such as oral pills, IUCD, condoms etc as against a top-down-targeted approach to these methods adopted ever since the Family Planning (FP) programme was initiated in the first decade after independence. The new approach stressed on determining targets for the field workers (in consultation with them) on the basis of Community Needs Assessment (CNA) starting from the community at the hamlet level, the target for each worker adding up to the revenue village, the Panchayat, the block, the district and the state according to the worker's jurisdiction, thereby granting them autonomy in their functioning. This bottom-up approach was in sharp contrast to the then prevailing practice of irrationally imposing targets top down uniformly from the Government of India on the basis of the population of a given administrative unit.

It may be of interest to quickly go over the various phases through which the FP movement in the country passed from an entirely clinical approach in the first two decades with the slogan ***HUM DO HAMARE DO*** – हम दो हमारे दो. The main emphasis in this phase was to target the male population in the reproductive age group by fixing targets of vasectomies to be performed on the basis of the population of an administrative unit such as the states, the districts, the development blocks etc. This phase was characterized by quality work on the part of doctors in adhering to strict standards of surgical procedures etc but in terms of numbers of vasectomies performed they were few and far between to have any impact on the rate of growth of population and the targets set were seldom met. The decade of seventies saw a change in the strategy of implementation in the FP movement with the districts becoming the focus of attention. Each district was encouraged to hold FP camps in selected months of the year to suit the farmers and a camp was organized keeping in mind the highest standards of surgical procedures with a team of doctors working round the clock during the camps. Each case of vasectomy was treated like a VIP from beginning to the entire follow up right through the week after the surgery till the stitches were removed. Each camp was able to perform tens of thousands of vasectomies with each case of even a minor complaint being addressed at the level of the district magistrate.

Then came the year 1975 when all of a sudden district magistrates began to be coerced to adopt fair or foul means to achieve the impossible targets that began to flow from Government of India. Cinema halls began to be encircled to round up people to be taken straight to the operation table for getting a vasectomy nick and then to be driven away to make way for the next victim. Cinema halls across the country went deserted to avoid such a fate and in 1977 when Parliamentary elections were held the ruling party was decimated in North India and considerably weakened in the South. The new political formation that came to power at the center immediately changed the name Family Planning to Family Welfare and the programme content underwent some fundamental changes with considerable emphasis on health of mother and child. The programme suddenly acquired a human face. The other fallout not entirely humane was a shift in sterilization from vanishing vasectomies to tubectomies and the programme began to hunt the prospective female candidates for tubectomies to achieve the targets of sterilization. The story of targets being met year after year with little or no impact on the rate of growth of population is now well known, leading to an obvious conclusion that the figures of achievements were being fudged with immunity by the states to avail the Government of India's cent per cent grant for

targets met, led the latter to adopt the target free approach in 1996 after the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994.

The steady decline in the SRS figures year after year relating to the rate of growth of population since then only go to confirm that the change in policy by Government of India in 1996 was a step in the right direction. It is strange that the critics of the target free approach are unable to see the absurdity of top-down approach to the fixing of targets which they seem to be beholden to, thereby compromising the quality of the family welfare services which would concentrate on meeting the targets (to avail Government of India grants for the targets met) instead of concentrating on client satisfaction. The point regarding the perils of a policy of pro-active state intervention has clearly emerged from this narrative. The state policy would best be such as to enable a couple in the reproductive age group to be able to decide how it would like to plan its family and the state system should provide an efficient delivery mechanism to enable the family planning services to perform at their optimal best without invading the privacy of each couple. It must be remembered that the sensitivity relating to maintaining the privacy of every couple in this most intimate of human relations was an important part of the training of FP workers when the programme was launched way back in the First Five Year Plan in 1950.

The New Health Issues

Kerala is an example of a state which is witnessing the demographic transition very close to a stage of stabilized size of population. The number of aged persons is increasing rapidly with a totally changed spectrum of disease burden falling on the health-providing system whether in the state sector or the private sector, along with the socio-cultural aspects of looking after the old family members by the nuclear families. Similarly the incidence of obesity amongst the children, due to a progressively sedentary life style being adopted, as a status symbol of prosperity, is making them diabetic leading to a decline in their longevity. A doctor made bold to assert that it is for the first time in human history that people are going to see their children die during their own life-time. The health seeking behavior of the population has also undergone a drastic change with economic prosperity and increase in longevity and the increased disease burden due to newer strains of viruses of different kinds invading the rapidly urbanizing conglomerations, has greatly complicated the health scenario. This coupled with the states aiming at providing “health for all”, has imposed a greater responsibility on the health-providing system which would have to be

addressed effectively in future with the help of progressively ascending investment in public health.

The Emerging Reproductive and Child Health Issues

These issues are going to change as demographic transition of different shades get underway in different states in order to rearrange their priorities to choose out of the various strands and components of the entire strategy of population stabilization as it has evolved with the National Population Policy 2000. That policy emphasizes the sovereign right of each couple in the reproductive age group to decide for itself the means it would like to adopt to limit its family size. The nationwide surveys carried out in the last decade have established that the need for a small family is now universally accepted and the paradigm shift which came about after the Cairo Conference on ICPD in the realm of population concerns has underlined the significance of the role of women in this area. In this context the statistics of sex ratio in different states acquires special significance, and this happened to be the burning concern in the Chandigarh Conference organized by PFI for the three states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The high incidence of female foeticide in Punjab and Haryana and the tendency to have one son to inherit the family property in order to prevent its fragmentation, have led to the demographic situation of a very adverse sex ratio in these states. Himachal Pradesh was in contrast doing very well in nearly all the demographic parameters which herald a situation of a stabilized size of population in the near future in that state. The change in the mindset of people in Punjab and Haryana to enable them to successfully address the prejudices against the girl child could only come about when this problem is addressed on all possible fronts such as education, women and child development, medical and health, culture and so on so forth involving the state departments concerned also along with civil society activists in a proactive manner with optimal synergy, to trigger a social reform movement to enhance the status of women in these societies.

Sociological Issues

States like Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan which have historically been for long victims of internecine warfare and which have prided themselves for their manly vigour have had a tradition of prizing a male progeny in preference to a girl child, because the male would in any case be killed sooner or later in some skirmish either due to external aggression or some feud with a neighbouring chieftain. Changing this mindset nurtured for centuries in the past is not going to be easy and the social activists engaged in this area of social engineering must take into account the

susceptibilities of people in these states while going about their mission to bring about change. The social discourse which needs to be initiated to bring about the necessary change in the mindset would have to contend with all the lewd and uncultured vocabulary that casually goes on at the level of people to assert their point of view to counter efforts to change their established mindset which they happen to cherish. This is where a multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral approach to social engineering in states undergoing similar demographic transition would need to be initiated both by civil society and the public sector in conjunction, to generate maximum synergy. The goal of such efforts would be to engender a mindset which would begin celebrating the arrival of a girl child also in each family as heralding the entry of goddess of wealth and prosperity Luxmi in the family. Taboos such as a daughter cannot light the funeral pyre of the deceased parents (giving *mukhagni*) or that old parents cannot stay with their married daughters need to be got over in order to minimize the significance for son-preference. These social mores have been engrained over centuries when they were perhaps relevant in the past, but now leading persons in such societies have to come forward to set examples so that others who may not be having the courage to go against the established traditions can make bold and help in modifying them.

The Emerging Legal Issues

It has been mentioned earlier that the desirability of a small family has been well accepted in India by nearly all sections of society, but the traditional preference for a male child had by the decade of nineties of the last millennium introduced strange distortions in the prevailing social practices putting a premium on sex determination of the foetus prior to a child being delivered by a pregnant women. To counter this tendency Government of India promulgated the PNDT Act to come into effect from 1996, whereby sex determination before birth through ultrasound machines was made punishable. The implementation of this Act has come in for sharp criticism due to many legal and procedural lacunae. The significant input which came in the Chandigarh Conference was that each machine should be legally mandated under the rule making powers of the executive to maintain automatic records of ultrasounds performed, to be made available for inspection by the prescribed authority. This would effectively rule out any subversive activities to pander to local social pressures in return for a consideration. This coupled with an effective system of compulsory civil registration of births and deaths would go a long way to minimize chances of foeticide which apparently is being resorted to at the cost of the girl child. Yet another sensitive issue of a pregnant woman seeking abortion in the early stages of her pregnancy who has often to take resort to the services of quacks at great risk to her health and life came up for discussion in Chandigarh. In this

context it was asserted that the MTP Act promulgated in the seventies of the last century had made safe abortions on the grounds of the woman's health possible. It was felt that the distortions in the implementation of this Act over the last few decades too need to be reviewed.

Conclusion

The population stabilization movement known by different names during the last fifty years has always stressed on networking of all the agencies of civil society to address the concerns relating to population explosion in India. These agencies can be named as the state, the voluntary groups, the corporate sector, the different religious, social and cultural groups, the different caste panchayats, social activists of all hues and intellectuals ready to 'walk the talk'. The optimistic note on which the Chandigarh Conference concluded seemed to suggest that there was now a fresh need to galvanize civil society to set right the distortions that may have crept in into this movement during its passage over the last half a century. This mobilization would have to be organized with the help of all these agencies, to begin celebrating every child birth instead of the state viewing it as a curse of population explosion, on the one hand and every family rejoicing it on the other. The need to take care of the nutrition available to each child in the first five years in every family should be the paramount responsibility of the state to ensure that their brains and physical growth are not starved for essential nutrients. We need to remind ourselves that signs of population explosion in India are now only visible in the metropolises, the state capitals, the district towns and mushrooming urban conglomerations due to rural-urban migration which has to be addressed by strategies different from those required for population stabilization. This trend of rural-urban migration is leaving quite a few villages deserted to the great detriment of the concerns relating to food security of the country. How would such a peoples' movement as recommended in the session on the media's role during the Chandigarh Conference be set into motion? Could the Population Foundation of India take the lead in this direction? The theme could be ***"Ladka Ladki Aik Saman, Dono Ko Ho Vidya Dan"*** – "लड़की लड़का एक समान, दोनों को हो विद्या दान" with all the other relevant issues relating to population stabilization skillfully woven into this theme.

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(v) Education for the future

2nd May, 2009

The background paper for this seminar begins with a reference to the market place. I feel that it is paramount that all who are concerned about quality of EDUCATION and access to it need to deliberate on how to liberate EDUCATION from the grip of the market place. What could be the constellation of policy initiatives at governmental (as a kind of prime moving force) and non-governmental levels that would be effective in arresting the all round slide in standards and at the same time would help meet the various challenges of “accelerating intensity” our society faces every day. Only EDUCATION could be expected to come to the assistance of society and its intellectual leaders in general to analyze the nature of the emerging challenges and to help find the answers to them. I presume that the purpose of a seminar like this is to ruffle some settled feathers and to create enough confusion in order to set people thinking to find answers to emerging problems.

“Humans have been producing NEW IDEAS at the unprecedented rate of more than 1,10,000 a year in the 20th century, comparing with 3,840 a year in the 19th century as the Industrial Revolution gathered steam, and only 39 a year in the years from 5000 BC to 1 AD”, so said Charles Jones of Stanford University. This rate of producing NEW IDEAS per year has only become much faster since the last millennium and this gives an inkling of the accelerating pace of social change that we are confronted with today. This is the biggest challenge our society faces today **“How to address the ever accelerating rate of social change our generation and the one still in primary schools would be facing today and tomorrow, not to speak of the day-after-tomorrow”**? I would prefer to go back to the conference on education held to decide the aims of education in the mid nineties of the 20th century in the previous millennium. They are equally relevant to Higher Education and were outlined as follows :-

(i) **Learning to know.** (ii) **Learning to be.** (iii) **Learning to do,** & (iv) **Learning to live together.** To these I venture today, to add yet **another aim of education and that too specially for HIGHER EDUCATION ie LEARNING TO LEARN as a core skill for the 21st Century**, as a skill essential for the present and future generations in order to keep pace with the accelerating rate of change they are being called upon to face.

Coupled with keeping these aims in view is the crisis of values which even a culture as rich as ours is now contending with in an ever globalizing milieu. The younger generation imbued with garbled and warped versions of western values, thanks to the electronic media, where there is a notion prevailing that money can buy any thing, including happiness and that there is no limit to the extent to which resources could be expended, is creating a crisis of yet another kind for a developing country like India. The limited global resources still available today, both natural & man made and the dangers of global warming are dictating what Mahatma Gandhi had advised the country to **(i) Reduce consumption, (ii) Reuse material & (iii) Recycle waste.**

Have we heeded his advice? The answer is well known, but what is surprising is that we are still not heeding these homilies. Could our Higher Education address this societal blindness and deafness along with what I have outlined earlier as an urgent need to meet the challenges of ever accelerating social change? The pollution levels in our rivers, thanks to government policy of draining all the sewers and industrial effluents into them is rising to such alarming levels that in a decade all the sources of clean drinking water would have been polluted beyond remedy. Instead of preventing rivers and water sources from getting polluted, governments prefer to first pollute them and then set about to clean them in order to maximize expenditure of resources.

One of the ideas in education introduced not so recently, which to my mind is a sterling one — the concept of **LIFE-LONG LEARNING** and introduction of **Open and Distance Learning** in the eighties of the last century have revolutionized access to education and thirst for it like nothing before. If established institutions and universities do not read the signs of TIME correctly, then they would be running the risk of being rendered irrelevant in less than a decade from now. Similarly, the ever expanding vista of Information Technology (IT) is opening up prospects of acquiring education outside established institutions. These developments need to be factored in their assessment by institutions of higher learning to decide the directions of their future courses of actions in order to **enable them to identify niche areas of education as well as skills (such as LEARNING TO LEARN) to cater to the ever rising hunger for them.**

I would like to quote Mahatma Gandhi who after having given his directions to Shri Zakir Hussain on the ***NAYEE TALIM*** and ***Bunkyadi Shiksha***, thought it fit to lay some guidelines for the future for his country men in education:

“Although we have been working for **NAYEE TALIM** and **Buniyadi Shiksha** (new education) all these years, so far, our course was mapped out. We have now before us uncharted waters, with the **POLE STAR** as our only guide and protection. **That POLE STAR is the VILLAGE HANDICRAFTS**”.

Rabindranath Tagore had this to say:

“We have come to the world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, **but we attain fullness only by sympathy with all existence**”.

I would like to close with what Sri Aurobindo had to say:

“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The second principle is that mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be”.

And quoting a line from Shri Zakir Hussain:

“Nothing is quite like the company of a good teacher”.

Could the higher education system in India give us.....

GOOD TEACHERS?

....who would be able to guide the present and the future generations through the challenging times confronting us today, **with the VISION 2020 when hopefully India would be a super power in its own right** within the lifetime of many of us?

(vi) Letters of Shri Sudarshan Agarwal & Comments of a few friends

(a) Letters of Shri Sudarshan Agarwal

Sudarshan Agarwal

Former Governor, Uttarakhand & Sikkim

Mentor, Him Jyoti School

August 29, 2009



Firstly, I must thank you profusely for your generous references to me in your book in more than one place and about my friends Shri OP Vaish and Shri Raja Saboo. The more I went through the pages of the manuscript, the more I found myself unequal to the task assigned to me. It is with great trepidation and a feeling of inadequacy that I ventured to write a few lines about this inspirational journey.

You are a role model as a husband, as a parent, as a public servant and as a friend. Persons like you have grown two blades of grass where one grew earlier and the world is better for that. Please do not hesitate to ignore the two pages written by me about the book which reveals the vibrant personalities of the **Guru** and the **Shishya**.

With warm personal regards to you and Abha ji,

Yours sincerely,



Sudarshan Agrawal

Extracts of mail dated 27th October, 2009 on my demitting office of the Him Jyoti Foundation and Himalayan School Society, Dehradun.

I write this to express my deepest sense of gratitude to you for your sterling contribution in giving a direction to the Him Jyoti School during the early years of its existence. Your abiding commitment to the cause, your vision, your guidance and your valuable inputs have brought the Him Jyoti School to its present stage of glory. I have no doubt that you, as a Trustee and Past

President will continue to take close interest in the affairs of the School and continue to offer your valuable advice to President Lt. Genl. K. K. Khanna in matters pertaining to the School in the days to come.

Please convey my profound regards to Abha Ji who has all along been a source of strength to all of us. Please also convey my sincere thanks to dear Lalit and his gracious wife who have been spending precious time in taking classes at the Him Jyoti School. I do hope they will continue to do so in future.

Extract of mail dated October 29 2009

Thank you for your e-mail of October 27 and for the kind sentiments expressed therein. We shall continue to lean heavily on you for accomplishing our mission to make a difference in the lives of bright girls from impoverished families and to inculcate in them values of compassion, honesty, integrity, caring and sharing and in developing leadership qualities. I am beholden to Abha ji, Lalit, Vibha, Nikhil and Ruchi for the keen interest they have all along evinced in the activities of the school.

(b) Shri Nirmal Kumar IAS (Retd): Extracts of mail dated December 30,2008

I have gone through 40 pages so far. First of all, I congratulate you on your success in presenting the author as a humble though determined practitioner of truth. Your love and affection for your seniors, teachers and assistants has also come up very authentically. At the same time, you have minced no words in expressing disinterestedly the opposition that you met from higher ups for unpraiseworthy reasons. This you have done in the stride of your mission, not out of bad feelings, bitterness or bad taste.

Your yatra from Gangotri glacier to tapovan, loss of consciousness for ten minutes and its immensely rewarding return may, perhaps, bring joy to many listeners.....

Extracts of mail dated January, 12 2009

I have read 106 pages of your manuscript. I was touched by your suffering and deep distress at the fatal and subtle illness of your father. Your devotion in sleeping for night after night on the same divan in which he had died reveals sensitively the artless devotion of your soul. I knew Mr. R K Dar for making observations that are close to truth. No wonder he told you that the loss of father will take time to sink inside you to make you aware of it. Your narration of experiencing the

presence of your departed father at the ritual of Mukhagni is very natural, touching and convincing.

I like the honesty and detachment with which you have fared with transfers when you were doing your utmost and the joy at the little praise you got from your subordinates and bosses. I am especially praiseful of your ability to take the help of Shanti Kunj in your teacher-training programme. In a political climate that treats even Bande Matram and Saraswati Puja with inhibitions, it must have required courage, devotion and conviction on your part to be able to introduce education in UP to the perennial wisdom of India.

A man of your spiritual attainment is naturally expected to be above prejudices and preferences in the roll of our worldly duties. You have been fairly above them.

Mail dated January 19, 2009

Your devotion to duty entrusted to you in civil service, methodical approach and success, in spite of small time assignments, amazes me. Your steady faith in your Gurudev's Yug Nirman mission and attempts to integrate it with the Agriculture Deptt. of the central Govt. reflects the sincerity of your conviction. Your book is turning out to be impersonal, something of a biographical autobiography or an attempt to understand yourself as a part of your Guru. Your sincerity to your job comes out as fragrance from every page of your manuscript. I commend you since I rarely met an officer whose soul had found so successfully a media in the mundane and mostly cynical bureaucratic service.

Another point for which I would like to felicitate you is your observance of the Hindu rituals, like Shradha and drawing spiritual experiences out of them, instead of accepting them as necessary superstitions. You have served this ritual with a few words that strike at the root of its spiritual significance that the Rishis had realized. The icy touch of your father's astral and causal bodies is expressed with such conviction that it looks to me as a better proof of the existence of these two bodies. You have proved it without arguing.

Your simple narration of actions taken by you on recommendations makes one see such things as the innocent part of the numerous nameless, unremembered acts of a good Govt. servant's life. It is refreshing to read such accounts. They enhance the prestige of Govt. service.

Please refer to your description how your family got scattered at a time when your Gurudev had also left the world. I liked the profound application of Indian philosophy in the words "the

shock of each balanced the other". This is what I endorse having practiced the Yoga of the rainbow colors and the sunray.

You have successfully projected the mission of Sri Ram Sharma to attain Nirvan through family life, not by renunciation but by enlarging his Gayatri Parivar. I see here one grappling to find tranquility in the midst of the worldly life. This part of India's message has not been practiced by many sages. The need of modern India is to tell the people that crossings made to dissolve the discord in worldly life, without dismissing one's love for family members as mere attachment, will bring Indian philosophy and spirituality close to the home, the hearth and the job. The grihastha dharma and its ability to usher Nirvana for the seeker was the core of the message of the Seven Rishis (Stars) and their consorts, like Atri-Anusuya, Agastya-Lopamudra, Vasishtha-Arundhati. (This is the theme of my novel *Call Of The Yeti* that the Americans are currently publishing.) Renunciation has been very well explained by the Indian sages by exemplifying it, not domestic and worldly life as a passage to Light. The *traditional (italics mine)* Indian ethos practically takes it as deviation from truth. It was a rare virtue of your Guru to have exemplified this path to Nirvana. The Islamist and the Christian distrust of woman has seeped in the Hindu mind. India will attain momentum only after woman becomes an integral part of man's quest of immediate and ultimate liberation. Calling modern times not finished times but 'Yug-Sandhi', great times to attain what looked impossible, is a bright message that your Guru has given to humanity.

If I do not comment as the book impresses me at that very moment I will not be true to myself.

(c) Nikhil Pant: Mail dated January 20, 2009

I have always believed in what Sri Nirmal is saying, papa. In fact, it was you who inspired me to take the plunge into REACHA as my way forward after I did not make it into the IAS. On hindsight, I think it was Gurudev's design that he prepared me for this plunge by making me go through 4-5 years of 'tapasya'....the IAS prep grind!! As the Dalai Lama says...."Sometimes its a wonderful stroke of luck in not getting what you were desperately seeking". He goes on to say that one realises this much later in life.....as I seem to be doing now.

I feel Ashu's (Lalit's name at home) inputs are now the most critical ones that will take REACHA to the global level. I visualize that in the next 10 years REACHA will become the most sought after institution all over the world. At least that is what we all must aspire to make it!!

(d) Dr. DC Thapliyal: Extracts of letter dated November, 2 2008

I consider it a privilege to have had the opportunity to peep into the personality and mission of Acharya Sriram Sharma rather closely through your scholarly work on him. I had visited Shanti Kunj quite sometime back with one colleague and had an occasion to meet the blessed Mataji – though only for a short while. But the serene ambience of the place was palpable.

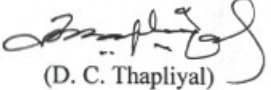
The manuscript of the book **Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya as I Knew Him** is unique in many respects. It is in a way a dialogue between a Guru and one of his most ardent disciples who incidentally happens to be a professional administrator. The wisdom from the Guru flows to the disciple in an informal manner. While the latter informs the former of his professional and spiritual progress from time to time, the Guru works to course correct him if, where and when necessary. The steadfastness and commitment of the author in pursuing issues of public interest as an important functionary in the government comes out clearly while we go through his narration about assignments he handled as an administrator at district, state and national levels. His approach to planning and implementation of the programmes can be good education to those aspiring for a leadership role in organizations. His observations about people with whom he worked and places have been patently candid at times which only add to his authority as an author. The part of the book dealing with the author's work and views as Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) may perhaps be considered of signal value for the State. We would be better served if the recommendations, which could have gone still further, receive our attention for they only reflect the widely held perception that VIP culture and inefficiency plaguing the State, if not nipped in the bud, could destroy the very purpose for which it was created.

Moral and liberal education seems to be author's natural forte and he admits it as such. A meaningful linkage between spiritual values and formal school education is long overdue. **Learning by Doing** was used as an important tool of education at primary and secondary levels. It was something like **Earn While You Learn** schemes that are operated in some institutions even today. The decline in moral values across the board in the society makes one like the author uneasy. His

programme of teacher-trainers' training at Shanti Kunj under the wise guidance of the Acharya with a view to reform teaching fraternity, therefore, came as a refreshing breeze. The project received accolades. The author laments the slow progress of the Yug Nirman Movement by the Acharya in 1953 to ignite the spark of the Divine in humankind especially after his passing. Founding of Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture and Agro-forestry (REACHA) – a voluntary organization by the author in 1992 can be best described as a watershed development in the career of the author. It was an effort to contribute towards the goals of Yug Nirman as enunciated by Acharya Sriram. The author outlines the strategies to be adopted to achieve the goals in the terminal part of his book. The impact of Shanti Kunj and especially of the Acharya on the author and on his kith and kin is discernible. And why not ? Shanti Kunj has been a hallowed place for all seekers of peace and truth.

Hope the book would be ready soon to appear in its printed form. It would be of interest to a general reader to go through the contents only to acquaint himself/herself of the travails of a conscientious civil servant who had been true to his duties at his work places and was still able to nurture the spiritual aspects of his life with all humility – a rare combination these days.

Pranam,

Faithfully yours

 (D. C. Thapliyal)

(e) Shrimati Daya Pandey and Shri BC Pandey (Engineer), Haldwani, Uttarakhand in their mail dated January 28, 2010.

पंडित श्रीराम आचार्य जैसा कि मैंने उन्हें जाना पुस्तक की पाण्डुलिपि पढ़ने का सौभाग्य हमें मिला। जब जब हमने इसे पढ़ा हमें एक नई चेतना एवं स्फूर्ति का अनुभव हुआ है।

प्रथम दृष्टया यह लगता है कि यह एक गुरु से अधिक लेखक की जीवनी बन गई है, इस लगने का कारण लेखक की प्रस्तावना का प्रथम वाक्य भी हो सकता है, पर सही परिपेक्ष्य में पढ़ने पर यह भ्रान्ति सही नहीं रह जाती है। जब गुरु यह कहते हों कि लेखक से उनका सम्बन्ध पिछले जन्मों का है तो यह मानना ही होगा कि गुरु की तरह ही लेखक का अवतरण कुछ विशिष्ट कारणों में गुरु का हाथ बटाने और उनके कार्य को आगे बढ़ाने के लिये ही हुआ है। गुरु से पहली मुलाकात चाहे वर्ष 1979 में हुई हो पर लेखक जन्म से ही गुरु सत्ता के प्रभाव में थे, स्वामी ब्रह्मानन्द सरस्वती से मुलाकात और उनकी कृपा का मिलना इसका प्रमाण है।

लेखक की गुरु से तब मुलाकात हुई जब वे सामाजिक परिवर्तन या यों कहें कि समाज परिवर्तन आन्दोलन जिसे गुरु ने **युग परिवर्तन आन्दोलन** नाम दिया था के लिये उपयोगी हो गये थे। गुरु के प्रभाव में आने पर जिस प्रकार उनकी कार्य शैली का परिमार्जन हुआ उस का वर्णन गुरु का प्रभाव दिखाता है। गुरु की योजना व्यक्ति के अन्दर के परम तत्त्व को जगाकर व्यक्ति निर्माण-परिवार निर्माण इस प्रकार युग निर्माण की थी जिससे धरती पर स्वर्ग लाया जा सके। व्यक्ति अपने को सुधारे तो वह दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा भला करेगा। **हम बदलेंगे युग बदलेगा-हम सुधरेंगे युग सुधरेगा** ही गुरु के युग निर्माण

मिशन का आधार है। यह मिशन ही गायत्री परिवार कहलाया और यह योजना बर्बादी लाने वाले बलों के विरुद्ध युद्ध छेड़ना था। विज्ञान और अध्यात्म को मिल कर समाज को आगे लेजाने का समय आ गया था। उन्नीसवीं सदी में स्वामी दयानन्द के बाद आचार्य श्रीराम शर्मा द्वारा ही यह अलख जागायी गई। पूर्व में भी ऋषि तन्त्र द्वारा समाज की भलाई का कार्य किया गया है। राम राज्य इसका प्रमाण है। आचार्य श्रीराम शर्मा में उत्साहित करने की लौ निरन्तर जलती रहती थी, उन्होंने हिन्दी लेखक राहुल सांकृत्यायन (जिन्होंने अपने जीवन का एक मिनट भी नहीं गँवाया) की तरह ही अपने जीवन का एक भी सेकेण्ड बर्बाद नहीं किया। इन बातों का बहुत सुन्दर तरीके से पुस्तक में समावेश है।

यह गुरु और वन्दनीय माता जी का ही प्रभाव था कि लेखक जिस भी विभाग में रहे उसके कर्मचारियों को शान्ति कुँज में आने का सौभाग्य मिला चाहे वह प्रशिक्षण के लिये ही क्यों न रहा हो। यह समझा जा सकता है कि किस तरह से युग निर्माण मिशन में लेखक का सदुपयोग गुरु सत्ता ने किया। पर गुरु का कहना था कि आधा काम मैंने किया और आधा पंत जी ने किया यह गुरु की महानता दिखाता है।

आचार्य शर्मा सूक्ष्म शरीर अथवा कारण शरीर से भी लेखक को उत्साहित करते रहे हैं और उनके प्रभाव, आशिर्वाद, पथ प्रदर्शन से अभी भी वे एक जवान सोशियल एक्टिविस्ट की तरह समाज के उत्थान के कार्य में डटे हैं। यह गुरु और वन्दनीय माता जी के आशिर्वाद और प्रेरणा से ही सम्भव है, जो इस बात को समझेगा उसे यह पुस्तक अत्यन्त पठनीय लगेगी।

लेखक एक अत्यन्त ईमानदार, कर्मठ एवं दूरदृष्टि वाले प्रशासनिक अधिकारी रहे हैं। उनके अपने विभिन्न सरकारी दायित्वों को निभाने का ढंग और उसमें जो अनुभव रहे उनका समावेश पुस्तक में बहुत सुन्दर ढंग से किया गया है। विभिन्न विभागों की कार्य प्रणाली में कैसे सुधार किया गया, विभिन्न अर्द्ध सरकारी संस्थानों का कार्यालय किस प्रकार किया गया, **पोलियो इरैडिकेशन** का बीड़ा किस तरह उठाया गया, **वाटर शैड डेवलपमेंट के जनक** किस प्रकार कहलाये गये, इन सबका अध्ययन कर अमल में लाने की, नई पीढ़ी के प्रशासकों को प्रेरणा देने के लिये गुरुदेव से प्रार्थना करनी होगी, अगर ऐसा हो सका तो भारत में एक दिन स्वर्ग का अवतरण हो जायेगा।

अपने जीवन के कुछ पहलुओं का लेखक ने बड़ा आकर्षक चित्रण किया है जो अनुकरणीय है, उनसे बहुत कुछ सीखने को मिलता है।

पुस्तक केवल अंग्रेजी जानने वालों तक ही सीमित न रहे इसलिये हिन्दी संस्करण की आवश्यकता होगी। इस वर्ग में लेखक को आदर देने वाले और स्नेह करने वालों की संख्या कहीं अधिक है।

यह न पूछो अकेली किरण क्या करेगी, तिमिर में अकेली किरण ही बहुत है।

(f) Shri Ram Updesh Singh, IAS (Retd): Extracts of mail dated March 3, 2010

... Ever since the days of the British Raj, civil servants have been writing their memoirs for the posterity. For example, John Beames who served in India during 1858-98 wrote his very interesting Memoirs after reading which one cannot but come to the conclusion that in this dramatic world the script doesn't change, only the actors do. Now you also have joined them through your own assiduously written Memoirs which I am sure will make the readers know of your own picturesque persona as well as the supernatural facets of the persona of Rev. Gurudev. Your friends and admirers will eagerly look forward to the publication and release of the Memoirs.

... My adorable friend and batch-mate, JC Pant who is himself a picturesque personality has penned his thoughts emanating from the experiences of his encounters with his Guru, the angelic Pandit Sriram Sharma who did so much as is not normally possible to be done in one's lifetime. Immensely inspired by the Acharya, Pant ji, as I affectionately call him, accepted Acharya ji not only as his Guru but also as a friend, philosopher and guide. His affectionate father also had immensely

inspired Pant ji to frame the course of his principled life not only in his formative years but also at later stages. By going through this very interesting and absorbing account of a Guru by his disciple, I cannot escape arriving at the conclusion that every thought and action of Pant ji was influenced and conditioned by his immense faith in his Guru who undoubtedly had been a supernatural human being. In the ultimate analysis, such a relationship is preordained by the heavens. Claspings the sharp edge of the dagger and snatching it from the hands of an attacker could not have been the act of a normal person.

Pant ji was my senior as a student of MSc. (Mathematics) in the University of Allahabad and also as an inmate of the Amara Natha Jha hostel, earlier known as the Muir hostel. As Pant ji had left the hostel before I joined it in 1958, I had my first encounter with him when we were taking the IAS, etc. exams held in the year 1960. For me, my coming into his contact was like meeting of persons separated at birth. I strongly subscribe to the view that any event or meeting of individuals is predestined. We spent one year at the National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie as probationers and during that period we happened to be the members of the same group and also of the sub-group of four probationers who travelled in the same four-berth compartment. I still have with me a photograph of January, 1962 in which Pant ji is seen flexing his muscles at the Puri beach. In short, by the end of the training period I felt myself so close to him that copious tears rolled down as I took leave of him. It was long years afterwards in 1979 that Pant ji first met his Guru who literally changed his road-map of life. My earliest reminiscences of Pant ji, his dutiful wife Abha ji and two Indianly cultured sons Lalit and Nikhil relate to the chanting of Gayatri Mantra by the devout family. I had a rare opportunity of staying with Pant ji and his close friends and relations in the holy ambiance of the Shanti Kunj at Haridwar last year. Thus I would like to make only this much out-of-place reference if only to boast of my closeness to the family.

As for the comprehensive coverage of the life of his Guru and by default his own life, Pant ji has himself been candid in saying that “what began as a thumbnail sketch of a biographical description of Pandit Sriram Sharma, gradually evolved into an autobiographical narration of a seeker who happened to be a civil servant of India during his long and active career”. Verily, the narration has turned into the form of an autobiography although there are intimate and inspiring details of unseen but felt influences in the life of Pant ji of the Guru and the processes of his thoughts and actions.

About the Author

JC Pant was born on 4th December, 1937 in an orthodox hill Brahmin family in Almora, an important cultural centre and now a district headquarters and once upon a time, capital of Kumaon. He had his early schooling in Mussoorie, another hill station of the erstwhile Uttar Pradesh and now Uttarakhand, and later proceeded to Allahabad University for his BSc and MSc degree education passing out from the then **‘Oxford of the East’**, as this university was till then reputed, in 1958. In his youth Pant was an avid trekker and mountaineer who trekked and climbed mountains in nearly all the Himalayan regions as well as in the Nilgiris and the Western Ghats. He joined IAS in the UP cadre in June, 1961 and served in many important positions in Uttar Pradesh state government as Principal Secretary to the state government, and later in Government of India, initially as Additional Secretary and later as Special Secretary and Secretary in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) and still later as Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare from where he retired on 31st December, 1996. In the agricultural sector his main contribution was to propagate the essentials of rain water conservation and water management to enable a simple farmer anywhere in India to manage on his own his needs of irrigating his crops by conserving rain water or managing its excesses. In the health sector his main contribution was to direct a national effort at eradication of poliomyelitis as well as converting the family planning programme to become Mother and Child-centric which for the first time after Independence of India triggered a decline in the rate of growth of population as indicated by SRS (Sample Registration Survey) figures of the Registrar General of India after 1996.

After retirement from the IAS in December 1996 he devoted himself tirelessly for his own brand of social activism in an honorary capacity, naming a few assignments as follows:

1. Preparation of 20 years’ perspective plan for the forestry sector for MoE&F in 1999-2000.
2. Preparation of Disaster Management Plans for the whole country, the states and the districts through Chairmanship of a High Powered Committee set up by the Ministry of Agriculture – 1999 to 2005.
3. Chairman of India Literacy Board (ILB) – 2000-2006.

4. Chairman REACHA, New Delhi – 1992- to date.
5. Member ICCPE (International Commission for Certification of Polio Eradication) WHO – SEARO 1997- to date.
6. Member International Team of Experts set up by WHO – 2000-2002.
7. Chairman, Review Committee to suggest comprehensive reforms in the management of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan for MoHRD – 2000-2002.
8. Chairman Working Group on “Watershed Development, Rainfed Farming & Natural Resource Management” for the 10th Five Year Plan (2000-2005) set up by the Planning Commission of India — 2000-2001.
9. Member Governing Board of Population Foundation of India (PFI) New Delhi-1997-to date.
10. Senior Vice President of Uttarakhand State Council for Child Welfare-2003 to date.
11. Involvement with “**Ganga Abhiyan**” to prevent pollution of Ganga and all rivers, water streams and water bodies in the country.
12. Ombudsman in association with Uttarakhand Electricity Regulatory Commission, [UERC] 2004-2007.
13. Chairman, Administrative Reforms Commission, Uttarakhand-2006-2007. The report of the Commission in five volumes was duly submitted to the state government of Uttarakhand in December 2007. A manual for ‘**Management of Rain-water**’ and a manual for ‘**Shram-Dan se Shram-Shakti**’ were also prepared and circulated. The honorarium received in this assignment was entirely devoted to charity.
14. President Him Jyoti Foundation and Himalayan School Society – 2006 – 2009.
15. Chairman VASUDEVA (Voluntary Agencies for Sustainable Universal Development and Emergency Voluntary Action) organized as a forum for over 600 voluntary agencies all over India from 1999 to 2003, to simplify enabling community-based disaster prevention and management planning. The urge to carry out rescue work in a disaster situation rouses the same kind of heroism that is seen on the battle-fields, and is something for which civil populations need to be trained on a continuous basis.
16. Chairman, Managing Committee of the Uttarakhand Red Cross Society – 2006-2009.

He set up a voluntary agency by the name of REACHA – Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture & Agro-forestry in March 1992, primarily to enable meaningful dialogue between the governmental research and extension systems on the one hand and the community based organizations and interested individuals on the other, to facilitate transfer of know-how and appropriate technology in the most cost effective manner. Through REACHA was initiated an experiment of Social Action Movement for Education and Eco-Restoration-SAMEER which was to be an institution based activity to mobilize interested faculty members and students for meaningful social activism. This subsequently led to setting up of MAITREYA CLUBS in neighbourhoods to mobilize interested parents to pay attention to their own children as well as children of neighbours to share their concerns and talents.

The SAMEER Club activity in the Him Jyoti School, Dehradun led to the development of the concept of Students' self Management Committees – (SMCs) with the help of the Principal Mrs. Tanu Nayal, which further became an instrument for Comprehensive Continuous Evaluation (CCE) introduced by the CBSE in 2009. Both these formations of SAMEER and MAITREYA CLUBS have evolved as models which can be plugged in at the convenience of any institution or neighbourhood which is keen to experiment and improve itself.

These are now the two tested work-horses of REACHA to bring about fundamental social change and to propagate the message of Yug Nirman with the objective of मनुष्य में देवत्व का उदय और धरती पर स्वर्ग का अवतरण ie, expressed in roman script '*manushya main devatwa ka udaya or dharti par swarg ka avataran*' initiated by Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya of Shanti Kunj Hardwar, who was Gurudev to JC Pant and his family members and also the main inspiration for the writing of this book. The author first met **Acharyasri** on 6th March, 1979, the turning point in his life in his quest for someone who really wanted to change the world for the better in a most non-violent manner through the power of love and compassion. **Acharyasri** lived till the age 80 and shed his mortal frame on 2nd June, 1990 at Shanti Kunj, Haridwar.

For a prophetic human like Gurudev, who had created the Yug Nirman Mission from scratch, every moment he was in the mortal frame was a moment of suffering for himself on behalf of all in the Gayatri pariwar and also to ensure the welfare and smooth succession of persons whom he had designated as his successors in the Mission, in order to enable it to carry on his work after his departure.

Vandaniya Mataji lived on till September, 1994 and carried forward the Yug Nirman movement valiantly after the passing away of Gurudev in 1990. In Mataji's case too the same story of suffering was repeated during her life time and also when she passed away, serving the cause of Gurudev till the end.