

Rameswar Tiwari
Realized Wholeness



*Jagadguru Bhagwan Shankaracharya Swami
Brahmananda Saraswati Maharaj of Jyotirmath*

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A Brief Biography of
SHRI GURUDEVA

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Preface to the Original Hindi Edition

How does one describe the Indescribable, circumscribe the Infinite, put into words That which is beyond all speech? This book is but an imperfect attempt to introduce to the eager and the devout an individual, who was an epitome of human perfection. Howsoever feeble this effort may be, its completion entails a feeling of total elation.

Pure, holy and luminous, whose very vision from afar bestowed peace, he was, to ascetics, an example of self-denial. Yogis saw him in union with the Divine. Sages found him calm, unruffled, wholly in tune with the cosmos. Paradoxically, he appeared withdrawn to the recluse, and full of involvement to the worldly.

Adorned in saffron silk robes, seated on a golden throne, he shone like the resplendent sun. Those around him sensed, as coming from him, rays of tender love, innocent simplicity, graceful compassion. Unconcerned about mundane matters, nevertheless, he brought into play his resolute will. Each word that he spoke was

charged with a power that won the hearts of his listeners.* Every person who came into his contact went away with the feeling of being the one who was closest to Maharaj Shri.

He was not in the habit of giving discourses. Whenever someone in a group used to ask him a question, he answered in such a way that others also felt their doubts dissipating. They reported later on that Shricharan had answered their questions without their having to utter them. His personality was replete with many such specialities for which ordinary explanations are inadequate.

In his elucidations, generally he used to relate his own experiences. This gave to his teachings a freshness that was irresistible to his audiences. It is because of this that we are able to have rare glimpses of his solitary life. This book, in fact, is mainly a collection of his life's experiences as narrated by him to his many devotees who took notes of what he said. Thus this biography can to an extent be described as an indirect autobiography. Truth-seekers are likely to find it beneficial.

CHAPTER ONE

The Child Ascetic

Glory to the Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omnipotent Supreme Soul who manifested Lord Rama in Ayodhya, a place that lies in the heart of what is now known as the state of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. Glory to the One who brought forth Swami Brahmanand Saraswatiji Maharaj in the holy village of Gana, a place not far from Ayodhya.

Maharaj Shri was born on Thursday, December 21, 1870, in a Saryoopareen Panktipawan Gana Mishra Brahmin Zamindar family: highly respected, well-known, well-to-do. All the normal comforts and luxuries of life were available to him as a child. But who knew that he would one day spurn the velvet and prove himself a supreme ascetic yogi? And who knew that this yogi would one day grace the venerable seat of Shankaracharya?

Maharaj Shri's early years were very unusual. Even as a child he sensed the transitoriness of the world, and had an urge to renounce it. He

was unconcerned about routine affairs. Loved solitude and mature behaviour. Disliked fickleness. His soulful transcendental look impressed everybody. He had no tongue for tasty sweetmeats nor an eye for fashionable clothes. He had no interest in the usual pleasures and entertainment, in toys and games that children play. He opposed purposeless talk and purposeless activity. Where he sat, he sat, lost in his own train of thoughts. Seeing his seriousness and unusually mature behaviour, family folks were astounded, and grasped, however vaguely, that they were in the presence of a celebrity in the making. Sharp intelligence, logical reasoning, quick decision-making: age, seven.

At that age he lost his most beloved companion, playmate, friend. His grandfather, a hundred years old, died. He was not allowed to see the corpse, though a servant took him to a window from where he managed to see the covered body of his grandfather being taken away to the chant of Ram Naam Satya hai, Ram Naam Satya hai, Ram Naam Satya hai.

Eyes closed as if in meditative sleep, his grandfather was going away forever, never to meet again, leaving behind his last message,

‘Ram Naam Satya hai.’ Lord, Thy Name is Truth. Lord, Thy Name is Truth. Lord, Thy Name is Truth.

The child’s thoughts turned to Death. His grandfather, whom he had regarded as his own, had left. One by one, he thought, they would all leave: his father, his mother, his uncles and aunts, all his relatives. One day, he himself would be dead. When everyone has to go, no one is to live forever, then what is the truth? What is it that is permanent? What is it that will remain? Vibrating loudly in his ears was the sound, Ram Naam Satya hai—Lord, Thy Name is Truth.

Days passed, but the thoughts generated by this sound reverberated deeper and deeper in him. The sound was inerasably recorded in his innermost consciousness. It became the refrain of his life, his motto. He became more and more convinced about the illusion pertaining to this world. His folks, attributing his melancholy solely to his grandfather’s death, wondered how to console him.

One year passed, he was eight years old. The Upnayan ceremony was duly performed in accordance with the Vedic rites, The sacred thread was put around his body. And he was sent to

Kashi (Benares or Varanasi) for a study of the Vedas. As days passed, the cultural mainstream of the ancient city had a growing impact on him, so that he resolved that come what may, he would devote his life entirely to spiritual development.

The first test came soon enough. In accordance with the prevalent customs of high caste Brahmins in those days, his people now eagerly sought to get him married which, they thought, might also cure his other-worldiness. Relatives were sent to Benares to bring him back for this purpose. He who had not turned nine, not even shed all his milk-teeth was being told to get married.

For most children, it is a time to wrestle and to play, to laugh and to romp about, but for him—marriage! Marriage and the incumbent wordly life, which he so much wanted to renounce, beckoned him. It was a major crisis for one so young in years but far advanced in intellect.

He had to make a choice immediately between a life of sensual pleasures, of physical comforts, of luxuries, of satisfaction of normal human desires and a life of ascetism, of denial,

of renunciation, founded on the permanence of Truth, promising peace and equanimity, and freedom from desire.

The path was chosen, the decision was made. The young ascetic in Kashi, renouncing all worldly desires, set out next morning on a lonely upstream journey along the banks of the river Bhagirathi (the Ganga). With his mind fixed on the inward Goal the child advanced in rapid steps alongside the Ganga. The sun rose, the sandy trail became hotter and hotter, but he kept walking, undeterred, calm, ready to face all challenges.

The river goddess suggested that he should drink a few sips of the holy water with the cup of his hands and rest a while under a shady tree. But he replied, “Mother, it is with your grace alone that I can make this long journey. Let me not get into the habit of stopping. Let me reach soon a cave in the Himalayas where I can sit and find my life’s fulfilment.”

Saying this, he bowed to Goddess Bhagirathi and moved on. Without rest, without sleep, unafraid of the desolate night, he moved on and on and on. On and on. On and on and on. Hungry or thirsty, or hungry and thirsty, he drank a few

mouthfuls of the Ganga water with his hollowed palm, and moved on. On and on.

One day passed.

Two days.

What a test for Destiny to give to someone so young in years! And also to give him the fortitude that enabled him to pass it!

It was nearing sunset on the third day. The young traveller was moving onwards, kicking up a lot of dust, leaping over shrubs, when a zamindar (village landlord) noticed him and wondered who he was and where he was going. He tried to send for him through his servant, but could he dare do that and insult the young traveller moving so freely and with such single-minded intent? When the servant failed to elicit response, the zamindar went himself.

“Who are you?” the zamindar asked, when he caught up to him at last.

Came the reply, “Why do you want to know? What is your intention?”

He entreated, “All I want to know is who are you and why are you going in such a great hurry on this rugged path at such an odd time.”

The young ascetic said, “You are not in a position to know whether this is the right path

or the wrong path, the right time or the wrong time. Sufficient for you to know that I am travelling from Kashi to the Himalayas in order to meditate. Go and mind your own business and don't trouble me for nothing."

The zamindar taken aback somewhat mustered courage enough to say softly, "Maharaj, may I ask you when and where on the way you have begged for food?"

He got the reply, "So far the Ganga water has been my food and my drink."

"Then come and have some food and rest before going further. That will give me satisfaction. Moreover, it's getting to be dark."

"I'm not going to knock at anyone's door for food. As for satisfaction, I cannot believe that your giving me a meal would give you satisfaction. Satisfaction means that no desires remain and after that no desires arise.

Your giving me alms is not going to give you that satisfaction. That can come only if you know the Supreme Essence, knowing which all else is known, and obtaining which nothing remains unobtainable.

So make such efforts that bring you real satisfaction."

What a glorious philosophy from such an innocent mouth! The zamindar wondered about the extent of learning that must be in the institution that produced such talk from the lips of a mere youngster.

Milk was arranged on the river bank itself. Our philosopher friend poured two-thirds of it into the river as an offering in repayment of the water he had drunk during the last three days.

The river goddess was immensely pleased and gave him a boon: He would never again need to quench his hunger with water alone. And indeed it so happened that during the many years that he spent in lonely caves or thick jungles or barren plains, he never had to beg for food and yet it came aplenty in some form or the other.

Many a time on dark dismal nights in the forest, he would receive pots of cream and baskets of fruits from nowhere—from somewhere.

Onwards once again with the Himalayan journey to the Himalayas up the meandering bank of the Ganga. He said his evening prayers as was his daily practice.

When he felt hungry again, he ate some leaves or whatever he thought was edible, accessible. When he felt thirsty, he drank the holy

water. When he felt tired, he slept, or rested under a shady tree.

The spiritual fire that burned within him gave his body a radiance and lustre that drew near him everyone who crossed his path. Some saw in him a modern Dhruva, some a modern Prahlad. (Dhruva and Prahlad were ancient Indian child saints.) A day passed. A night passed. The journey went on and on. After three more days, he noticed that the river had become very much broader. Actually he had arrived at the Sangam (confluence) of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. He learnt from the people that he was in Prayag (Allahabad).

From his grandfather he had heard about the Triveni, or the sacred meeting-point of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. With great devotion he took dips at the holy spot. Then he moved onwards. Feeling tired, he sat down on a wooden plank near the riverside at the Dashashwamedh Ghat.

Some time later, he was sitting, meditating, when a stranger came and sat down nearby. Both remained motionless for quite a long time. The stranger saw how different this child was from other children of his age. He looked tired and

yet there was a glow on his face. The stranger took out a piece of paper from his pocket, read it, and looked again at the child's facial features. Then he came very close and sat down beside him. The child ascetic was shocked a little by this behaviour and looked curiously at him. The man once more took out the paper from his pocket and placed it before the child.

Child ascetic: What is this?

Man: Your description.

Child ascetic: Who are you?

Man: I am a policeman.

Child ascetic: What do you want?

Policeman: This is your description. You have run away from home...

Child ascetic: There is no need to talk much. It's just a description, isn't it?

Policeman: Yes.

Child ascetic: Then whoever has given you this description, inform him that I am here. If someone loses an animal, he reports a description to the police. But I am someone's son. Go and inform him that I have come here. If he wants he should take me from here.

Policeman: Yes, of course, I will inform. But tell me why have you come away from home?

Child ascetic: It's a fine question, "Why have you come away from home?" I ask you, why do you never leave your home?

For a while the policeman forgot who he was. He was wonderstruck by the philosophic logic of the little boy's retort.

Policeman: Everybody stays at home because that is where the comfort is. Why have you left the comfort of your home? Why are you wandering restlessly on the riverside on such a hot afternoon?

Child ascetic: Go, Sir, mind your own business. Go and enjoy the pleasures of home. In the lap of Mother Ganga, or on the sands, or walking on a silent afternoon in the wilderness—do I wander about restlessly or do I have the very bliss of life? —you'll never understand.

The policeman felt cut down to size, and sensed a great deal of respect for the child ascetic.

Policeman: You are young of age. But you seem to belong to a very high family. Roaming around like this—like an orphan—don't you feel...ashamed?

Child ascetic: It's true I'm small. But you consider yourself big, don't you? But being big

you still don't understand who is an orphan and who is not an orphan. If you think about it a little, then you will see that the Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Supreme Soul is everyone's Guardian, is everyone's Master, is everyone's Father. Whoever surrenders to Him, takes refuge in Him, puts himself in His protection, can he be regarded as an orphan? I ask you, whoever has not established contact with the Father, is he not an orphan?

Such sagacious words coming from the mouth of one so very young left the policeman speechless and he thought that this was no ordinary child but a Mahatma in the bud.

After a few minutes' silence, the policeman said with great humility: Now please do me a favour. Come with me because I have this description. I cannot actually leave you over here but I will not take you to the police station. You come with me to my house. You stay there the night. Tomorrow morning we'll do what we consider best.

After pleading with the child ascetic the policeman took him home. A long dialogue with the child during the night convinced the policeman that his hostage was bent upon reaching

the Himalayas to devote his life exclusively to meditation with the sole objective of complete God-realization.

The policeman thought that it would be better if the child could go by train. Early next morning the policeman made it clear that he did not want to be an impediment in the child's noble path. But his description had been relayed to police stations all over the country, and if he continued his journey on foot by the side of the Ganga he would get caught somewhere or the other.

What the child ascetic wanted now happened. He wanted to reach Haridwar the quickest possible way and now he was being requested to do so. What strange coincidence that the one who had come to obstruct him, wanted to help him to get away faster. Amazing indeed are the experiences of God's true devotees. The All-powerful, the All-knowing God aware of the innermost desires of His seekers creates circumstances that bring about their fulfilment. The policeman bought him a ticket and put him on the train. Next day, the child ascetic reached Haridwar.

When he was going for a dip in the Ganga, a police inspector noticed him. The inspector

saw that this was the same child for whom a big hunt was going on. "Why not send him home and earn a reward?" he thought, and with that followed him. Catching up, he asked, "Son, why have you left your home and where are you going?"

"In order to meet my Supreme Father I'm making straight for the Himalayas."

"I want to send you back to your people for which I'll get a reward."

"My decision is final. Even if you send me back, I shall not stay and will leave again the next day for this very place. So do not stand in my way and let me go. If, however, you are greedy for a reward, then do send me back and take your reward. Do as you like."

The police inspector was essentially a religious man. He heeded the child's request, and quietly went away. Next day, however, as our young hero with Himalayan aspirations was moving towards Rishikesh, another police inspector accosted him. He also recognized him from the description available with him and remembered that there was a reward for tracing him. He was not to be persuaded and the child ascetic was sent back home.