

*Dedicated to the memory of  
Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi,  
Paramacharya of Kanchi,  
from whom I received much  
love and guidance.*



## Fullness

*He who is meek and contented, he who has an equal vision,  
Whose mind is filled with the fullness of acceptance and of rest;  
He who has seen Him and touched Him, he is freed from all fear and travail.  
To him the perpetual thought of God is like sandal paste  
Smearred on the body, to him nothing else is delight:  
His work and his rest are filled with music: he spreads the radiance of love.  
Kabir says: Touch His feet, Who is one and indivisible,  
Immutable and Calm,  
Filling all vessels to the brim  
With ecstatic joy,  
Whose form is Love.*

KABIR

(From *The Jewel in the Lotus*, edited by Raghavan Iyer.)

## Foreword

To maintain a diary meticulously is neither simple nor easy. It requires enormous discipline to devote time every day or at least once in two or three days whatever be the other pressures on one's time. A diary must recapture the thoughts and perceptions at the time of the occurrence and not the views formed later. Very few Statesmen, philosophers and other eminent men in India have kept a diary. Hence their contemporary thinking has been lost to the nation. Later historians have also been deprived of source material for their works. I therefore congratulate my esteemed friend M.Y. Ghorpade on a diary meticulously kept with minute details of the visit of the Paramacharya to Sandur, Hospet, Dharwad, Miraj, Gulbarga and Kurnool and of his several visits to Kanchi.

The diary brings out several aspects of the Saint's life with some of which each devotee has personal knowledge and experience. For instance every one knows about the benevolent kindness and compassion of the Paramacharya and have been the recipient of such blessings. Again every one has been amazed at the versatile knowledge of the sage. His knowledge of Art, Architecture, Culture, History of places and temples, rituals practised in temples, Science and latest international events is amazing. It is my experience that even the most educated and well versed have been unable to answer some of his piercing questions. In short, the Sage was a Brahma Gnani. This book "Paramacharya of Kanchi" is replete with instances of his deep insight and versatile knowledge. Whether it be the

history of Hampi or the significance of several temples in the area, the Paramacharya's knowledge was comprehensive and complete. He would confer a rare privilege on some devotees by asking them to renovate a temple or instal an idol. Shri Ghorpade is one such fortunate person.

Swamiji made no distinction between very important persons and the common folk. He received them wherever he was. Shri Ghorpade mentions that the Swamiji received President Sanjiva Reddy in the cattle shed where the Swamiji was giving darshan to other devotees. Swamiji did the same thing to Gandhiji and to Indira Gandhi also. I had the same experience several times. While I would be struggling to ward off the stinging mosquitoes, the Paramacharya was impervious to any discomfort.

One striking feature I have noticed about Swamiji is that every one without exception who met the Acharya used to claim that the Acharya had a special affection and kindness for him. I often wondered why he alone is able to create this feeling amongst all his devotees without exception. The Paramacharya was able to interiorise the problems and woes of his devotees and offer solace to them and when they poured forth their heart, it appeared as if the Paramacharya was absorbing those problems as his own and establish the unity of the Souls in him and his devotee. This is possible only for a Jivan Muktha who has realised the universality of the soul in all beings.

This volume gives a complete account of Paramacharya's daily routine,

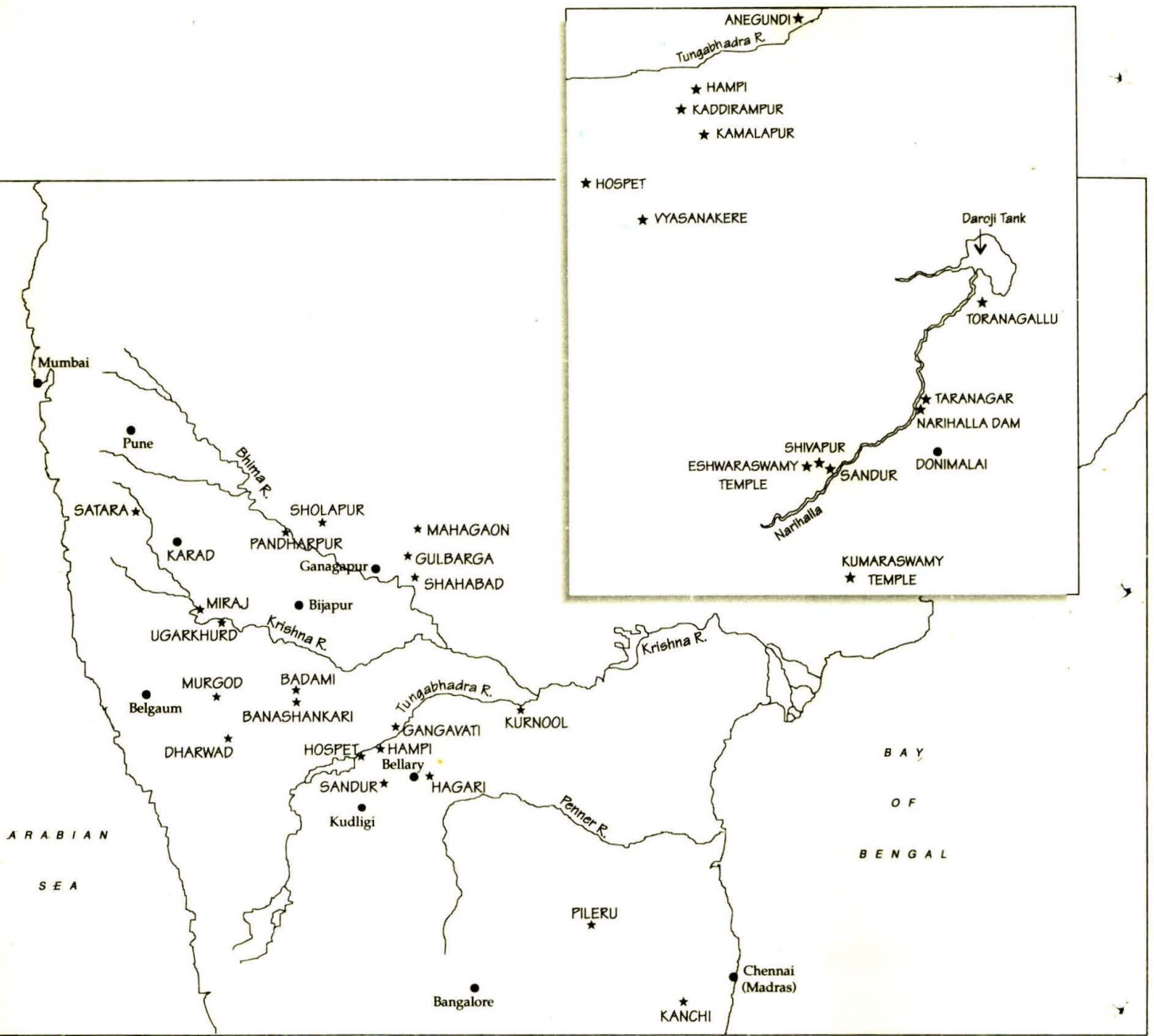
his knowledge of almost everything under the Sun, his anxiety to promote Vedic knowledge through Pathashalas, his unparalleled austerity and his boundless love, kindness and compassion. Every one who reads this volume will recall hundreds of such instances in his own life and experience.

Shri Ghorpade is a scion of the royal family of Sandur and a graduate of the Cambridge University. He has a facile command of the English language. He has good knowledge of Sanskrit and a fair grounding in our scriptures. He conveys spiritual sayings of the Paramacharya lucidly and in a language that common people can understand. Interspersed in this volume are Paramacharya's simple enunciation of Advaita philosophy and explanations from Upanishads, etc. I am sure, people would enjoy reading the volume as they could substitute themselves for the author and undergo the same ecstasies in the narration.

26 August 1996



**R. Venkataraman**  
Former President of India



★ Places visited by the author for the Darshan of Paramacharya of Kanchi

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## Author's Note

Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the Paramacharya of Kanchi, visited Sandur in September 1978, as part of his *padayatra* in Bellary district and the neighbouring areas, in keeping with his simple spiritual way of life and traditional practice, reminiscent of the great Adi Shankara who also walked the length and breadth of our country, spreading the message of *Advaita* or non-duality several centuries ago.

The Paramacharya was widely recognised as one of the greatest saints and mystics of our times. The Swamiji stayed at Sandur from 27 September 1978 to 21 October 1978, in the Eshwaraswamy temple which is more than a thousand years old and very close to my house, Shivapur. I had the good fortune to meet him often, walk with him, talk with him and experience the silence and spirituality. Even after he left Sandur and Bellary district, I kept meeting him whenever possible and after his return to Kanchi, until he attained *Mahasanadhi* on 8 January 1994.

It was a spiritual and human relationship which has been recorded in my diary, without which I could not have now written this book. It is essentially recollections from my diary, which contains particulars of almost every meeting with the Swamiji. It is a personal account of what I saw and felt with my sensory and, perhaps, extrasensory perceptions. It is not a treatise on the Swamiji's life and philosophy about which much has already been written. It is just a truthful account of my meetings with the Swamiji and the details of his daily life and routine as observed by me. It is being published along with the photographs I could take of the Swamiji. I do

hope it would be of interest to the devotees and others who would like to know a little more about this great sage and spiritual master from a personal view point.

16 May 1996

**M.Y. Ghorpade**

*Swamiji at Sandur*

Hagari, Toranagallu, Sandur,  
Eshwaraswamy and Kumaraswamy Temples

## Swamiji at Sandur

Hagari

23 August 1978

Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the Paramacharya of Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha, was camping on the banks of the river Hagari, at the crossing of roads, about 15 kilometers from Bellary. Some friends and devotees of the Swamiji had had his *darshan* only the other day. I had heard of the Swamiji as one of the greatest living mystics of our times. I had also read how when Paul Brunton met him for spiritual guidance, the Swamiji had directed him to meet Ramana Maharshi, another great mystic of our times. Now that this great spiritual personality was physically in Bellary district and so close to Sandur, I decided to go and see him, though, I must confess, I have no marked propensity to visit Swamijis and God-men — not that I am indifferent or insensitive to true spirituality which is very much a part of our innate nature.

On 23 August 1978 I left Sandur at 9.00 a.m., picked up Tekur Krishnamurthy at Bellary, and reached Hagari by 10.30 a.m. The Swamiji was sitting in the *mantapa* of the temple near the calcium carbide factory set up by the late Machani Somappa. There were a couple of dozen devotees when we reached the spot. The person close to the Swamiji told him our names and the places we came from, as was customary. The Swamiji beckoned us affectionately to sit down. The gesture he made with his hand was both a sign and a blessing. There was a soft benign smile on his face. I felt perfectly at home. It was like paying homage to an old and venerable elder whom one was meeting after many years. I was grateful to be in the pres-

ence of so human a person in spite of his great reputation and spiritual aura which, perhaps, was the reason why one felt so comfortable and at peace with the world. I was quite content to sit and wait. Suddenly, after a couple of minutes, the Swamiji asked me through his interpreter, how many brothers I had and what they were doing. He hardly spoke in his own voice, and when he did it was in a low whisper. He preferred to converse through his interpreter and the sign language which he had perfected and well understood by the interpreter and often by the person for whom it was meant.

After about ten minutes the Swamiji got up and went inside. I was also preparing to leave when the factory authorities insisted that I have a cup of tea in the building whose foundation stone, they said, I had laid when I was Finance Minister of Karnataka (1972-77). Hardly had I gone inside the building when there was a message that the Swamiji had called me. I hurried to the hut in the sand next to the temple where the Swamiji was sitting. There was, on his face, the same soft smile which was such a totally fulfilling expression of loving care for all without any distinctions. I put my folded hands and forehead on the sand in front of him, only to be asked how many children I had. I replied briefly, three boys and a girl. He then blessed me and went inside the hut and I came home full of joy and fulfillment. The effect of this meeting has still not left me. It is a sort of feeling which enhances peace and makes one more sure of oneself and one's ultimate destiny, without really knowing what it is. Nor did it seem important to know. It was enough to feel the wholeness which is also holiness.

It was amazing how any person who was nearly 85 years of age, as the Swamiji, could walk as much as 20 km. a day, look so fresh and live on just a handful of dried rice and milk. He never travelled in a car and had walked to Hagari from Tadepalli, in spite of the rain and the generally inclement

weather. They said he might go to Hampi. I was happy to have the opportunity of requesting him to visit Sandur and the Kumaraswamy (also known as Kartikeya, Kartikeshwara, Subrahmanya) temple (6). The Swamiji just smiled and delicately cupped his right palm in a gesture of blessing, which I was to know and experience so many times in the past fifteen years. The spiritual goodness seemed to flow from every gesture and every moment, like being under a spiritual shower. That is all I can say.

My parents went to Hagari the next day (24 August 1978) for Swamiji's *darshan*. It was also their first *darshan* which left them greatly satisfied. They reached about 10.30 a.m. when the Swamiji was returning to his hut from the river. He gave them an apple and a mosambi or sweet-lime and went into his hut. They sat on the sand for an hour before the Swamiji came out again from his hut. He witnessed a poor woman wailing and crying her heart out for some reason or the other. My father says he saw a tear roll down the cheek of the Swamiji. It is quite remarkable how such great souls have an intense capacity to feel and share human suffering, in spite of the rare heights of detachment they have reached. Compassion and spirituality are obviously inseparable and belong to the same stream of consciousness.

Hagari

4 September 1978

I went to see the Swamiji again on Monday, 4 September. He was in the same hut next to the temple. As soon as he saw me, he showed his four fingers enquiring about my four children. I told the Swamiji that I would bring them next time, at the commencement of the Ganesha festival, on the day Ganapathi is installed on Wednesday, 6 September — not that I

was looking for an auspicious day. It was just a happy coincidence. Any day on which the family could meet the Swamiji would be auspicious. Like last time, after I had had good *darshan*, I was again sent for, this time because Balachandrasastry of the Sanskrit *Pathashala*, Dharwad, had arrived and was with the Swamiji. I went quickly to the hut where the Swamiji was giving *darshan* to devotees. The sand outside the hut was hot. I was happy to enter the hut and sit in the cool shade in the presence of the Swamiji. Balachandrasastry thought that he should introduce me properly to the Swamiji and started referring to my work as Finance Minister. Swamiji had a twinkle in his eyes and made a gesture with his thumb and index finger to indicate finance or the counting or testing of coins to be precise. I cut short Balachandrasastry by saying that I have come away from all that. But Balachandrasastry was not deterred. In the traditional manner he asked whether I had anything to ask the Swamiji. This became a little awkward as it was totally unexpected. To say that I had nothing to ask would have sounded a bit abrupt. And so I said hesitatingly that I had voluntarily come away from active politics and power in search of peace and renewal. I did some meditation and would feel blessed for Swamiji's guidance in that direction. The Swamiji understood and shook his head with a knowing smile and right hand gently raised in blessing. I had really nothing else to say to him and there was no need to say anything more. I felt the cool sand in front of his feet and felt light and unburdened. Before I left, I renewed my request to the Swamiji to visit Sandur and the Kumaraswamy temple. This time he brought the finger tips of his two hands together in front of him to signify a mountain, as if to say 'I know the temple is on a hill'. There was serene satisfaction on his face and I thought I could notice a hint of eagerness. I came out of the hut and back to Sandur feeling very happy.

Hagari

6 September 1978

On 6 September, after installation of Ganapathi at Sandur, the whole family went to Hagari for Swamiji's *darshan*. The Swamiji was doing *Ganapathi pooja* in the temple. We sat and watched him direct the proceedings for more than an hour. He was instructing the *archakas* to perform the rituals to the *Ganapathi vighraha* which was placed at the entrance to the *garbhagudi* or sanctum sanctorum of the Shiva temple. Swamiji was mostly inside the *garbhagudi*. After the completion of the *pooja* he sat for a while, as the devotees did *pranams* and filed past him. There was a faint smile of recognition on his face but we could not talk to him. Even on the previous occasion, his voice was very feeble as he had been observing *mouna* or silence for many days, and only his *shishyas* or disciples could follow what he was saying and would translate it for our benefit. The Swamiji whispered mostly in Tamil — not that he did not know Kannada or English. He knew these languages very well, but had to take into account what the traditional disciples knew best. Incidentally, the parents of the Paramacharya belonged to the Hoysala Karnataka Brahmin sect whose mother tongue was Kannada. The Swamiji's paternal grandfather, Ganapathi Sastri, was well versed in Kannada, Marathi, Telugu and Tamil.

Kumaraswamy temple

8 September 1978

It was *Skanda Shasti*. At the ancient Kumaraswamy temple, near Sandur, there was *abhisheka* in the early hours of the morning followed by *alankara darshana*. The handsome God looked particularly effulgent. The *archakas*



chanted the Vedic verses and did *arati* which is the culmination of any *pooja*. Just then, a bunch of yellow *shevanti* flowers, securely tucked away near the God's spearhead, rolled down on its own without any apparent external cause or reason. It could be the sound vibrations of rhythmic chanting. But nothing prevented the human mind from thinking that it was an auspicious signal of the God and Swamiji, knowing that they would soon see each other like in a mirror. After all, much of beauty is created by the human imagination and the line separating it from superstition is very thin. Signals and symbols only reflect what is uppermost in our own mind and heart

Toranagallu—Tararagar

26 September 1978

I had to go away from Sandur on work for some days. When I returned, I found that the Swamiji had left Hagari and was moving towards Toranagallu, on the Bellary-Hospet road, where one takes a deviation to the left for Sandur. The Swamiji reached Toranagallu from Kuditini in the early hours of 25 September 1978. An improvised shed had been constructed for him in the garage of the inspection bungalow next to the high-level canal. My father and I went there at about 8.00 a.m. on 26 September, so that we could once again invite the Swamiji to Sandur before the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, arrived at 10.30 a.m., with the hustle and bustle that accompanies such visits even to small places like Toranagallu. A tricycle, with a box-like contraption in wood and expanded mesh, to carry Swamiji's meager requirements, was parked at the entrance to the garage, and the Swamiji was doing *japa* or *dhyana* behind a bamboo partition. When we were

taken to the Swamiji, we once again requested him to come to Sandur, with one intermediary halt at Taranagar, which is just outside the Bheemanagandi gorge at the entrance to the oval-shaped valley (16) which was described by Mahatma Gandhi as an "oasis" when he visited it in 1934. The Swamiji just smiled and shook his head in agreement. Toranagallu, which is 11 km. from Taranagar, must have been, as the name indicates, the entrance to the outer limits of Hampi, the famous capital of the Vijayanagar empire. The Swamiji had already decided to come to Sandur. Our request was only a formality, but his warm and spontaneous response made us very happy.

At 10.30 a.m. the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, accompanied by Devaraj Urs, the Chief Minister of Karnataka, and a few others arrived, as per schedule, without much fanfare. C. Rudrappa, who was the local member of the State Legislative Assembly, garlanded them at the gate in due discharge of a formality. (Incidentally, Toranagallu is the eastern entrance to the Sandur Assembly Constituency which I had represented continuously from 1959, and from which I had asked C. Rudrappa to contest in 1978, as politics at that time was not quite to my liking and I had decided to keep away from active politics for sometime with the consent of both Indira Gandhi and Devaraj Urs). Tonpe, Morarji's Private Secretary, told me that when they had sent a man to meet the Swamiji and find out where Morarji could meet the Swamiji on certain dates, the Swamiji had indicated that he would be on his way to Sandur on those dates. After the exchange of some pleasantries, Morarji went inside the garage with Devaraj Urs and some others. After a few minutes everybody except Morarji came out of the garage. Morarji spent about 20 minutes with the Swamiji. The Swamiji had just nodded in the affirmative when Morarji asked in Hindi whether he was going to Sandur. Morarji sat silently for about 20 minutes, after which he asked for the blessings of the Swamiji and left. I understand that Indira Gandhi, when she

was Prime Minister, had also met the Swamiji at Kalavai, near Kanchi, sat silently in his presence for quite some time, the Swamiji on one side of a water-well and she on the other. The Swamiji preferred to communicate without words. Moreover, he showed little interest in politics, as is generally practiced now — a game of power, not principles. His main concern was humanity and service which to him was basically an extension or expression of spirituality.

I returned to Toranagallu at about 5.00 p.m. after having chosen a suitable place for the Swamiji to spend the night at Taranagar. It was a spot near the distributary which carried the waters of the Narihalla from the reservoir to the fields of Taranagar. Flowing water was what Swamiji liked very much. He valued it more than any other thing in choosing a spot to stay. Narihalla is the stream that flows through the Sandur valley. An earthen dam on this had been constructed at the gorge near Taranagar. This medium irrigation project had been the dream of Sandur. Work on it had commenced when I was Finance Minister and this year we were to give water to the farmers. It would also provide drinking water to Donimalai and eventually to Sandur. The Swamiji reached Taranagar from Toranagallu by about 8.30 p.m. The people of Taranagar gave him a warm welcome and the rural folk were happy singing *bhajans*. The Swamiji made them all sit down and blessed them. Saints and mystics have an aura of peace which is highly infectious. One feels humble and happy in their presence.

The Swamiji was to proceed to Sandur the next morning (Wednesday, 27 September 1978) at about 8.00 a.m. But it had rained rather heavily in the early hours of the morning, and though the rain had stopped by 8.00 a.m., the Swamiji decided to start his journey to Sandur on foot only at about 3.00 p.m. At 8.00 a.m. he was standing in the open and I got good *darshan*. A little later he went inside and interestingly conveyed to me with appropriate gestures that he wanted some half a dozen pairs of rubber *chappals* to be used by some disciples while climbing and crossing the Sandur range of hills. He conveyed this by first showing me his wooden sandals and then indicating plasticity or rubber with telling movements of his thumb and index finger. He himself walked barefoot or in the traditional wooden sandals but wanted these modern rubber *chappals* for some of his disciples and followers. It was also more than a direct hint to me that I could also wear these rubber *chappals* to protect my feet from the harshness of the road surface and the slush after the rains, though I had not told him that I had already decided to walk with him barefoot from Taranagar to Sandur. His concern for others was so touching that when we were actually about to leave Taranagar for Sandur at about 4.00 p.m., he once again enquired whether we had been able to get the rubber slippers. It was a unique experience to walk with the Swamiji. It was amazing to see the Swamiji climb up and down the hill without even a hint of perspiration or panting. When we came to the top of the Taranagar-Sandur road, overlooking the Narihalla dam, the Swamiji took a few steps towards a boulder from where he stood gazing at the water spread below and once again that soft sensitive smile lit up his face in the evening sun. He stood there for a few minutes before getting back to the tricycle on the road to resume the journey. Sometimes,

in sun and rain and long journeys, the tricycle went ahead of the Swamiji who held it lightly from behind, with the canvas flap hanging down from the roof of the box-like structure on it, serving to protect his head and back. But most of the time he walked freely without any support or aid, taking in the scenic beauty of Sandur in September. He walked nonstop with his wooden slippers and sometimes barefoot. At some places I became conscious of the rough road surface and the slippery but sharp pebbles pricking my feet which were not used to walking barefoot. Sometimes, I wished I had been less strong-headed and had accepted the Swamiji's kindly advice to wear rubber slippers. But the whole atmosphere was so surcharged with spiritual excitement that one did not really feel the physical discomfort so much. The people were chanting *bhajans* in praise of God and we were following a man of God who lifted us all above the monotonous and the mundane. The Swamiji was so austere and yet so simple and sensitive, sometimes like a child which feels and radiates security in its natural innocence.

After walking for about 8 km. we came to the Donimalai crossing, where a group of employees from the National Mineral Development Corporation (N.M.D.C.) surrounded the tricycle and the Swamiji to persuade and pressurise him to turn left and proceed to Donimalai instead of Sandur. It was not a reasonable request, as Donimalai was about 8 km. from here and it was already getting late for Sandur, where a large gathering of people were awaiting the Swamiji's arrival, in great anticipation and awareness of the significance of the moment. The Swamiji took the situation in his own stride and raised his right hand towards Sandur. That was the end of the interruption and we moved on towards Sandur. The Swamiji could always go to Donimalai later from Sandur. This was only the beginning of his visit to this valley.

The distance to Sandur was about 4 km. from this spot. As we reached the *nala* or streambed near Krishnanagar, people from Sandur town started joining us and soon we were linked by a string of people to the main body awaiting in the streets of Sandur and on treetops. When we actually reached Sandur, there was a huge crowd all along the route from the entrance to the circle where the four roads meet. So many people had never turned up in this manner before. Though it was dark the Swamiji was walking at a brisk pace behind the tricycle. The people watched with reverence the 85-year old Swamiji who was known to have walked the length and breadth of India on foot, in the best tradition of Adi Shankara, to bless as many people and places as possible and to maintain that living link between souls and spirituality.

It was 7.30 p.m. when we reached the Eshwaraswamy temple (7), opposite Shivapur which is my home. It is an ancient Shiva temple, more than thousand years old, with an *ashwatha* or peepul (*Ficus religiosa*) tree in the courtyard. My parents, wife and children were there to receive the Swamiji. Balachandrasastry was also present and chanted the appropriate hymns and Sanskrit *slokas* with the *puṅnakumbha*. My mother and wife did *arati*, the traditional welcome with lamps, while my sons, Sujai and Kartik, and the crowd looked on. As soon as the Swamiji entered the temple premises there was a hush. The Swamiji looked around and sat on his straw mat under the *ashwatha* tree. As we did our *pranams* or traditional salutations, he blessed us all with a smile and a protective right hand gently raised with fingers slightly bent to convey by an age-old gesture, *ashirawada* and *abhaya* — freedom from fear. There was such an atmosphere of peace of a kind we had not experienced before. Swamiji who had been so austere and silent at Hagari and even Toranagallu, suddenly started speaking freely to all. We had not known that his voice was so clear and affectionate. The Swamiji

saw me standing at some distance and asked me to come close. Smilingly he pointed to his legs and told Balachandrasastry that I had walked with him from Taranagar and my legs must be aching. I did not know what to say. I was overwhelmed by his humanness and consideration, also his affectionate sense of humour. Balachandrasastry replied on my behalf that I had only done what I had decided to do, my *sankalpa*, and felt fulfilled doing so. The Swamiji smiled his childlike smile which I will never forget. When my wife, Vasundhara, was introduced to him, the Swamiji thought of Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda and wanted to know whether she was his great-granddaughter, which she was. Then a large number of people did *pranams* to the Swamiji. It was not just a formal act but a genuine unself-conscious act of devotion and surrender to a higher power which was so very benign and benevolent. Seldom does one come across such spontaneous recognition of divinity in human form, from so many people from all walks of life, irrespective of caste and creed. The unifying peace of true spirituality could be directly felt and experienced by all. It was about 9.00 p.m. when the Swamiji gently asked us to retire and leave him to his meditation. Sandur had become his.

Eshwaraswamy temple

28 September 1978

There is only a road separating Shivapur, my house, from the Eshwaraswamy temple. When I went to the temple this morning, the Swamiji was sitting under the peepul tree and talking freely to the people who had already gathered there. It was like a great-grandfather talking to his children. The Swamiji was making kind enquiries about their families and work. Each one

felt that the burden had been lifted from their shoulders and there was nothing in the world to worry about. There was such a marvelous atmosphere of informality and peace. Everybody who came there, rich or poor, felt the equal vision of the Paramacharya. Every word and gesture of his reflected the essential unity and oneness of mankind and the kindness of God — the universal soul or source from which the world has been born. Devotees who had known the Acharya at Kanchi were amazed to see him in this mood at Sandur. They said that they had not seen him like this for years.

*Eshwaraswamy temple*

*29 September 1978*

The Swamiji was sitting in the Eshwaraswamy temple when he sent for me. My parents and Vasundhara were already there and two of my sons, Ajai and Sujai, joined a little later. The Swamiji spoke kindly to Ajai and asked Sujai whether there was a Shiva temple at Shivapur, to which he answered in the affirmative. There was nobody else in the temple except Balu, who normally acted as an interpreter and had to be near the Swamiji, who was in a very expansive and talkative mood. I spoke to him in Kannada which is his mother tongue. He asked me about the various regions of Karnataka and said that there were quite a few Kannadigas in Goa. He asked me whether I knew that Panduranga was also called *Kanadi Vithala*. I told him how the Kannada speaking areas had come under one rule only from 1956 and how, in Bellary district, Kannada and Telugu had received patronage in the days of the Vijayanagar kings. Now there were quite a few Tamilians working here. The Swamiji referred to them as “new comers”. He used quite a few English words and spoke Kannada fluently. Obviously he was



also well-versed in Marathi, apart from Tamil which was of course the language he knew best. I was amazed at his knowledge of science and history. He talked of the southern region and asked whether we had noticed that the people on the western coast were fair while the colour of the skin becomes darker as we went deeper into the peninsula. The point that he was making was that skin complexion depends not only on the degree of heat but on the penetrative scorching quality of light from the sun's rays in different areas, apart from other factors. To convey to me what exactly he had in mind, he gave an illustration from "photography" and more specifically to the effect of light on "printing paper" in a "dark room". (The words in quotation are those used by the Swamiji). The effect of the sun's rays on the skin was not the same in all regions, just as even a ray of light can fog the printing paper in a dark room. It obviously depends on the quality of light and the sensitivity of paper. But what was fascinating to me was his knowledge of photography. I learnt later that the Acharya had done some photography in his school days. He used words like "experience" and "culture" when he talked on more serious subjects such as the quality of governance of the country. But generally he was in a light playful mood (5). He would teasingly ask Balu whether he had been taught this or that fact of science or history in school, to which Balu would often answer in the negative without the slightest embarrassment. That the Swamiji was in such a communicative mood was a great boon to all those who met him in those days at Sandur. Obviously he liked the temple and the surroundings and had left far behind his earlier *mouna* or silence. The impact of his hearty behaviour was tremendous on me who had the good fortune to spend so much time with him under these circumstances.

In the evenings from 5 to 9.00 p.m. was community prayer time. Groups of people would come from Sandur and the neighbouring villages to sing

*bhajans* in the presence or within the hearing of the Swamiji, who liked the local, down-to-earth *bhajans* very much. The culture of India is so much intertwined with the mood and experience of prayerfulness and peace. The Swamiji would see that *arati* is performed at the main Eshwaraswamy temple and also visit regularly the other two temples of Parvati and Venkateshwara on the northern side of the main temple. Near the Parvati temple there is another little temple which generally goes unnoticed but which the Swamiji never failed to notice. He would bend down to look into this tiny temple and clap his hands which had some traditional significance. But all this used to be done quietly and unobtrusively as part of the traditional routine. There was no crowding or jostling or the noise of meaningless chatter that one comes across elsewhere. The people would take in peace like draughts of fresh air and feel happy. Some would, of course, tell the Swamiji their personal problems. The Swamiji would listen with patience and gently nod to say that he had understood. The person narrating his woes would feel unburdened. It is strange how a relationship, which is like a dip in the sacred river, gets established in a moment, without any fuss or fanfare, when one is in the presence of a soul such as this. It is an experience which cannot be described in words. It must be felt to be known.

Narihalla—Shivapur

30 September 1978

Early in the morning, a little after sunrise, there was sudden excitement at the temple. Somebody came running to tell me that the Swamiji was walking towards Sandur town. Perhaps, he was going for a dip in the Narihalla, a stream which flows through the Sandur valley. I walked briskly to catch

up with the Swamiji. There was a small group of devotees following him. As we passed the gates of the Shivavilas Palace, my parents also joined us. As we approached the circle near the Block Development Office and the Multipurpose Cooperative Society, a crowd had started gathering which swelled as we neared the Narihalla, near the bridge under construction on the way to the temple of Kartikeya. Men, women and children just followed the master as in the biblical days. The force was compelling without a hint of compulsion. It was like the natural flow of a river inevitably moving towards its ultimate destination. The tricycle (carrying a rectangular box-like structure with wire-mesh on all four sides and a canvas covering on top) went along with the Swamiji, pushed and pulled by four assistants from the Kanchi Mutt. Nobody knew whether he would stop to bathe or proceed to the Kumaraswamy temple which was on a hill 11 km. from Sandur. Total unpredictability had come to be closely associated with the Paramacharya. Nobody would dare to predict what he would do next. The Shankara Mutt people were also wanting the Swamiji to visit the new temple which had been built recently in the name of Adi Shankara, the great seer who had preached *Advaita* or non-duality throughout India and established religious centres including at Sringeri and Kanchi several centuries ago.

The Swamiji continued to walk towards the Narihalla. He stopped at the water's edge and for a moment we did not know what would happen. Slowly he walked into the flowing stream, in knee-deep water and sat down without removing his saffron clothes. Hundreds of people had gathered on both sides of the stream and on the incomplete bridge. The Swamiji was quite oblivious of the crowd. He slid into the water sideways and plunged his head thrice under water. Watching him, I could not help thinking of a lordly elephant having a bath in the river in the heart of the jungle. There were great similarities in some of the movements and the mood. For a mo-

ment the thought seemed sacrilegious, but only for a moment, because to be in tune with nature is not sacrilegious. Incidentally, *Ganesha* with an elephant's head is worshiped as the first God. After this initial dip which was most natural and spontaneous, he rubbed his head and body with powdered mud from anthills and once again submerged his head under water. Then he got up in his dripping clothes and stepped on to the bank. This whole process lasted for about ten to fifteen minutes. He then meticulously removed his wet clothes while covering himself with fresh saffron lower and upper garments which he put round his head in an anticlockwise sweep. His entire attire consisted of three pieces of saffron *khadi* including the *kaupina* or loincloth. By this time, his helpers had improvised a simple seat for him at the waters edge. There were three or four stones lying in water, which were brought closer, so that a wooden plank covered by a straw mat could be put there for the Acharya to sit. The Swamiji sat on this straw seat cross-legged and applied *vibhuti* to his body in the traditional manner. It was amazing to see the ease with which he could sit in *padmasana* without using his hands to pull his legs and feet into position. His body and legs were so supple with long practice and penance. He sat facing the morning sun and started praying in silence. Man and Nature also watched in silence except for the occasional truck that crossed the Narihalla. But the Swamiji was not bothered by any sound or movement. He was engrossed in his internal prayer. Sometimes he would do *japa* or the turning of the beads underneath his saffron cloth. At other times he would fold his hands in front of him and above his head in salutation to God and Nature. The sun's rays were soft and sacred at a moment like this.

The Swamiji then put on his spectacles which he had to wear as his left eye had been operated for cataract. (They said he could not see much even with the right eye which had not been operated. But he had insight to

more than make up for it). He then washed the two ends and middle of his *danda* or the sacred staff, which was a frail bamboo stick about four feet in length with a piece of saffron cloth folded and tied neatly at one end. It was a spiritual symbol associated with the Shankaracharyas from ancient times. The Paramacharya always carried it with him and treated it with great care and reverence. It was like a spiritual extension or instrument with which he bowed to the higher powers within and without. Finally after a few ritualistic sprinkling of water on the *danda*, the Acharya got up, went up to where the tricycle was standing and started walking towards the town. This unique caravan again started moving the way it had come. We all followed. The *bhajan mandalis* were singing with deep reverence and devotion. When we came to the old well called *hosa bhavi* (new well), the Acharya went towards Vithal Mandir instead of turning left. We knew that he would go to the Shankara Mutt which was close-by. The Shankara Mutt boys who were singing *bhajans* with great gusto were jubilant and we reached the *mutt* in a matter of minutes. The narrow space was jam-packed but in that excitement no one felt the sweat and the suffocation. The Swamiji stood before each of the three *vigrahas* (Ganapathi, Adi Shankara and Sharadamba) with an intent look and bowed with his *danda*. In front of Sharadamba's *vigraha* (idol) he stood for a long time, about fifteen to twenty minutes, praying as if in communion with the goddess. He is an ardent devotee of Kamakshi, the goddess at Kanchi. Sharadamba's marble statue had been beautifully chiseled. It looked all the more attractive and alive in the presence of the Swamiji and the pitch of devotion that had been reached. Then the spell gave way once again to the general shuffling of people as the Swamiji got out of the temple and on to the road. We walked the way we had come.

As we neared the Shivapur Eshwaraswamy temple, my mind was full of

the arrangements to be made, for the bath and shelter of pilgrims, opposite the temple and inside the Shivapur compound. The Swamiji had told the District Special Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police, who had come to meet him, that he would be spending the whole of *Navaratri* at Sandur, except for a brief visit to the Kartikeshwara temple. The government officials had come on behalf of the President of India to ascertain where the President, Sanjeeva Reddy, could meet the Swamiji on the 12th, the day after *Vijayadashami*. The Swamiji promptly replied that the President could see him at Sandur. Mentally I calculated that while the Swamiji turned left to climb the steps to the Eshwaraswamy temple, I could turn right into the school gate and spend some time with the volunteers to make sure that all was well. Just then the tricycle followed by Swamiji came and stood before the steps leading to the Eshwaraswamy temple where he was staying. Before I could leave the crowd and turn right, I saw the Swamiji standstill, facing north, and raise his right hand in front of him like a general ordering the army to march on. For a moment no one knew what was happening. But Balu who perhaps could read Swamiji's gestures and intentions faster than anybody else, did not take long to realise that the Swamiji did not want to go inside the Eshwaraswamy temple, but wanted to go inside the Shivapur compound and visit the Shiva and Siddharudhaswamy temples to the north of my house. Balu quickly conveyed this to me and said that we should get ready to receive the Swamiji at the Shivapur gate with the traditional coconut and *kalasha* or metal water pot and see that the temple door was open. I did as I was told. My father also followed me to the Siddharudha temple and stood in silence wondering what would happen, as the Paramacharya did not normally enter any residential area. Just then somebody came running to inform us that the Swamiji was standing in front of the Shivapur gate, near the Hanuman temple and opposite my dairy,

and wanted me to come immediately. I, of course, went there as fast as I could and saw the Swamiji standing at the entrance of the gate, praying with eyes closed and *kamandala* or pitcher of water held in both hands which were gently swaying like the rocking of a cradle. I was overwhelmed by the sight. I did *sashtanga pranam* and Vasundhara also bowed down next to me. Tears of blessedness and beatitude welled up from the very core of my heart and we requested the Swamiji to step into Shivapur, our abode. The Swamiji, who had opened his eyes, came in with measured steps, looking straight ahead of him. He walked past the western side of the Hanuman temple and turned left when he came to the main building and went round to the front door and on to the Shiva and Siddharudhaswamy temples, as if he knew the place inside out. As soon as he came to the temple door, he touched the *padukas* or marble feet of Siddharudha with his *danda*. It was a swift spontaneous gesture which conveyed so much to us. On the wall, behind the Shivalinga, was the photograph of Siddharudha. The Swamiji immediately noticed the photograph and wanted to have a closer look at it. The photograph was brought to him and he looked at it intently for some time. Then he had *arati* done and all of us once again did *pranam* to him. By touching the *padukas* with his *danda* and showing so much interest in the photograph of Siddharudha, the Swamiji had indicated in his own inimitable manner, the sanctity of this spot which was our spiritual heritage. The Swamiji had shown his personal regard and respect and, in doing so, also added his own grace to the temple. He then climbed down the steps and walked back to the tricycle at the end of the narrow temple patch. He then directed the tricycle and the holy entourage to go round the house in one full circle by moving eastwards. While passing along the eastern side of the house, Shivapur, he looked up briefly at the new construction in progress. We just followed. When he came to the gate from which he had entered

the compound, he turned left and walked into the Hanuman temple. The steps here are quite steep but he climbed them unaided and without taking any support. Here also he had the *arati* performed to Hanuman and then he went round the temple before returning to his room inside the Eshwaraswamy temple adjoining my dairy. This sudden and spiritually electrifying gesture on his part had a profound effect on all of us. It did show great concern for me and the family. Why did he stop at the gate and pray before entering Shivapur? Perhaps, it was only to give me time to arrive at the spot. Whatever it was, his blessings were there for all of us to feel and experience. That it would be expressed in this manner was something we had not dreamt of. It was one of those auspicious things which happen and are remembered throughout one's life.

Sandur-Kumaraswamy

1 October 1978

In the morning the Swamiji started towards the Narihalla. He went to the same spot for his bath as yesterday. This time the improvised stone platform was a little better. Once again, we could watch him from close. His total absorption in these daily rituals was amazing. He was just not bothered about the surrounding din and bustle. Time and again he would sip the Narihalla water as part of the ritual. He would hold his right palm close and parallel to the surface of the water as a purificatory act. Then he would take a little water from that spot with his right hand and pour it in the hollow of his left hand and cover it with his right hand before pouring it back into the right and drink it. Every time he drank water in this ritualistic and, perhaps, purificatory way, he would wipe his lips from right to left,



a practice which had become quite habitual. The water of the Narihalla was muddy. It had rained and so the water was far from clear. But this made no difference to the Swamiji. He had a preference for flowing water, whatever its colour and complexion. He also drank water from wells from so many different sources that one wondered how problems such as infection did not arise or affect him in any manner. Perhaps, the purificatory gestures were not merely ritualistic.

After his bath, the Swamiji settled down on his straw mat for prayer facing the sun. It was 9.00 a.m. and I could not help realising how beautiful the lighting was for photography. I knew the Swamiji did not like to be photographed. I had heard tales of how one photographer took pictures against the wishes of the Swamiji and found that the whole roll was blank when developed. Yet the impulse was too great. I had a word with the disciples who said that the Swamiji may not mind if I took a few pictures for my use, from a distance, without the use of flash. They also said that if I asked the Swamiji for permission he may not give his consent. So the choice before me was either to take a few pictures without asking for specific permission or be so insensitive as to let go this wonderful opportunity. I decided to take the risk and take a few photographs. After all the intention was quite genuine and one could always ask for forgiveness if at all it annoyed the Swamiji. I had never seen the Swamiji get angry and, deep within me, I knew that he had passed the stage of anger. He seemed too kind-hearted to notice these little indiscretions, if at all. I sent my blue jeep-station wagon to fetch my Hasselblad camera from Shivapur, convinced that I was not committing any major wrong. After all the Swamiji was also human and would understand the urge to record this wonderful moment. I put the 150 mm lens on my Hasselblad to record something of the environment as well. Standing in the crowd, close to the tricycle on the road, I

took a few pictures, as the Swamiji prayed after his bath, closing his eyes, folding his hands, touching the spot between his eyebrows with his middle finger and opening his eyes after *japa* and *dhyana* with an inward turn of his right hand (1,2 & 3). This last picture happened almost on its own, my finger clicking intuitively in response to a great moment which was a sight for the Gods within us. When the Swamiji opened his eyes he must have seen me click but, fortunately, chose to ignore it or even silently permit me to indulge, from a respectable distance, in this photographic activity so close to my heart. I knew I had got my pictures provided, of course, the roll did not turn out to be blank when developed (which it did not).

I had got my pictures and the Swamiji had also finished his bath and prayers. Nobody knew what would happen next. There was knee-deep water in the swiftly flowing Narihalla. What if the Swamiji insisted on crossing the Narihalla and proceeding to the Kartikeshwara temple, a distance of 10 km. The bridge across the Narihalla was not yet open to traffic as the last portion had not yet been completed. The cement slab had not yet been cast though the supports had been built. However, while the Swamiji had closed his eyes in prayer after his bath and sat meditating, we had asked some volunteers to put some wooden planks across the incomplete portion of the bridge, so that the Swamiji could walk on it, if he so chose. A number of people quietly assisted in this task which was completed in record time. It reminded me of the story in the Ramayana where the squirrels were supposed to have helped to build a bridge for Shri Rama in record time. Mythological stories have their own charm and credibility if understood in the true spirit and not taken too literally or un-imaginatively.

We were all hoping and praying that the Swamiji would not finish his prayers before the bridge was ready for crossing. I do not know whether the Swamiji knew what we were up to. It seems he did. As soon as he finished

his prayers, he picked up his *danda*, rose from his seat, and started walking away from the Narihalla. For some time we did not know whether he would return to Sandur or turn in the opposite direction and walk on the bridge along the loose wooden planks that had been hurriedly laid for his use. When the moment of decision came, he turned left and moved towards the bridge. The contractors who had constructed the bridge and those who had laid the planks were visibly moved. They had made a circle or garland of flowers on the floor at the entrance to the bridge. They broke a coconut and did *arati*. The Swamiji had a careful look at the flowers on the floor and softly stepped forward, taking care to see that he did not step on any of the flowers. He put his right step in the centre of the circle of flowers and his left beyond them. The Swamiji did not like people strewing his path with flowers. He was too sensitive to step on flowers. The Swamiji was concerned not only about the flowers and the bridge but all of us following him. He asked us not to follow him until he had crossed the bridge, stepping carefully on the planks laid for him. Then we followed in single file across the bridge and on to Harishankar and Kumaraswamy via Lakshmipur (that part of Sandur town, which is on the other side of the Narihalla, where a highly sophisticated electronic complex has now been established).

The Swamiji walked at a brisk pace. Depending on the road surface and his own personal inclinations, he would use the wooden traditional sandals or rubber *chappals* but walked mostly barefoot, accompanied by all of us and the *bhajan* parties. On the way, I showed Swamiji the Hulikunta tank area and the Nandihalli Postgraduate Centre, before starting the climb to Harishankar. The Swamiji walked without any rest or halt. By the time we reached Harishankar we were pleasantly tired and wholeheartedly welcomed the opportunity to sit under the cool shade of the old mango trees next to the natural spring. But there was no sign of tiredness or fatigue on the face

of the Swamiji which was fresh as ever without the slightest trace of sweat or hard breathing. Such physical and spiritual equanimity in spite of so much exertion and effort at the ripe old age of 85 was a sight to be seen to be believed. The Swamiji was happy to have a bath in the Harishankar fresh water pond and sat for meditation. The rest of us went up to the Kartikeshwara temple (only a distance of 3 km. from here) for our bath and *prasad* — we were quite hungry and so the *prasad* was not just a ritual but a hearty meal which did much good to our body and soul.

The Swamiji had slept in the box-body of the tricycle *rickshaw*. He sleeps soundly without stirring. Perhaps it is that deep sleep beyond the dream state. When it is time to get up, the toes give the first indication and then within minutes he is up. We had expected him to rest till 5.00 p.m. But he got up at 4.00 p.m. and started walking towards Kartikeshwara. I was also refreshed after a little siesta. The evening was pleasant and the lights of the Nandihalli Postgraduate Centre looked attractive from that height. Devotees who had come all the way from Tamil Nadu joined us on the way; so did the Superintendent and the Deputy Inspector General of Police. They also walked barefoot. The Swamiji was wearing his wooden sandals but, as soon as we got to the *Padagatti*, he removed his sandals and did *pranam* with folded hands as he bent to peep into this small temple. He then noticed the signboard as we started the final climb down to the main temple. We passed the cottage or rest house and the *gopura* of the main temple came into full view.

As soon as the Swamiji saw the *gopura* and the top of the temple, it was as though some current passed through him. He stopped in his tracks, quickly removed his sandals and prayed with folded hands. The Lord inside the temple must have known that a great devotee was approaching. At the entrance to the temple or the *mahadwara*, the Swamiji was received

with a *purnakumbha* or coconut placed on a silver pot. The Swamiji saw it, lifted the coconut from the silver vessel and turned in the opposite direction. We did not know what he would do. He had taken the coconut in his hand and went straight to a small temple below the ground level, opposite the *mahadwara* or main entrance, and kept the coconut there after making sure it was a Shiva temple. What was the significance of this unusual gesture? How did the Swamiji know that there was a small temple opposite the *mahadwara*. He could not have seen anything as there was a crowd blocking the view all around as he approached the *mahadwara*. But with great certainty he asked the crowd to make way so that he could deposit the coconut where he had wanted to. He then returned to the *mahadwara* and we entered the main temple of Kumaraswamy without any paraphernalia or further ado. The *arati* was performed and the Swamiji entered the *garbhagudi* or sanctum sanctorum and went round the main *murti* and other *vigrahas*. When he reappeared at the door of the *garbhagudi*, where we were standing, he looked so very pleased. His face was wreathed in more than his usual smile and he touched his chest below his chin with both his hands to indicate to us that he was very happy and also tried to say something which was drowned in the din. Obviously, the Swamiji and Kumaraswamy were very happy to see each other. Those of us who were fortunate enough to witness the scene were left with no doubt on that score. At spiritual levels the recognition is instantaneous. It was undoubtedly a sight for the Gods and nobody could fail to be affected by it.

After this first *darshan* of Kartikeya, the Swamiji sat in the verandah, in front of a small room in which he was to stay, above and opposite the Shiva temple, next to the main temple of Kartikeya. This was an opportunity for the people gathered there to have his *darshan* and be rewarded by that soft inimitable smile, at once human and divine. Sometimes he raised his right

hand to bless and also to convey his permission for the devotee to move away and make room for others. This was done in such an affectionate and intimate manner that the person who was asked to leave felt fully blessed and not unwanted. The atmosphere was so all-inclusive that nobody could ever feel unwanted whatever the Swamiji did or did not do. Most of the time he was silent but not unconcerned. Even to stand in his presence was to serve and feel that it was worth waiting a lifetime. There was a serenity which permeated everybody and everything, such was the quality of his look and grace.

The Swamiji had developed quite a repertoire of simple gestures which were easily understood by those who were close to him and used to interpreting what he said or wanted to convey. For instance, if the Swamiji touched the front of his throat, it was a well-understood sign that he wanted Srikanta, one of his assistants. The sign for a person who was named after Shiva or Mahadeva was a circular movement of the hand above the head to signify the *jata* or rising crescendo of Shiva's matted hair. All of a sudden his voice would go inwards so to say and, at such times, only a very faint whisper would emanate, which his closest associates only could follow and that too by repeating loudly to cross-check what they thought the Swamiji was saying. If they had understood correctly, the Swamiji would nod his head and want it to be conveyed in so many words to whomsoever it was meant for. But sometimes what the interpreter said loudly would not tally with what the Swamiji had in mind. It was strange how his voice would suddenly disappear or seem to disappear or get lost in some internal process or state which was independent of the will. Otherwise would not the Swamiji utter a few audible words especially when he was striving to convey something to somebody? Then, after a while, the voice would return, so to say, and he would converse in a number of languages without the slightest diffi-

culty. Perhaps the experience of deep meditation had something to do with it. We, the lay onlookers, would not naturally know where and at what level his consciousness was at a given time. The physical and external after-effects must, therefore, also be equally intriguing. We stood with folded hands in front of him. The memory of his first *darshan* of the Lord on the hill of Kumaraswamy was fresh in his mind, and it seemed to us that he was in two minds whether or not to return to Sandur for Navaratri. The convenience of the devotees was, however, uppermost in his mind.

Kumaraswamy

2 October 1978

Being Monday, in the very early hours of the morning, there was *sarvanga abhisheka* of the Lord Kartikeya as usual. But this time the unusual circumstance of the Swamiji's presence gave a new depth and dimension to this holy ritual. I did not want to miss this opportunity of experiencing that special peace and holiness of the morning, in the presence of the God and the *Guru*, before the world woke up to the mundane business of life. At such moments it is so much easier to reach inwards a little deeper than what is normally possible. It was in moments of such great peace that one had a chance to hear the delicate tinkle of the tiny bell in the heart of our being — a subtle vibration which has a way of spreading and suffusing every form and state of one's existence. The *abhisheka* had started at 4.00 a.m. and went on till 5.00 a.m. One did not want anything except to be there to stand there, to sit there and watch the Swamiji in deep meditation. After the *abhisheka*, the Swamiji sat there in the *garbhagudi*, leaning

against the stonewall with legs folded close to the body. He gave the impression of a child huddled close to the mother in the womb of deep sleep. I sat there outside the inner door, watching and imbibing the atmosphere which was exquisite and inexpressible. The Swamiji would stir a little occasionally and go back into his divine shell. To watch him was to experience great peace. I must have sat there for more than an hour, cross-legged and with a straight back, without any hindrance or inconvenience, and feeling nothing but contentment. Thoughts did not interfere or disturb the feeling of peace. So many inner constraints and trappings seemed to have just vanished and one felt nearer to the centre of one's being.

A little later the scene changed. The Swamiji came out looking inwards and still not recognising people and faces. The curtain in front of the deity was drawn, as per the traditional practice, so that the Lord could be dressed and decked with gold ornaments and flowers — *alankara* as it is called. Then we all assembled again for the *alankara darshana*. The Swamiji also allowed himself to be disturbed from his spiritual reverie, to rise and move towards the Lord in slow steps to put some flowers at his feet. He also touched the feet of the Lord with his *danda* in salutation. After this he again sat in the *garbhagudi* immersed in meditation. Time lost all meaning. Only the moment mattered.

As the sun rose higher and higher, people started coming for *darshan* of the God and the Swamiji, who had now come out of the *garbhagudi* and was sleeping soundly in the hot sun outside, on the narrow passage to one of the rooms (where we usually sit and have *prasad* before leaving the temple), after having covered himself with a coarse white woollen rug from head to foot. Why the woollen rug in this hot sun? Strange are the ways of saints. We can only watch and wonder. Obviously, what we understand is a small portion of what there is to understand. Swamiji slept like that in the hot



sun for a long time. People would come, see him immersed in deep sleep under the thick rug, fold their hands in reverence and depart or take shelter in the shade, waiting for the Swamiji to rise. The Swamiji continued to sleep without stirring on a narrow, rough granite step which was hardly sufficient to contain his frail body and certainly did not permit the slightest movement. Any normal person would have found it extremely difficult to remain in that constricted position for even a few minutes and would have melted in the hot sun and the thick woollen rug. But to the Swamiji it was just some place to dump his body and the rug was there in between him and the sharp sun. The heat was obviously of no consideration.

I went and had something to eat at the rest house and returned to the main temple after quite some time. This time I saw the Swamiji sitting up on the rough stone-flooring in front of the small temple above the Shiva temple and next to the steps on which he had been sleeping. Just then some devotees from Madras brought some fruits and other offerings in a plastic bag and put it before him in a tray. The Swamiji was still looking dazed. He looked through the devotees who were introduced and were standing before him with folded hands. He was somewhere but his hands picked up a packet of incense sticks and his fingers started removing the paper wrapper as if they were acting on their own volition and without any particular purpose. Consciousness was somewhere else and the fingers were moving and playing with the objects in the plastic tray like a child playing with pebbles on the seashore. Perhaps this simile is not very apt. A child plays with pebbles as if nothing else mattered; its whole attention is focussed on the pebbles as if they are gems of the purest ray; it is so engrossed in its play that it is oblivious of the rest of the world. But in the case of the Swamiji, only his fingers were playing with the articles in the tray, as if to keep them occupied, while his mind was far away deeply en-

grossed in the stuff from which all things emanate, the gems and the pebbles and the incense sticks. Sometimes a faint smile would suddenly come to the surface from the deep serene and play with his delicate expression, childlike in the sense that it was a reflection of some inner joy and not obviously associated with any particular external object or idea.

As time passed and the sun became hotter and hotter, the veil of nonrecognition was melting away in slow stages. People would come and go, content to just have *darshan* of the Swamiji immersed in secret, sacred realms, oblivious of the sun and the heat. They would prostrate with the full length of the body, symbolic of total surrender and the dropping of all barriers and reservations. I also did likewise and went to the rest house for a while. When I returned a little later, the Swamiji was in the shade of the verandah, standing on one leg like a meditating stork. His gaze was less distant though he was still in *mouna* or deep silence. There were some devotees standing on the grass below the wall of the verandah, with folded hands and in great wonderment, grateful and thrilled that they were in the presence of one who reflected divinity, the silence and peace that is deep within us. When the innermost curtain lifts, one sees things in true light and perspective, free of illusions and half-truths. This is the spiritual goal which, perhaps, we all try to intuitively achieve, whether we fully realise it or not. It had been a very fulfilling day. The mind was still and the spirit deeply rested and cool, though the Swamiji had spent many hours in the sun.

Kumaraswamy-Sandur

3 October 1978

I had returned to Sandur last evening with the idea of returning to the

Kartikeya temple next morning. But very early in the morning I got the news that the Swamiji had left Kartikeshwara and had started walking towards Sandur. The messenger said that he was walking so briskly that he might have already reached Nandihalli. I quickly got ready and rushed towards Nandihalli in a jeep. There were a few mango trees and a water-well, on the Sandur side of Nandihalli, near a forest stream which feeds the new Hulikunta tank and flows into its catchment in the monsoons. This is where I saw the Swamiji coming with a small group of people. *Bhajan*-singing devotees from the temple were in the front, followed by the cycle *rickshaw* and the Swamiji whose feet alone were visible as he was holding to the rear of the *rickshaw* from inside the sheet of canvas cloth flowing down his head and back to his knees. I was happy that I was able to meet him halfway though, for a moment, there was a pang of regret that I had missed the first half of the journey on foot, the climb down from Kartikeya to Harishankar early in the morning when everything was so divinely fresh. I was standing on the road with folded hands, eager to pay my respects and join the march or *padayatra*. The Swamiji must have seen through the wire-mesh of the *rickshaw* or through his meditation or both (he usually does mental *japa* when he walks holding the *rickshaw*), but he stopped and stepped out of the canvas for a moment to enable me to touch the ground before him with my forehead. He lifted his right hand in silent blessing before once again getting inside the canvas and continuing the journey to Sandur. We all walked at his brisk pace. Once he changed his wooden sandals for rubber ones in order to further quicken the pace on this rough road surface. After some time he again put on his wooden sandals to which he was more accustomed.

As we neared Sandur, the *bhajan*-singing youths from the Shankara Mutt joined us, adding some urban tunes to the chanting. Some of them were

quite good and melodious. But one preferred the time-tested devotional songs and rustic *bhajans*, composed on the hill of Kartikeya years ago, and still sung by the rural folk in exactly the same way as they must have been sung when first composed, with simple musical accompaniments like the *tala* and the *tambura* and, of course, a great deal of devotion or *bhakti*. There were quite a few old verses and tunes which have slowly but surely sunk deep into my consciousness from my childhood days. The Kannada song *bande nimma charanadadige* (I have come to thy feet), for instance, never failed to appeal to me, each time with a slightly deeper meaning and significance. Now it seemed more pertinent and meaningful than ever. The Swamiji's gentle touch had awakened in us a fresh awareness of our spiritual heritage and experience. The old experiences seemed to come alive with fresh insight and inspiration.

As we reached Sandur, throngs of people came beyond Lakshmipur to greet the Swamiji and follow him. In the town, the roads were lined with men, women and children, happy that the Swamiji had returned and that they would hopefully be able to get his *darshan* everyday during Navaratri. When he passed the circle, where four roads meet, it was clear that the Swamiji was returning to the Eshwaraswamy temple near Shivapur. As we came to the steps leading to the temple, I was relieved to see that thatched bamboo shelters had been erected in the area opposite the temple for the pilgrims to rest for a while, have a bath and some light refreshments. Once they came to know that the Swamiji would be at Sandur during Navaratri, pilgrims would come not only from the surrounding villages but from the neighbouring states, including Tamil Nadu. It would not be a problem to make bus arrangements for pilgrims to commute to Toranagallu and Hospet. The Swamiji, obviously, had the convenience of pilgrims in mind when he decided to climb down from the sacred hill of Kartikeya to stay at Sandur

during Navaratri.

The Eshwaraswamy temple was also a place which he, obviously, liked very much. The unspoilt atmosphere and the quiet freshness of the temple suited him. There was an old draw-well inside and a dingy room which was ill-ventilated and poorly lighted but which was small and secluded like a cave built in mortar. This is where he would sit and do his *japa* or meditation without the help of beads or other external aids. He would sit on a gunny bag and there was no other piece of furniture in this room. In between the well and this room was a small area which his assistants used for cooking. They had tied some thatched material for this purpose to provide minimum protection from wind and rain. The Swamiji himself ate hardly anything. Some puffed flour and milk was his staple diet and occasionally some fruits. Some disciples used to bring some dates for him, believing that he preferred them to other fruits, fresh or dried. The Swamiji used to touch them for their satisfaction. A spartan diet was part of the discipline even for his assistants, though fresh cow's milk was not a problem as there was the dairy on the western side of the temple.

The main temple was in the centre of an ancient enclosed area in which Eshwara or Shivalinga was the deity. There were other small temples as well. In the northwest corner was a *Devi* temple. Shiva and Shakti always go together. Next to this was an even smaller temple where the Swamiji used to bend and clap gently to awaken some hidden forces, or so it seemed to us. (Traditionally, it was to awaken Chandikeshwara from his deep meditation so that he and Shiva are kept fully informed by the devotees). On the northeastern side, opposite the *Devi* temple of the same size, there was another small temple for Venkateshwara. This temple also used to receive the Swamiji's attention whenever he went round the main temple in *pradakshina*. Sometimes he would sit behind this temple and the outer wall

and light an earthen lamp or meditate. There was a short shady tree on the western side behind the main temple which was also a favourite spot of the Swamiji for meditation and *japa*. He sat there for hours oblivious of the people coming to see him. There was such an atmosphere of holiness and tranquility, watching the Swamiji meditate under this tree. One was reminded of what one had read in history books about the Buddha sitting under the tree of Enlightenment. Buddha, I guess, must have looked something like this after he had attained Enlightenment, as he sat in the shade of a tree and blessed the simple folk who thronged to see him.

Sandur

4 to 10 October 1978

From 4th to 10th October was a period during which the Swamiji observed *mouna*. I understand it is his usual practice to observe *mouna* or silence during Navaratri. But this did not make any difference to the devotees who came in a continuous flow from morning till night. There was never an unmanageable crowd because families and groups of people would come, have *darshan*, sit for a while and go away without disturbing anybody. They were quite content to have *darshan* and go away, only to come again and again. Each time, however, their names would be announced to the Swamiji by one of his assistants. Sometimes the Swamiji would ask for some more particulars. He would then bless by raising his right hand with cupped fingers. Occasionally a smile would light up his face and of all those who were around him. Arthur Koestler, writing about his meeting with the Swamiji, has said that he "had never seen a comparable smile or expression; it had an extraordinary charm and sweetness".

Morning and evening the Swamiji would go inside the temple and witness the *arati*, after which he would bend low on one knee without actually touching the ground, with his *danda* in one hand, and look at the deity from a lower angle. This, perhaps, was a practice symbolic of humility, an awareness that there was so much more to experience of the nature of Infinity, God. I was fortunate to be present on a number of occasions when *arati* was performed everyday. It was as though we would know, without the ringing of temple bells, that *arati* was about to be performed. During all these days I never failed to see the Swamiji every morning and evening and sometimes more often. After bowing before him, I would stand at a distance and inhale the atmosphere. Often the Swamiji would gesture to me to sit down and, when he thought I should go, he would again gesture with a smile or a gentle movement of his hands. Thus I must have spent at least a couple of hours everyday in this temple, in Swamiji's hallowed presence and benign influence. One gets automatically drawn to what one knows, in one's heart of hearts, to be good. There could be no other explanation as to why so many people would come and go everyday. There were no miracles to hold their attention, unless, of course, the great peace that poured into them and enveloped them, without any special effort on their part, was considered a miracle. This is the test of true spirituality — the amount of peace and harmony that one is able to feel and generate. To be in the presence of such a sage as this is to get a direct experience of true peace and well-being, to know that it is possible to transform one's inner map and start looking at things from a different angle and live a new dimension. It is the birth of Faith — faith in the present and its spiritual potentialities and not some distant miraculous future. I read somewhere that there are two types of *bhaktas* or devotees, those that cling to God like a baby-monkey does to its mother out of fear of falling, and the other type

who are guided gently by a higher spiritual force like the mother-cat which carries its young softly from danger to safety without the young ones realising it. All that I can say is that in the presence of the Swamiji and even afterwards one did strongly feel his vast humanity and incomparable spiritual care and guidance.

Sandur

11 October 1978

It was Vijayadashami, the tenth and final day of the *Dasehra* or *Dusserah* festival which is celebrated with enthusiastic popular participation in Sandur. It is also known as the *nadahabba* or the country's postharvest festival when farmers are in a mood to share their joy and their prosperity and propitiate the Gods by way of thanksgiving. As usual, after my morning bath, *yogasanas*, *pranayama* and meditation (which was a part of my daily routine and helped to maintain health and unity of awareness), I went to the Eshwaraswamy temple and had a most wonderful *darshan* of the Swamiji who had ended his *mouna*. I made bold to ask him whether it was better to meditate with attention focussed in between the eyebrows or in the region of the heart. The Swamiji immediately put his right hand on his heart in answer to my question. It confirmed my own natural inclination and practice in this regard. The Swamiji further indicated, in his own way, that I was not so much of a novice as I thought I was in such matters. His clear guidance and direction in this regard gave me a great deal of confidence and clarity. Strangely enough, a few days earlier I had written a piece on the "Human Quest", which sets out some basic questions about human evolution and consciousness, which I rewrote as the "Human Quest and Experience" (see



Annexure) after the Swamiji came to Sandur, and which I placed before the Swamiji in all humility. The Swamiji had this writing read and reread to him by one of his English-knowing disciples. (Years later, the Swamiji remembered this piece of writing and had it distributed to devotees and scholars in his presence at Kanchi, indicating in his inimitable way, his approval of what I had written when he was in Sandur). The Swamiji had a wonderful capacity to clear doubts without words.

Vijayadashami is also the day for the exchange of leaves of the *shami* or *banni* (*Acacia suma*) tree by way of greetings in some parts of the country. In Sandur, it is a customary practice to pluck some leaves from the sacred *banni* tree (in which the heroes of the Mahabharata, the Pandavas, are supposed to have kept their arms and weapons during their incognito period), and offer them to the Gods, elders and friends on the Vijayadashami day. This is quite an established practice in Sandur and an occasion for much bon homie and mutual exchanges cutting across all other distinctions. This time we had the good fortune to have the Swamiji with us on Vijayadashami day. I naturally presented *banni* to him by placing a tray full of *banni* leaves before him in keeping with the custom. The Swamiji immediately took a handful of these leaves and placed them on his head. It was a heartwarming gesture which at once recognised the sacredness of the occasion and the practice and all the feelings that go with it. To rub the top of his head with these *banni* leaves was the Swamiji's way of conveying his appreciation and blessings. The tray full of *banni* leaves which had been touched in this affectionate manner by the Swamiji was looked upon with wonderment and respect by his devotees and those present on the occasion. I felt fulfilled and happy that I had done the right thing by offering *banni* to the Swamiji, (a practice I was to perform every year thereafter, wherever the Swamiji was during this festival period).

In the evening, the Swamiji paid a visit to the Shankara Mutt and, while returning, paid a visit to the Subrahmanya temple on the eastern side of the Shivavilas Palace, in response to my father's pressing invitation and prayer. The Swamiji entered the eastern gate of the Palace, climbed a few steps to see the *Deogarh*, walked along the southern and western side and came out of the northern gate before returning to the Eshwaraswamy temple opposite Shivapur. My parents, who stay at Shivavilas, were extremely happy to receive the Swamiji and show him the *Deogarh*, where the ancestral Gods are kept and worshiped. This was about 6.00 p.m. Till quite late, the Swamiji received *banni* from countless devotees who thronged the Eshwaraswamy temple that evening. Then they would exchange *banni* amongst themselves and all of us before returning satisfied to their respective homes. It was undoubtedly a most memorable Vijayadashami.

Sandur

12 October 1978

The day after Vijayadashami also turned out to be quite memorable. It was the day when Sanjeeva Reddy, the President of India, was to visit the Swamiji at Sandur. Sanjeeva Reddy was to arrive with his family in a helicopter which was to land in the school playground opposite the western side of Shivapur. The police and all the security men were making their presence felt and people were also gathering to see the President and the helicopter. Sandur was a small town with a population of about 15,000. Such events take place quite rarely and everybody comes to know of it quite fast. So, the atmosphere was surcharged with expectancy and excitement. However, as usual the Swamiji went in the morning to the Narihalla

for his bath and returned to the Eshwaraswamy temple. I had also accompanied the Swamiji to the Narihalla and back. As soon as we returned, we were informed by the police authorities that the helicopter carrying the President and his family was due to arrive any time shortly. Just then an extraordinary thing happened. The Swamiji got up from the temple, came out from the door and went and sat under a tree in the adjoining dairy. Just then the police announced that the helicopter was about to land. The Swamiji asked me to go and receive the President at the helipad, which was a very short distance from the dairy, with a road separating the dairy from the playground. I was just in time to receive the President as he alighted from the helicopter in the midst of cheering crowds.

I had known Sanjeeva Reddy earlier. The very first question he asked me was "Where is Swamiji". I had to reply factually that the Swamiji was in my dairy close-by. The President smiled a good-humoured smile and said that, perhaps, because he was a farmer, the Swamiji preferred to see him in a dairy. The Swamiji himself said later that there was nothing unusual in his seeing the President in a dairy, as he (the Swamiji) had seen Gandhiji in a dairy many years ago. The crowd outside the dairy and on the main road was about seven to eight thousand. The occasion was quite exciting, the head of our country coming all the way with his family to spend a few private moments with a saint and a mystic who was presently at Sandur. But our people are quite orderly and the policemen and our own volunteers did not have much of a problem controlling the crowd and ensuring that the President and his family had good un-disturbed *darshan* of the Swamiji who was sitting under a rain tree in between two cowsheds (9). A small carpet was spread on the ground in front of the Swamiji for the President and his family to sit and seek his blessings individually and for the larger family of the nation as well. The President was with the Swamiji for quite some time

after which I again saw him off at the helipad. Sanjeeva Reddy was totally satisfied with his visit to Sandur to see the Swamiji. We were also happy that the visit went off so well and now all the people assembled there could also have their *darshan* at the same spot without the inconvenience of protocol and all the *bandobust* that goes with it. The whole day, until the time for the evening *pooja*, the Swamiji was in the cowshed. I remember how the crowd had thrown some coins on the empty carpet in front of the Swamiji who asked his assistants to collect all these well-intentioned coins and buy some bananas for the cows in the dairy. One cow called Kamakshi (which is also the name of the deity at Kanchi) was brought in the presence of the Swamiji, *kumkum* applied to her forehead and one plantain put in her mouth. Bananas were also given to the other cows which, perhaps, did not fully realise the delectable significance of this customary feeding as they were all used to the routine diet of a modern dairy which had about 150 exotic animals. But they also seemed to realise that something special was happening here. Under the rain tree where the Swamiji gave *darshan* to the President of India and other devotees, including my father (10), we have put a plaque, which reads as follows:

His Holiness Jagadguru  
Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi  
Shankaracharya of  
Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham  
sat under this tree and gave darshan  
to devotees including  
Shri N. Sanjeeva Reddy, President of India,  
on 12-10-1978

On 13 October, Shantadevi Gaekwad, my wife's mother, who had come all the way from Baroda for Swamiji's *darshan* at Sandur, left in the morning for Bangalore with my daughter, Anuradha, who became an ardent devotee of the Swamiji and used to go to Kanchi for his *darshan* quite regularly when she was studying at the Women's Christian College, Madras (1985-87). The Swamiji also used to treat her with the utmost consideration. My mother-in-law from Baroda had been a devotee of Shri Siddharudhaswamy of Hubli in her childhood days, and now felt fulfilled by Swamiji's *darshan* in such a homely atmosphere at Sandur. On 14 October the Swamiji also left for Narasapur, near Donimalai, in keeping with his earlier commitment, but returned to Sandur on the 16th after a night's halt at Narasapur. From 18th to 21st were the last three days of Swamiji's unforgettable stay at Sandur for nearly a month. A plaque has been put up outside the room (8) where he stayed :

His Holiness Jagadguru  
Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi  
Shankaracharya of  
Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham  
Stayed Here  
from 27 Sept 1978 to 21 Oct 1978

Hospet, Hampi, Anegundi,  
Tungabhadra and Vysanakere  
(Bellary district, Karnataka)

Hospet, Hampi and  
Anegundi

21 October to early November 1978

On the 21st, the Swamiji left Sandur at 4.00 a.m.. and started walking towards Hospet. I walked with him and at 9.30 a.m.. we were at Siddapur where the Swamiji had his bath in a small stream followed by *japa* and meditation. We left Siddapur a little after 2.00 p.m. and reached Hospet at about 8.30 p.m. The distance from Sandur to Hospet is 30 kms. People flocked for his *darshan* at every roadside village and the atmosphere was so alive and electrifying that we did not feel the strain of walking. At Hospet, the Swamiji halted at the Chintamani Mutt. He was at Hospet for three days and left in the morning of 24 October towards Kaddirampur, a village where he halted that night. On 25 October he left Kaddirampur for Hampi, the famous capital of the Vijayanagar empire, now well-known for the Virupaksha temple and the ancient structures and sculptures in stone. Vidyaranya swamy, one of the greatest Shankaracharyas after Adi Shankara, had presided over the initial fortunes of Vijayanagar in the early 14th century.

At Hampi, on 25 October, there was *parayana* or reading of Panchadasi, that great work of Vidyaranya on *Advaita*. On 26th the Swamiji was in meditation at the *Devi* temple in the Hampi temple complex. On the 27th he visited Kamalapur and the Anjaneya temple in the afternoon. I knew this area very well as many of these villages were part of the Sandur Assembly Constituency some years ago. As I walked in the rural environs of Hampi, along with the Swamiji (11&12), I saw many familiar faces which were lit up with a special kind of joy and satisfaction. It was a renewal of so many things which are basic to our lifestyle and culture, the spiritual heritage and values.

On the 28th we left Kamalapur for Anegundi at about 8.00 a.m. via Talawargatta. My youngest son, Kartikeya, accompanied by Ananda Nikkam, also joined me in this *padayatra* with the Swamiji to Anegundi, an ancient, historical place in the rocky environs of Hampi and Vijayanagar, on the other side of the river Tungabhadra. The river had to be crossed, which we did in a *hargole* — a round boat of ancient design made of wickerwork or interwoven lathes, covered with waterproof layer of materials such as animal skin, canvas, tar, oiled cloth and the like. The Swamiji stepped into a *hargole* and sat in the centre, paddled by two local boatmen familiar with the river and its terrain. We followed in another *hargole*. The Swamiji looked extremely comfortable in this ancient float, which progressed slowly but surely to the other bank of the river, where there was an enthusiastic crowd waiting for the Swamiji to alight and proceed to Anegundi (14&15).

My father along with my sister, Vijaya, and Vasundhara came from Sandur for Swamiji's *darshan* at Anegundi, where he visited the Chintamani Mutt and made us light lamps in the *guha* or cave where he was sitting. In the *mantapa* above the *guha* is a *Shivalinga* with a *Shrichakra* carved on it. I came here again on 29th evening for a brief *darshan*, and, on the 30th at 10.00 a.m., when Annapurna was propitiated. When I next met the Swamiji, it was at Gangavati, on 2 November 1978, sitting inside the stationary tricycle box which was also used as a parking room wherever and whenever they had to break journey. Normally there was always some temple or the other for the Swamiji to rest and spend the night. The dominant impression in my mind of this meeting was his message: "Must continue service to the people". On 4 November, I again met the Swamiji at the Malyavanta Rama temple near Kamalapur, in the evening, walked with the Swamiji and requested him to return to Sandur after his *padayatra*. But I knew that time



always moves forward and never returns. What is timeless always remains with us like the memory of the Swamiji's visit to Sandur, changing our lives in a very subtle and inexorable way. The Swamiji's decision to move on and keep moving was equally inexorable.

Hampi

21 November 1978

I had not been able to see the Swamiji for about a fortnight as I was away from Sandur on work. When I returned, the Swamiji was at Hampi. When I saw the Swamiji on 21 November he gave me a broad smile which warmed my heart and made me feel more than welcome. He asked me to sit in front of him, which I was only too happy to do. To be in his presence was bliss. One forgot oneself and one's petty problems. However, my eyes noticed some jungle fruits, *barehannu* (*Zizyphus jujuba*) kept right in front of the Swamiji. I distinctly remember how one chestnut-coloured berry trickled down to me, as if in acknowledgement of my very human attention. It is one of my favourite fruits.

Hampi

30 November 1978

The Swamiji was in the Virupaksha temple, in the rectangular hall where there are some ancient paintings on the ceiling. They are the only paintings of its kind to be found in this temple complex and are precious from the point of view of history and art. There is great need to preserve them in

the best possible manner. (As George Michell puts it "clearly this ceiling is only a fragment of the painting tradition that must have coexisted with stone and bronze techniques but which has now been almost completely lost"). When I went for Swamiji's *darshan* he drew my attention to these paintings and more particularly to a painting of a procession in which an important personage was being carried in a palanquin, who, the Swamiji said, must be the much venerated sage, Vidyaranya, who was so closely connected with the founding of the Vijayanagar empire. The Swamiji had his own way of conveying to us what was important and noteworthy.

Hampi

16 and 17 December 1978

On the 16th the Swamiji was sleeping in one of the old temples. After deep and prolonged meditation, the Swamiji sometimes sleeps at any odd hour and for any unpredictable length of time. Though I had reached Hampi in the morning, I could have *darshan* of the Swamiji only at 1.00 p.m. It was a brief *darshan*, but next day, on the 17th, when I went there at 9.30 a.m., the Swamiji was near the rear pond in the Hampi temple complex. He was in a mood to discuss and show interest in a variety of subjects such as the starting of *Veda Pathashalas*, renovation of temples and the installation of deities, sources and science of sculpture and palm leaf writings and literature on Hampi. I mentioned to him my idea to bring out someday a pictorial book on Hampi as I was interested in photography as well. The Swamiji mentioned Robert Sewell's book on the Forgotten Empire and the scope to do more work on Vidyaranya. A foreigner, who was often seen standing and meditating with his mind focussed on the Swamiji, was now

seeking his guidance on some work on our epics, transliteration in verse of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. I was with the Swamiji for a little over three hours from 9.30 a.m. till 12.45 p.m. and was fully exposed to the wide range of the Swamiji's interests and the depth of his knowledge, to the last detail, on a variety of subjects of abiding cultural significance. I did not feel how time passed, but just when my mind seemed to notice that over three hours had passed, the Swamiji indicated that I may now leave. Perhaps he thought that at midday I should have something more solid to eat after the feast of thoughts and ideas I had had. It is not as though for three hours there had been un-diluted discussion and discourse. All types of visitors would try to attract the Swamiji's attention to their particular problems. There was one persistent visitor who wanted the Swamiji to give him a fruit or some article he had touched but did not succeed in his attempts. Perhaps the Swamiji had in mind his own good in not giving him the fruit he wanted and tried so hard to get. A human being has to learn to offer the fruits of his action to God or the universal principle and not expect any fruits or rewards for his actions, except, I suppose, the deep joy and spiritual satisfaction of doing one's best in the service of a higher life-principle or deeper awareness. Very often we get the best when we least expect it. It is when one is lost in moments which are all-pervasive and total that one is likely to find or experience something which is truly worthwhile and soul-satisfying. As the Swamiji has said : "It is the all-pervasive *ananda* that marks the Self of every person. Any joy that comes from outside must become one with that Self." (Aspects of our Religion — Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi — Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay).

My youngest brother, Venkatrao, with his newly wedded bride, Vidya, had *darshan* of the Swamiji on 2 January, when they visited Hospet where our metal and ferroalloys plant is situated. He blessed the couple in his own characteristic way which always brought a great deal of satisfaction to all concerned. A few days later, I again had *darshan* of the Swamiji in a temple at Kaddirampur, a village near Hospet. Then again on Friday the 19th I had a very good *darshan* of the Swamiji in the Kali temple in the vicinity of the Tungabhadra Dam garden. Though I had come to Hospet in the morning, I was called only at 2.25 p.m. and the Swamiji gave me permission to return to Sandur only at 4.30 p.m. Again a number of subjects were discussed, including art and literature. The Swamiji mentioned an exquisite Sanskrit poem, *Madhura Vijayam*, the conquest of Madhura (the achievements of Kumara Kampana, the second son of Bukka I of Vijayanagar are celebrated in this beautiful poem by his wife Gangadevi), which he said should be translated from Sanskrit to Kannada. There were, of course, a number of books written by Vidyaranya and his contemporaries which should be collected and kept in a library for the benefit of the interested students and *savants* (which, incidentally, has now been done in the library run by the Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha, Hospet). The discussion then veered to the listing of names of those who had made a significant contribution in their respective fields. The names which figured in this list were: Valmiki, Tulasidas, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Thyagaraja, Purandaradasa, Mira Bai, Samarth Ramdas, Adi Shankaracharya, Basaveshwara, Vidyaranya, Ashoka, Vikramaditya, Krishnadevaraya, Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wadeyar, Varahamihira, Aryabhata, Bhaskaracharya, Nagarjuna, J.C. Bose, C.V. Raman, Ramanuja and Visvesvaraya. The list does give an idea of the sort of persons, who,

according to the Swamiji, qualified to be included amongst those who had made an outstanding contribution to the country and Karnataka in different walks of life. I thought to myself that surely the name of the Swamiji himself, the mystic sage and unassuming spiritual master that he was, should automatically find a place in any gallery or *mantapa* of the great sons of India.

Hampi

February 1979

During this month I had *darshan* of the Swamiji on four different occasions. On one occasion (2 February), during discussion, the Swamiji made special mention of a Sanskrit work, *Virupaksha rathothsava* or *Vasanthothsava champu* by one Ahobala (15th century), who describes Vidyaranya being taken in a procession in the streets of Vijayanagara during the car festival of Lord Virupaksha. (This book is edited by one R.S. Panchamukhi, Dharwad, 1953). Vidyaranya was the guiding light of the Vijayanagar empire until his death towards the end of the 14th century (1386). He was also the minister of the kingdom for some time like Basaveshwara in the 12th century.

When I next met the Swamiji (4 February) Sujai and Kartik (aged 21 and 19 respectively) were with me. The Swamiji talked to them and asked them to do "social work" and called me a "Voluntary Minister" as I was not officially one but continued to do social work. The idea that everybody and especially those in authority or of any importance should do social work to benefit and build a just social order was dominant in his thinking and reflected the Indian ethos. There was reference to Vivekananda and the rock at Kanyakumari to which he swam across the sea and meditated.

Also to the need for community effort to reduce social burdens and inequities including marriage expenses for all sections of society. All this which was tucked away in the recesses of my consciousness must have surfaced and unerringly influenced me when we decided to build the *Adarsha Community Centre and Kalyanamantapa* at Sandur in 1991.

On *Shivaratri* (25 February) I again went with Sujai and Kartik for Swamiji's *darshan* at Hampi. We watched with fascination the meticulous manner in which the Swamiji bathed his *danda* or bamboo staff with water poured out of a *shankha* or conch. In the lively discussions that took place in the presence of the Swamiji, I had occasion to mention what Arthur Koestler had said about the growth of the neo-cortex and the conflicts that may arise between the old and the new brain centres, causing imbalances which need to be recognised and corrected. Neuroscientists also talked of the left and the right side of the brain, the left side being the centre of logic, rationality and articulation, while the right side was more intuitive, musical and holistic. Spirituality and spiritual practices had obviously to help a human being to achieve greater harmony and develop a deeper and a more balanced personality. (I have dwelt more fully on these aspects in my *Human Quest and Experience*, presented to the Swamiji at Sandur: see Annexure). The Swamiji would listen intently and his occasional brief interjection would be of great value to all of us. Even his silence was highly educative and enlightening in a way I cannot quite describe. He gave *darshan* to one *Mouna Swamiji*, before giving me permission to go and come again the next day. On returning to Sandur I visited the Kartikeya temple in the evening. The next morning (Monday, 26 February), after an extremely peaceful and satisfying meditation, I once again came to Hampi and participated in the *aradhana*, gently presided over by the Swamiji who was always the centre of our attention and awareness.

I could meet the Swamiji only in the latter half of the month. In the first half I was away on work and returned to Sandur, after visiting Bangalore, Bombay and Delhi, about the 15th of March, with an allergic hay fever to which I was prone. But I had Swamiji's *darshan* on the 16th and again on the 21st when he was in *mouna*. 29th was *Gudi Padva*, observed as our New Year Day. In the morning I went to Kumaraswamy and in the evening to Swamiji who was in Hosuramma temple near Chitwadgi. The time was about 7.00 p.m. The roads were very dusty and there were crowds of people visiting the temple because of Swamiji's presence there on *Ugadi*. The Swamiji was doing his evening *japa*, sitting on the steps leading to one of the irrigation canals running close to the Hosuramma temple. He had finished his holy dip and was sitting facing south. I was standing at some distance in the dusk. After a few minutes, after he had finished praying to the elements and paying ritualistic attention to his spiritual staff or *danda*, he turned north and looked up. Vasundhara and I thought that this was our opportunity to approach closer and do our *pranam* and *arati* with camphor lit in the centre of a round metal plate with edges turning inwards. The Swamiji was trying to convey something to us by gestures. But it was only after we had finished doing our *pranam* that we realised that we were facing south, and what the Swamiji was trying to tell us was that we should not be facing south while doing *pranam* to him. He was very particular that all should meticulously observe this rule of not facing south while paying their respects to him. Whatever the reasons for this in his mind, we were content to observe the rule to the extent possible, only because the Swamiji said so, though we also knew that Shiva as Dakshinamurthy faces south, and so the devotees automatically face north while offering worship.

(A seven feet Nataraja, exquisitely carved in stone by D. Vadiraj in 1991, at the temple in Shivapur is also facing south.) There are many such ritualistic practices the full significance of which we do not know.

Then the Swamiji got up from that place and went inside the temple, followed by all of us. After *arati* to the deity was performed, the Swamiji sat in the *mantapa* of the temple and beckoned us to also sit near him. He then enquired about my health. Balu was the interpreter as usual. The Swamiji was speaking very softly, mainly movements of lips and gestures to convey his thoughts. Balu was adept at understanding this language, though he had to repeat loudly what he thought the Swamiji was saying, to check whether he had understood correctly, before conveying it to us. Whenever the Swamiji had come out of deep meditation and *mouna*, he tended to speak in whispers, hardly audible, and mostly through gestures. However, he was in a mood to communicate. First he made very kind and paternal enquiries about my flu and fever and where all I had been before returning to Sandur and what work I had done. Then he asked whether I had visited this temple before. I had not, but he was in a mood to educate us.

For the benefit of everybody the Swamiji conveyed how *Adi Vyasaraaya*, the Vaishnava Saint, is said to have visited this temple and placed two *saligrams* on the face of the *vigraha* to represent the two eyes. Two dark spots were seen in the centre of the more recent silver eyes, below which were supposed to be the *saligrams*, called *Narasimha* and *Vasudeva*. The temple priest said that they could be seen more clearly in the early hours of the morning before the *alankara* or the beautification of the deity. Strangely enough, the silver eyes were kept in position by a bandage of cloth which was removed only at the time of *abhisheka*. The Swamiji asked me to have a close look at the eyes and whether I had seen or heard about *saligrams*. I replied that I do not remember seeing one but had heard about them as



sacred stones. The Swamiji was keen that we all knew a little more about *saligrams*. He made somebody explain where they were found and how they were to be recognised. We were told that *saligrams* were more easily found in the Ghandak river in Nepal, just as the river Narmada was known for stones resembling the *linga*. The Swamiji said that the *saligram* was a hard dark stone. In spite of its hardness, an insect bores into it and executes perfect geometric patterns by which the *saligram* is to be recognised and used for various purposes and to represent different Gods. It had perfect polish in the natural condition and was found in riverbeds. The Swamiji also wanted to know whether we had heard of Mahatma Gandhi's *bhajan* where there is a reference to "Ganga, Tulasi, Saligram". Generally, the *saligram* to the Vaishnavite was what the *linga* was to the Shaivite. That a great Vaishnavite Saint had presented *saligrams* to this *Shakti* temple, so many years ago, was the significance of this temple, which is what the Swamiji, perhaps, wanted to emphasise. He has always been keen to stress the basic unity behind the apparent diversity of different sectarian practices. Sitting on the steps of the Eshwaraswamy temple at Sandur, I have heard the Swamiji say to the pundits of Kanchi that we should bring together the common features of all sectarian beliefs and philosophical traditions, so that what is emphasised was unity and not diversity. In any case, great saints and spiritual masters are above narrow sectarian forms and practices; otherwise they would not have that universal appeal and all-embracing humanity.

By the time the Swamiji gave us permission to leave for Sandur, it was 9.00 p.m. Before that he had asked Balu to tell me that he will be staying here for the next five or six days till *Ramanavami*. I remember distinctly how the Swamiji broke into a pleasing, knowing smile earlier in the evening when I said that I will come very early one day, at the time of the *abhisheka*

of the deity, so that I could see the *saligram* eyes uncovered. I could not get over the feeling that there was some mystery hidden in the eyes. It could be that the Swamiji wanted me to try and understand something which he had in mind. Did he want me to get a *saligram* and worship it? Did our family already have a *saligram* to which he would like me to pay more attention? Why did he suddenly think of my daughter, Anuradha, who has had to pay special attention to her eyes from her childhood? (Later, Anuradha served at a voluntary social service organisation at Sandur, dedicated to the eye care of the rural people). I felt I should visit this temple, again and again, as long as Swamiji was there.

I have earlier referred to Swamiji wanting to know whether we had heard of Gandhiji's *bhajan* where there is a mention of the *saligram*. He had done this all by gestures which only Balu could decipher by a process of trial and error. The Swamiji had to do it in steps. First he managed to get Balu to say "freedom". From freedom to Gandhiji was the next step. Balu caught on after a few errors. Then the Swamiji clapped his hands and easily conveyed that he was referring to Gandhiji's favourite *bhajan*. We could all make a good guess that it must be "*Raghupathy Raghava Rajaram*". He made a person sing this *bhajan* hoping that he will come to the lines which contain the word "*saligram*". A school teacher, who had been my schoolmate in the Vidyamandir at Sandur, sang this *bhajan* followed in chorus by his students. Eventually, by this circuitous but totally absorbing way, we discovered the words the Swamiji had in mind: "*Sundara Madhava Meghashyam; Ganga, Tulasi, Saligram*". It was like a quiz in gestures. Both children and adults could get totally absorbed in such play and forget themselves.

We again went to see the Swamiji in the evening at the *Hosura Kshetra*, popularly known as the Hosuramma temple. Vasundhara and I did *arati* to the Swamiji which was our usual practice. The Swamiji was sitting on the edge of a low stone parapet in front of the temple. His one leg was pulled up and bent at the knee, while the other was dangling, sometimes touching the floor. He was beautifully framed by the surrounding foliage. The tree leaves were stooping down to provide coolness and shade. It was a scene which could have been hundreds of years old. But what was happening in Swamiji's presence belonged very much to the present. Some devotees had come all the way from Tadapatri to show Swamiji the photographs of the temple construction they were undertaking. They had also come to Sandur when he was there. Now they were squatting on the ground in front of the Swamiji who was perched a little higher like a tree-God. He had a saffron cloth tied to his head, and the green foliage provided the natural halo enhancing the spiritual aura. The Swamiji was closely examining the photographs and giving his comments, while we stood at a little distance behind. But as soon as Swamiji spotted me, he told Balu to beckon me to come closer and see the *saligram* that was placed on the floor right in front of him. The person from Tadapatri had brought this *saligram* to show the Swamiji and seek his instructions as to how he should worship it. The Swamiji conveyed that he should pray mentally. He seemed to be satisfied with this brief instruction.

I bent down on my knees in front of the Swamiji and closely examined the *saligram* which was the size of a potato. The pattern made by the insect inside this smooth black stone could not be seen. Only a spot where the insect had made a hole could be seen from the outside. After having had a

close look I went inside the temple for the *Devi's darshan*. To my great delight the *pujari* was very cooperative and voluntarily raised the cloth which was tied across the eyes of the *Devi* and showed me the two *saligrams* hidden in the sockets below. In the left eye of the *Devi* was the *Narasimha Saligram*. It was a very impressive dark, polished stone with one side cut or exposed, in the centre of which one could distinctly see the *Vishnu Chakra* like the outlines of a *shankha* or conch. The thin firm lines were very distinct and sharp. There was no difficulty in seeing these lines without going too close or handling the *saligram*. The *saligram* in the right eye was called *Vasudeva* and the markings were not exposed or easily seen, though the *pujari* said that this also has a cavity inside. (I discovered later that in the *Kartikeya* or *Kumaraswamy* temple near *Sandur*, there are two *saligrams*, one called *Narasimha* is the size of a small apple with a hole on top where the apple would have been attached to the branch of a tree, and a smaller one called *Sudarshana* with a conch like design on the inside exposed surface).

The *Devi vigraha* was called *simha swarupini* (lion-like). The pot-like head with prominent silver lips and protruding teeth looked like an aggressive fish coming straight towards you. Then one noticed the mustache, the silver lining of the nose and the eyes. The *utsava murti* of the *Devi* was astride the head below. Local legend has it that this is only the head and the body is elsewhere. I was amazed at the weird flights popular imagination and mythology could take. The earrings looked like locks of metallic hair or the feet of a mythological dragon pointing sideways and away from the face of the *vigraha*. Sheltering the *utsava murti* were two hooded serpents, one small and one large, one above the other, with green bangles and *kumkum* adding colour to the whole decor.

A little behind and to the right of this temple is another temple which

has an impressive *vighraha* of a serpent goddess who is believed to be the mother of Hosuramma. The Swamiji was living in the room adjoining this temple. This is where he settled down for *japa* after his evening bath. When the Swamiji had gone for his evening ablutions, the people who had assembled there asked me to tell the authorities concerned to pay more attention to the maintenance and upkeep of this and other similar temples. The Swamiji himself had earlier made some suggestions regarding renovation of such small temples. Before returning to Sandur at about 8.00 p.m. I placed before the Swamiji a small basketful of grapes, *Anabhi Shahi* and *Thomsons Seedless* and a pomegranate. I told the Swamiji that these were from my garden at Sandur. He smiled and blessed with his slightly raised right hand, a typical gesture which has given so much satisfaction to so many Indians and foreigners alike. Why does one feel so blessed and peaceful in his presence? Perhaps because he himself is immersed in Peace — he lives and breathes Peace and holiness of the eternal spirit and those who come within his ambit cannot but be affected by it. It is an experience which fills one's whole being and dissolves all superficial conflicts and contradictions. One must only have the spiritual instinct to let go and surrender to a higher experience, so that mind-created problems disappear, leaving one to enjoy far greater peace than ever before. Out of Peace is born true happiness, creativity, compassion and service. This, I felt, was the main pull of spirituality as a living experience. As the Swamiji has said: "It is the all-pervasive *ananda* (blissfulness) that marks the Self of every person" but "if our mind is a mirror and if it is oscillating and has a layer of dirt, it does not reflect the *Paramatma* or our inner self truly as blissful. If the mind is steady and clear, reality will be revealed."

Hospet

31 March 1979

The Swamiji was sitting inside the Hosuramma temple, in the enclosure to the right of the *garthagudi* or the sanctum sanctorum which contained the *vigrahas* of Parashurama and Renuka Devi. As I was about to do *sashtanga namaskara* the Swamiji reminded me not to face south but towards the main temple. Accordingly, we did *arati* and bowed in the direction of the main *vigraha* in the presence of the Swamiji. He asked Balu to place the grapes we had brought at the feet of the *vigrahas*. The Swamiji then asked through Balu whether I knew the word *parashu* (axe) and the story of Parashurama and how he cut off the head of his mother at the instance of his father Jamadagni. I said I knew. The Swamiji said that, as the legend has it, it is only the head of Renuka Devi which was in the temple, the body being on the other side of Tungabhadra at a place called Hulgi. There is scope, I thought, to do meaningful research on the social conditions, psychological states and psyche that have gone into the making of such mythological stories and legends and their local adaptations over a period of time.

The Swamiji then changed the topic from mythology to modern events. He asked me whether I had seen recent newspaper reports about Indira Gandhi's visit and conveyed that he (Swamiji) had told both Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi that everybody should come together in the interests of the nation, which had also been reported in the press. He then gave us permission to leave by waving his hands in a gentle farewell, after having distributed to the children the grapes I had brought from Sandur. The children were happy and so was I.

Hospet

1 April 1979

Left Sandur a little after 6.30 a.m. and reached Hosuru Kshetra about 7.30 a.m. The Swamiji was sitting in the courtyard and had not yet retired for his *japa*. It was as though he was waiting for us to come. A group of persons had also come from Gadag. The Swamiji made some kind enquiries of them and then asked me how Ranganathan had died all of a sudden. (Ranganathan was an accountant working with me at Sandur who had had a massive heart attack after a couple of games of tennis and suddenly died sitting in a chair watching the game). The Swamiji then asked me to offer the seedless grapes to the deity in the temple and, after a little while, gave us permission to leave. He did this by a soft movement of his hand which was so very courteous and seemed to say 'you can go now and come again'. One did feel like coming again and again to take in draughts of fresh spiritual air which strengthened psychic health and made the body and spirit feel light and joyous. The sensation of being drawn to the centre of one's being was so very satisfying.

Hospet

2 April 1979

The second and third stage of the Mariyammanahalli lift-irrigation project was being inaugurated at 5.00 p.m. by the Minister in charge of minor irrigation D.B. Chandregowda. I had been pressed to participate in this function because the first stage of this project to irrigate 1,800 acres had been completed during the period I was a minister. This year they had actually made water available to about 1,500 acres and the farmers had taken two

successful crops of maize and groundnut with above-average yields. The second and third stage of this project was to double the irrigation potential. After inspection the minister agreed to get the canals properly lined to avoid seepage, waste of water and damage to the fields. When we reached Mariyamnahanalli, which was previously a part of my Assembly Constituency, we were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic crowd who swiftly put us into a decorated jeep and took us in a procession to the venue of the public meeting. We had no option but to fall in line like obedient school boys. The drum-beaters were mostly *Nayakas* who were once foot-soldiers of the Vijayanagar empire, and willy-nilly we felt like generals participating in a victory march — the victory of the farmers expressing their happiness over the greening of their fields which would no longer be dependent on precarious rainfall. The drums were in front and raised a lot of dust but determined the pace at which the jeep could move forward. The people were happy that I had been able to come, though I had not contested the 1978 elections and had kept away from active politics for some time. The minister, Chandregowda, sensed the spirit of the crowd and said in his speech that there was nothing more that any public worker could expect from the people whom he had served than such spontaneous response and affection. I also felt quite touched. After all, I was not now a minister and had no formal power whatsoever. When it was my turn to speak, I said I had come only as a friend and coworker; I could never come here as a guest, much less as a chief guest, as I was very much at home here and knew the people and the area too well for that. Of course, when a mike was put in front of me, old memories and habits of public life surfaced and I spoke for an hour giving facts tinged with statistics and spirituality. I could not help mentioning how between 1972 to 1979 the irrigated area in Karnataka had increased from 20 to 50 lakh acres. In my own Sandur Assembly Constituency, the



irrigation potential would have increased by about 15 to 20 thousand acres, taking into account the potential of this lift-irrigation project, Daroji and Taranagar in Sandur taluk and Gandabommanahalli in Gudekota firka which was also previously a part of my constituency. However, I did not forget to remind the people that prosperity also brings greater responsibilities. Jawaharlal Nehru called irrigation projects the new temples. The green revolution brought prosperity to rural areas but peace within is equally important. For this we must continue to pay attention to the temple of our heart and basic human values. Progress with spiritual balance and equanimity is the challenge before modern man. This is where the mystics and the men of spirituality have a soft and sobering influence. The Minister, Chandregowda, had also met the Kanchi Paramacharya and referred to him, in his speech, as a "Walking God", and to the discussion he had had with the Swamiji regarding the Hampi car festival.

The public meeting at Mariyammanahalli was over only at about 8.00 p.m. By the time I returned to the Hosuramma temple it was 8.30 p.m. The Swamiji was sitting near the water channel outside the temple. As I went there he got up and had the evening *arati* performed to the deity and then settled down inside the temple. He wanted to know all that happened at the public function including the facts and figures about irrigation and what kind of arrangement had been made to lift and use the water. His interest in the subject was so great that I had to reply at length and give him all the details. I told him how this was an area worst affected in a drought before the Tungabhadra Dam was built. But the dam had also resulted in the submergence of several villages which had to be relocated and rebuilt elsewhere. The Swamiji wanted to know whether the new villages had all come up and whether temples had also been built there. I told him that Mariyammanahalli itself was a rehabilitated village where

an impressive Laxminarayana temple had been constructed. At the well-attended public meeting, at Mariyammanahalli, I had also emphasized the need for better maintenance of water channels and temples, both old and new.

The Swamiji then asked me how far was Mariyammanahalli from our Vyasnakere factory or ferroalloys plant. I said it was a couple of kilometers. Suddenly the Swamiji's face was wreathed in a broad smile and he asked, with a twinkle in his eyes, why I had never suggested that he should visit our factory at Vyasnakere. For a moment I did not know what to say. But in a split second I understood the spirit of the question. It was written large on his face. Balu, who was the interpreter, was also anxiously awaiting to see what I would say. I said how could I not want the Swamiji to visit the factory. But my only feeling at that time had been that it would be a bit too much to ask the Swamiji to walk about 10 km. to the factory from Hospet and return to Hospet the same day, as he wanted to start moving in the opposite direction the next day. If the Swamiji was going towards Kudligi, then the factory would be on the way and the Swamiji could even halt at the Laxminarayana temple at Mariyammanahalli. Somehow it had never occurred to me to ask the Swamiji to visit the factory. My feeling was that there was something imperfect in the attitude which expected the Swamiji to actually come and bless every material structure that we had constructed. A great spirit knows everything and does not have to be taken to the spot like the secular V.I.Ps. It is true that all this had crossed my mind. But obviously the Swamiji had sensed it, as he senses every nuance of thought and feeling that passes through one's mind. He catches every mood and reflection irrespective of whether one expresses it or not. He knows at once what comes from the heart and what is a mere formal utterance. And what comes from the heart also comes from him. So where was the need to

prevail upon him to do this or that. All this which I had felt at that time, the Swamiji reminded me in one masterly stroke. His broad teasing smile was to assure me that he had read my thoughts and feelings in the right perspective. He also, perhaps, wanted to convey to those present that *bhakti* went deeper than wanting to get the blessings of saints and God-men for our material prosperity. I was reading the book on Swamiji, "Aspects of our Religion" (published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan) in which the Swamiji is quoted to have expressed some thoughts on true devotion: "True prayer is not asking for this or that which are alien to us, which are things outside of us. The true devotee prays to God to give Himself to himself. Give me my own nature ... . Give me to myself means to give Thyself to me".

"For what should we pray to God? We may have all the goods of the world, but none of them will give us satisfaction if the mind is not at peace. We must pray for freedom from distraction".

"Surely, if a man is helped to shake off his pride, control his mind, restrain his senses and feel an inclusive love for everything in this world, he will automatically attain *shanti*, peace of mind and cross the sea of *samsaara*. This must be the prayer on the lips of everyone".

K.H. Srinivas, Minister for Power and Youth Services had also met the Swamiji earlier and suddenly decided to see me at Sandur after visiting the Swamiji, in order to go to the Kartikeshwara temple before proceeding to Chitradurga for an official function. As I took him to Kartikeya temple, he told me what the Swamiji had said to him about me. He said that the Swamiji had called me an absolutely "straight forward" person and described how the Swamiji had moved his right hand in a straight and unswerving forward direction to emphasize the straightness of path. To say that I was flattered is to miss and grossly underestimate the impact this had on me. It strengthened several folds my inner dedication and resolve to tread the

straight and narrow path, without fear or favour, firm in the belief that that is what my spiritual mentor or *guru* wanted me to do, come what may. Perhaps that was the purpose of such a remark to a minister who was also a friend.

Hospet

3 April 1979

The Swamiji was sitting in the open shade of a tree adjoining the Hosuramma temple. Sitting in front of him were a few pundits and some students who were reciting avidly in Sanskrit. It was an atmosphere reminiscent of the peace and purity of the ancient *gurukula* where learning was nurtured and passed on from generation to generation, largely by word of mouth.

As soon as I went there at about 10.00 a.m., the Swamiji asked the pundits to explain to me what was being recited. The head pundit had brought three teenagers from Karachi whom he had taught, so that the Swamiji could see and hear for himself what they had learnt. Two other pundits were also taking part in the proceedings by asking a few questions and trying to make sure that the students fully understood what they were reciting. The head pundit had a powerful personality and would firmly correct the students if they made the slightest mistake. The Swamiji would keep him in check, as he tended to interrupt and intervene rather too frequently, and encourage another milder looking pundit to test the students without overpowering them. However, the senior pundit was anxious, as instructed by the Swamiji, to explain to me what the boys had been taught, namely, *vyakarana* (grammar), *nyaya* (logic) and *darshana* (philosophy). After asking the boys to recite from their different disciplines, the Swamiji went for his bath and

*japa* to the canal flowing close to the temple. The pundit, feeling a little freer in the Swamiji's absence, proudly made the students recite what he had taught them. The slightest mistake would bring a spontaneous admonition from him, to which the students were fully accustomed. This affectionate show of authority by their master at regular intervals did not bother them in the least. They took it as part of the game. They went on reciting what they had learnt. Their memory was so well developed that they could recite almost endlessly. That was the style and practice of traditional learning. Now we seem to have gone to the other extreme in neglecting the development of memory. After all, it is memory which readily makes available the learning when required. It is memory which makes a ready person. What is the use of a warrior who does not have his weapons close to him but neatly arranged in the armoury. The time-lag entailed in a person's poor memory is a tremendous disadvantage.

The boys recited Sanskrit verses freely and without being too conscious of their attainments. For a time there was a discussion on some concepts of logic and philosophy, in which I could also participate. One pundit made a mention of the well-known example of the serpent and the rope to distinguish between reality and appearance. Another pundit suggested that the example of the tree and its shadow was perhaps more useful for the purpose of explaining what is reality. The shadow is caused by the tree but is not the tree, the implication being that the shadow was not real because it was caused by the tree. (To me, of course, both the shadow and the tree were real). Obviously, the tree was not the original cause. There were a variety of forces which resulted in the tree. Thus, in relation to these forces the tree was not real. One could go on, layer by layer, to try and arrive at the root cause. One perhaps never arrives at it but one can certainly deepen one's awareness by which our vision becomes multidimensional. The search

for reality might thus deepen our vision, but it is still relative. If the universal un-differentiated energy is considered the source of everything, one can certainly try to become aware of this underlying unity within the limitations of the body, mind and spirit. But absolute non-differentiation or non-duality is only a concept as awareness itself implies the distinction of the experience and the experiencer. Life and logic, as we know it, would end if this distinction also disappears. This is as far as argument can go. But what is more relevant is the experience of a person with a deep holistic vision. The *jeevan muktha*, liberated in life like the Swamiji, is one who has tasted the nectar at the heart of experience, is aware of the deepest unity, and yet functions at the worldly level but with a difference. His actions and attitudes appear godlike and superhumanly dispassionate. The pundits admitted that such a view was not inconsistent with *Vedanta* which depended essentially on experience and not on just concepts and philosophical distinctions. It is the multidimensional awareness and functioning that falls within the destiny of man. The integrated vision is an *Advaitic* experience of great value, whatever the degree of integration a human being can achieve. The basis of our life would be very unstable if we took the fleeting shadows to be absolute reality.

We had exhausted this argument and also the pundits in the process when the Swamiji returned after his bath and *japa*. It must have been obvious to him that we had fully utilised the opportunity to exchange views and enjoy the atmosphere under that tree near the Hosuramma temple. He then mentioned to me about the need to collect the hundred and odd works of Swami Vidyananda on a wide variety of subjects. Time had passed without one being aware of it. It was nearly noon when the Swamiji gave me permission to leave after jokingly enquiring how I had liked sitting in the open heat. I said that the cool shade of the tree and his grace had refreshed

me greatly. He smiled and once again waved gently as if to say that the morning's session was over and I could now think of my afternoon meal, miles away at Sandur.

Hospet

4 April 1979

Due to some mundane preoccupations, I could reach Hcsuramma temple only at about 8.30 p.m. I was told that the Swamiji had been doing *japa* for nearly an hour near the water canal. As soon as I went and paid my respects to the Swamiji, he got up, went inside the temple and had the *arati* done to the goddess. Then he came out and sat in a small temple near the entrance gate. I had brought some grapes and a piece of *ahimsa* silk for Swamiji, though he normally wears only *khadi* cloth, handspun, handwoven, dyed ocher with vegetable and not chemical dyes. This I placed before him and told him that I had also brought some *dhotis* and *angavastras* for the three pundits who had taken such an active part in yesterday's discussion, and for the *vatus* or boys who had recited so beautifully from their *Vedic* books. The Swamiji was silent for a while and then called all the persons I had mentioned. He made the boys chant once again and explain the meaning. It was a closely argued piece in *tarka* (reasoning). It referred to the phenomenon of a falling fruit. The boys mentioned *gurutva* (weight) and *vega* (speed) as two qualities of a falling fruit. The Swamiji then asked one of them the difference between a fruit falling on one's head from a low branch and from a greater height. The boy answered simply that the impact of the fruit falling from a greater height would be more. The Swamiji wanted the boys to explain more clearly the principle behind this phenom-

anon. The head pundit was not spared the glare of the Swamiji's exacting mind. What he wanted was greater precision in thought and expression. It was Rajagopal, one of Swamiji's disciples who is a chemical engineer, who interpreted what the Swamiji was saying as the principle of velocity and acceleration. The boys did not mention gravity, perhaps because this gravitational field was common to all objects and was not the exclusive *lakshana* or quality of a falling fruit.

After a lively discussion on the above subject, the Swamiji fanned out his elbows to indicate that he wanted the *purohit* of generous proportions to come forward to arrange for the distribution of clothes by me to the pundits and pupils. It became quite a ceremony, the main significance being that it was in the presence of the Swamiji. The *ahimsa* silk piece which I had brought for the Swamiji, he took it and placed it close to him. This gave me much satisfaction. (*Ahimsa* silk is made from silk strands taken from cocoons after the moth has flown away).

The Swamiji then asked me whether I knew the princess from Greece who had come to see him and had left just a short while before I arrived. I said that I did see a car with an European lady in it but did not realise that she was the same Greek princess mentioned in T.M.P. Mahadevan's book and Swamiji's great devotee. The Swamiji said that she had a good heart and was a friend of India.

Hospet

5 April 1979

It was Ramanavami. At the Hosuramma temple the Swamiji was in deep meditation when we reached there about 8.30 a.m. My parents also came a



little later. We all waited for the Swamiji to come out of his meditation and commence the *pooja* which he did at 9.30 a.m. The green sari which we had brought was used for the Devi's *alankara* and *arati* performed, followed by chanting of *Vedic mantras*.

One *vidyarthi* was then asked by the Swamiji to read from the Ramayana. He specially asked him to read a portion which refers to the qualities of Shri Rama, particularly his farsightedness (*duradarshini*). Ramanavami was thus performed with traditional charm and elegance, at the end of which my father asked me to mention to the Swamiji our wish of making a traditional offering to the Lord Virupaksha of Hampi, through the Swamiji, at the Hampi car festival on the 12th. The Swamiji nodded in consent.

Hampi-Kaddirampur



10 April 1979

The Swamiji had come to Hampi from the Hosuramma temple after visiting the other *Devi* temples across the river. When I reached Hampi in the evening, the Swamiji had just started walking along with his cycle rickshaw towards Kaddirampur. I met him at the outer gates of Hampi and walked along with him (11). At the canal, the Swamiji had his bath before proceeding to the village of Kaddirampur, where the new temple was dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya. There is a *goshala* or cowshed behind the temple where the Swamiji intended to stay. After *arati* at the main temple and two other temples on either side, the Swamiji settled down in the narrow passage connecting the rear of the temple to the cowshed. Here he gave *darshan* to a number of people who had come to see him. It was fairly late when the Swamiji went inside the cowshed and sent for me. He had sensed that I

had something to say to him and so I was called after he had finished giving *darshan* to all the others. I did not quite know how to put it, but, after some initial hesitation, I said that it was strongly rumoured that immediately after the Hampi car festival on the 12th, the Swamiji would leave the district and proceed towards Raichur. I was only voicing the feeling of all the devotees that the Swamiji should postpone undertaking a long journey to Raichur until the summer abated and the rains cooled down the atmosphere. I added that if the Swamiji must leave Hampi for any reason he could decide to stay at any other suitable spot in the district including Sandur. To this the Swamiji reacted quickly with a smile and pat came the answer which left me spellbound. "Wherever I am it is Sandur", he said. I must confess that I had no answer to this, but I was touched by what he said.

Hampi

11 and 12 April 1979

At Hampi it was the day prior to the car festival. *Pooja* was performed to the *ratha*, the traditional wooden chariot to carry the Gods in procession, by breaking coconuts in the presence of the Swamiji, who wore a broad smile and brought special grace and dignity to the occasion. It was here that the Swamiji informed me of his decision to perform *Shankara Jayanti* near the waters of the Tungabhadra at a suitably selected spot in the vicinity of Vysanakere. This gladdened my heart. The Hampi car festival which took place the next day (12th) was a grand occasion which did revive old memories of what it must have been like in the days of Vidyaranya.

The Swamiji had left Hampi and was at the Ghalamma temple at the Tungabhadra Dam. I had *darshan* both in the morning and in the evening. In the morning when I went he was sleeping soundly in the rickshaw, and in the evening bathing in the Tungabhadra canal. The next day (25th) I joined the Swamiji on his way to Vyasanakere where a place had been chosen on the banks of the Tungabhadra reservoir for his stay (13). A *parnakuti* or small hut was quickly constructed in the traditional fashion not far from the expanse of water in an open pebbled strip, a little beyond the narrow wooded projection with a forest rest house on the western side of the main road, opposite the Vyasanakere Railway Station. It was a well-selected site and I had the great satisfaction of seeing the Swamiji perform *sandhyavandana* at sunset (26th) in the warm glow and an atmosphere surcharged with spirituality. It is here that Shankara *Jayanti* was to be performed with traditional solemnity from 27 April to 1 May. This was almost like being back home at Sandur. (Incidentally, our ferroalloys plant is only a couple of kilometers from Vyasanakere).

It was at this time, on 28th evening to be precise, that I had recorded in my diary detailed instructions or guidelines given by the Swamiji with regard to a future temple complex. (It all came back in a flash, on the day of Ugadi, April 1995, on my way to the Kumaraswamy temple via our electronic industrial complex near Lakshmipur, Sandur — the idea of a temple complex in recollection of what the Swamiji had said about fifteen years ago). The Swamiji had said that:

1. The temple should face east.
2. It should be built in stone and not bricks.
3. It was to be a Shiva temple with *Sahasra Lingas*.
4. There was to be a Ganapathi temple in the southwest corner.
5. A Kumaraswamy temple in the northwest corner.
6. A Navagraha temple in the northeast corner (with a sun-dial outside).
7. There was to be no temple in the southeast corner.
8. The south wall of the temple was to have a carving of Anantha Padmanabha with Brahma in the *nabhi* or navel.
9. The north side wall was to have carvings of Nataraja and Govindaraja (like Chidambara).
10. The western wall behind the central *gudi* or temple was to contain three layers of carving:
  - i) The top one quarter of the wall was to have Dakshinamurthy facing south.
  - ii) The middle half of the wall would have Vyasa and his four disciples.
  - iii) The lower one quarter of the wall would have Adi Shankaracharya with his four disciples.

Dakshinamurthy in the panel was to be in a blessing pose under a banyan tree with the *Sanakadis*. Vyasa's four disciples were mentioned as Sumuntu, Jaimini, Vaishampayana and Paila. Adi Sankaracharya's four disciples were Sureshwaracharya, Padmapadacharya, Hastamalakacharya and Totakacharya.

Details of the Swamiji's stay at the *kuteer* or hut beyond the forest rest house at Vyasanakere, from 27 April to 1 May 1979 where Shankara *Jayanti* was performed, have been recorded almost hour-to-hour and minute-to-minute in my diary notes. It is worth mentioning here the salient features of his recorded daily routine for those few days at Vyasanakere:

### Vyasanakere

27 April 1979

- 3.55 a.m. The Swamiji woke up and walked towards the river.
- 5.00 a.m. Returned to the *kuteer*.
- 5.25 a.m. Singing of *bhajans* commenced.
- 6.20 a.m. Two framed pictures of Shri Adi Shankara were brought to the *kuteer* and shown to the Swamiji.
- 6.30 a.m. Some disciples applied mud to the Swamiji's body and more disciples arrived from the *Veda Pathashala* for *darshan*. The Swamiji listened to the *bhajan* parties.
- 7.20 a.m. The Swamiji left the *kuteer* for inspection of the *pooja* site (opposite the forest lodge), and made some suggestions.

- 7.40 a.m. Returned to the *kuteer* and discussed *pooja* arrangements with disciples.
- 8.20 a.m. Went to the river for bath and returned to the *kuteer* by 8.50 a.m.
- 9.00 a.m. *Bhajans* stopped.
- 9.15 a.m. Chanting of *Vedas* started.
- 9.20 a.m. Disciples carried Shri Adi Shankara's photo in procession from the *kuteer* to the place of the *pooja* where the Swamiji was immersed in *dhyana* or meditation.
- 9.27 a.m. Shri Adi Shankara's photo was placed at the place of *pooja*.
- 9.30 a.m. Vedic recitation stopped and *bhajans* began.
- 9.48 a.m. *Pooja* started at the *pooja pandal*.
- 10.25 a.m. *Bhajan* stopped but *pooja* continued.
- 10.50 a.m. Vedic chanting.
- 11.30 a.m. *Darshan* to devotees.
- 12.30 p.m. I was called to hear recitation of *bhashya* in Sanskrit.
- 12.55 p.m. I was asked to perform the function of presenting Narasimha Shastrigal of Godavari district with a shawl.
- 1.35 p.m. The Swamiji started doing *japa*.

- 2.50 p.m. The Swamiji offered prayer to Adi Shankara's photo inside the *pandal*.
- 3.35 p.m. Gave *darshan* to devotees.
- 4.50 p.m. Saw the ceremonial umbrella brought for the *pallakki utsava* or palanquin ceremony in the evening.
- 4.57 p.m. Enquired about *nadaswara*.
- 5.05 p.m. Swamiji gave *darshan* to me and my father.
- 5.17 p.m. Palanquin was got ready for the procession. The Swamiji symbolically touched the palanquin but did not walk with it.
- 5.50 p.m. He went towards the river for *sandhyavandana*.
- 5.55 p.m. Palanquin returned from the river to the *mantapa*.
- 6.00 p.m. Procession started. All except the Swamiji joined it.
- 6.35 p.m. Swamiji returned from the river and I was given *darshan*.
- 6.40 p.m. Swamiji attended the *pooja* to Shri Adi Shankara.
- 7.11 p.m. Started giving *darshan* sitting on the floor as usual.
- 7.30 p.m. I was given *darshan* which in my case usually meant permission to sit in his presence and participate in peace and respond to whatever the Swamiji might say or convey by gestures.
- 7.35 p.m. Returned to the *kuteer* for the night.

- 3.15 a.m. Swamiji awoke.
- 3.55 a.m. *Sankalpa* and *Panchanga Sravana*
- 4.00 a.m. *Dhyana*
- 5.45 a.m. *Bhajan* followed by *nadaswara*
- 6.00 a.m. Swami i went to the river for bath, returned at 6.11 a.m., applied *vibhuti* and went to the *pooja pandal*.
- 6.35 a.m. Started giving *darshan* to devotees.
- 8.00 a.m. *Bhajan* stopped and chanting of *vedas* commenced.
- 8.30 a.m. Swamiji observed disciples decorating Shri Adi Shankaracharya's photo.
- 10.30 a.m. Swamiji completed *japa* and performed *pooja*.
- 10.45 a.m. *Veda* chanting ended and discourse on *Vedanta* commenced.
- 11.15 a.m. Scholars were honoured including K.G.Halasgi, *keerthankara*.
- 11.20 a.m. *Darshan* to devotees.
- 12.30 p.m. Disciples recited *Vedas*.
- 12.35 p.m. Swamiji did *japa*.



- 1.00 p.m. Gave *darshan*.
- 2.20 p.m. Noticed a police constable on duty and gave him *prasada*.
- 2.35 p.m. Rested inside the enclosure.
- 3.55 p.m. Came out and started giving *darshan*.
- 5.30 p.m. Palanquin in connection with Shankara *Jayanti* was taken in procession to the river while the Swamiji sat outside the enclosure giving *darshan*.
- 6.45 p.m. Had bath and *sandhyavandana*.
- 7.05 p.m. I did *arati* to the Swamiji at the riverside followed by a long discussion, which lasted for more than two and a half hours, when Swamiji gave detailed suggestions and guidelines (as already mentioned) with regard to a future temple complex.
- 9.40 p.m. Swamiji returned from the river to the *kuteer*.
- 10.20 p.m. A scholar was honoured with a shawl.
- 10.30 p.m. Swamiji retired inside the *kuteer*.

### Vyasanakere

29 April 1979

- 5.55 a.m. *Bhajan* started. Swamiji was doing *japa* inside the *kuteer*.
- 7.05 a.m. Gave *darshan* to devotees from Kanchi.

- 7.30 a.m. Went to the river for bath.
- 8.00 a.m. Walked back to the *kuteer* and listened to the chanting by nine *vidyarthi*s or students near the *pooja pandal*.
- 8.23 a.m. My father did *arati* to the Swamiji.
- 8.30 a.m. Swamiji enters the *pooja pandal* for *japa*.
- 9.20 a.m. *Veda* recitation by scholars and disciples.
- 10.00 a.m. Swamiji offered his *pranams* or salutation to Shri Adi Shankara's photo and went inside the enclosure for *japa*.
- 10.10 a.m. *Abhisheka* started by disciples reciting *Rudrabhisheka*.
- 10.25 a.m. Recitation of *Purushasukta*.
- 10.38 a.m. *Ashtothara pooja*.
- 10.45 a.m. Recitation of *Samaveda*.
- 11.00 a.m. Swamiji came near Shri Adi Shankara's photo for *mangalarati*, followed by recitation of *Chaturveda* or the four *Vedas*.
- 11.15 a.m. Did *chamara seva* followed by presentation of certificates, cash prizes and shawls to students of the *Veda Pathashala* by my parents and me on behalf of the Kanchi Mutt.
- 12.45 p.m. Swamiji performed *pooja* inside the enclosure.
- 1.45 p.m. to 4.55 p.m. Intermittent *darshan* and *japa*.

- 5.20 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. Palanquin with Shri Adi Shankara's photo was taken to the river, *pooja* performed and, while returning, Swamiji himself did *chamara seva*.
- 6.35 p.m. The Swamiji gave his blessings before I left for a cultural programme.
- 7.10 p.m. Went to the river for bath.
- 7.30 p.m. Started *japa*.
- 8.30 p.m. Gave *darshan* to devotees.
- 9.50 p.m. Went to *pooja pandal*.
- 10.10 p.m. Retired for rest.

Vyasanakere

30 April 1979

Swamiji's routine was more or less similar to the previous days. At 6.20 p.m. Swamiji himself did *pooja* to Shri Adi Shankara's photo with flowers and *pradakshina*. After returning from the river at 7.25 p.m. the Swamiji sat near the anthill close to the *kuteer* and listened to the discussion on *Meemamsa* by Ramamurthysastry of Madras (translated into Kannada by Narayanasharma) on the values of zero and infinity. The discussion went on till 10.30 p.m. after which the Swamiji gave *darshan* to the officers and labour union members of our company, The Sandur Manganese & Iron Ores Limited (SMIORE), before going inside the *kuteer* and retiring for the night at about 11.30 p.m.

Vyasanakere

1 May 1979

It was the main day of Shankara *Jayanti* though the routine and rituals were similar to the previous days. The Swamiji's day began at 4.00 a.m. and consisted as usual of *japa*, *darshan* and discourses. *Mahamangalarati* was at 10.43 a.m., followed by *Vedic* discourses. There was a discourse in Kannada by Mulugund Sreepada Dixit on the philosophy of *Advaita* or non-duality and Shri Adi Shankara's contribution to the regeneration of Hinduism. After 12 noon there was recitation of a Kannada poem on Shri Adi Shankara by Hari Sarvothamadas. At 4.00 p.m. the Swamiji was sitting behind the photo of Adi Shankara. After the palanquin procession, the Swamiji himself performed *mangalarati*. At 7.00 p.m. the *kalasha* was taken to the river for *visarjana* and the water poured on the Swamiji. After bath and *japa* the Swamiji once again gave us *darshan*, my mother and wife performed *arati*, before he retired to the enclosure and later to the *kuteer*.

Vyasanakere

2 May 1979

At 3.40 a.m., the Swamiji wanted me to be sent for. I could arrive from Sandur and have *darshan* only at about 6.15 a.m. I sensed that the Swamiji was about to leave. When I requested that he should stay here for a few more days, he just smiled. Earlier he had said "Wherever I go I am here". At 6.22 a.m. the Swamiji moved towards the Tungabhadra Dam via the forest guest house and reached the Anjaneya temple at T.B. Dam at 8.20 a.m. accompanied by me. Walking with the Swamiji was always a great experience. At 8.30 a.m. the Swamiji had one more detailed discussion

with me and Annadurai Iyengar who was to be later closely associated with me in the establishment and running of the Sanskrit *Pathashala* at Hospet. It was only after 9.00 a.m. that I left with the Swamiji's blessings for Sandur which is nearly an hour's journey from here.



1 Swamiji in Prayer after bath in Narihalla at Sardar



2 Swamiji in Prayer after bath in Narihalla at Sandur



3 Swamiji in Prayer after bath in Narihalla at Sandur





4 Author with his parents and Annadurai Iyengar having *darshan* of Swamiji



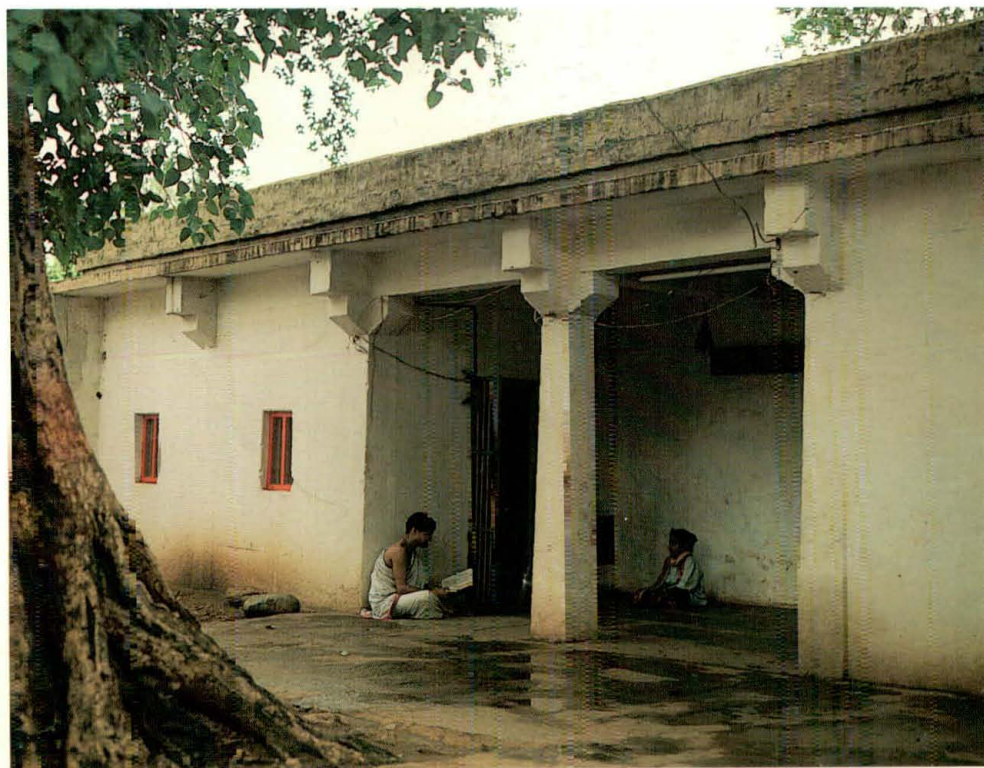
5 Swamiji in a lighter mood at Eswaraswamy Temple, near Sivapur, Sandur, 1978



6 Ancient temples of Kumaraswamy (right) and Parvathi (left)

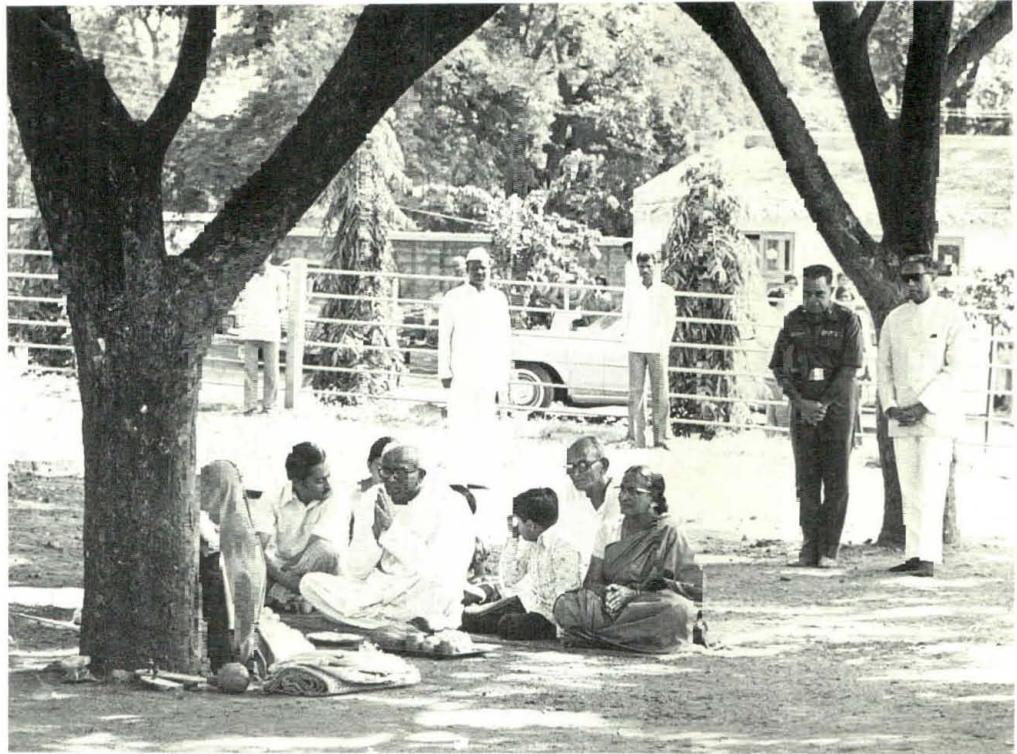


7 Eshwaraswamy  
temple, Sandur



8 The room in the  
Eshwaraswamy temple  
premises, Sandur, where  
Swamiji stayed from 27  
September to 21 October  
1978

9 Darshan to  
Sanjeeva Reddy,  
President of India, in  
the Sandur Dairy on  
12 October 1978

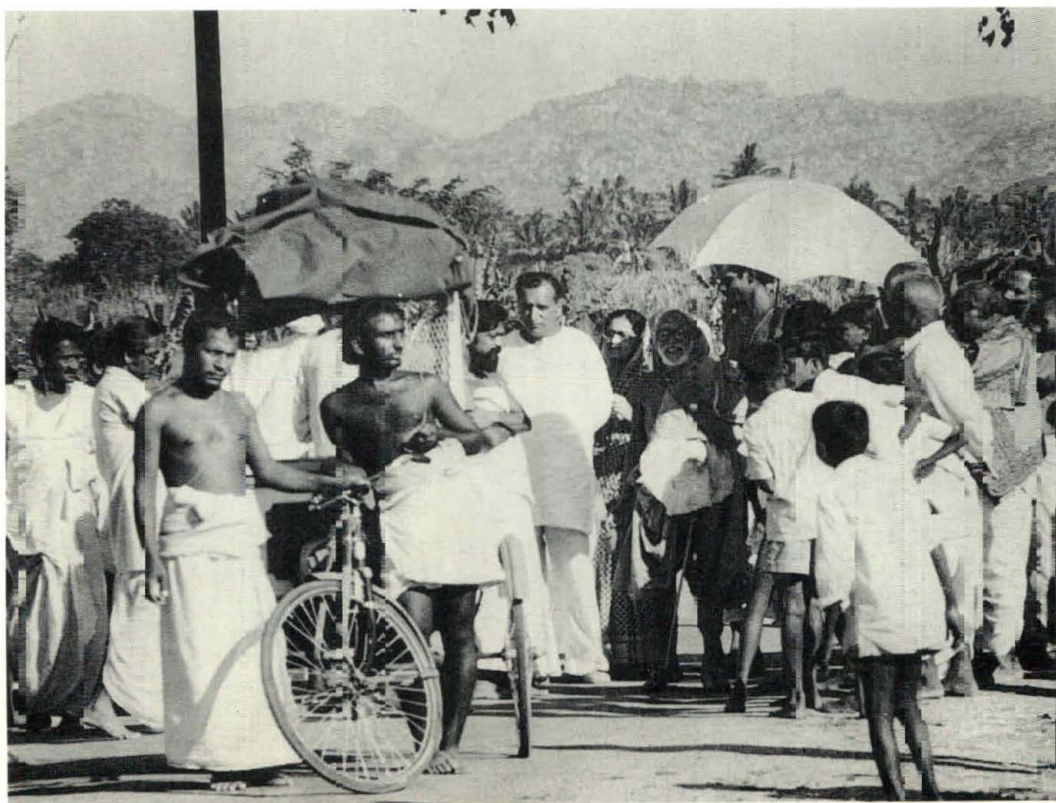


10 Author's father,  
former Ruler of  
Sandur, Y. R. Ghorpade  
(extreme right)  
having darshan of the Swamiji  
in the Sandur Dairy





11 Swamiji walking behind his cycle rickshaw.



12 Swamiji in the shade of an umbrella during *Padayatra*. Author and his wife, Vasundhara, are also seen walking with him.



13 Prayer after bath in the Tungabhadra River, near Vyasanakere. Balu standing with folded hands, behind Swamiji, second from left.



14 & 15 Crossing the river Tungabhadra  
in a *Hargole* or *Coracle*.

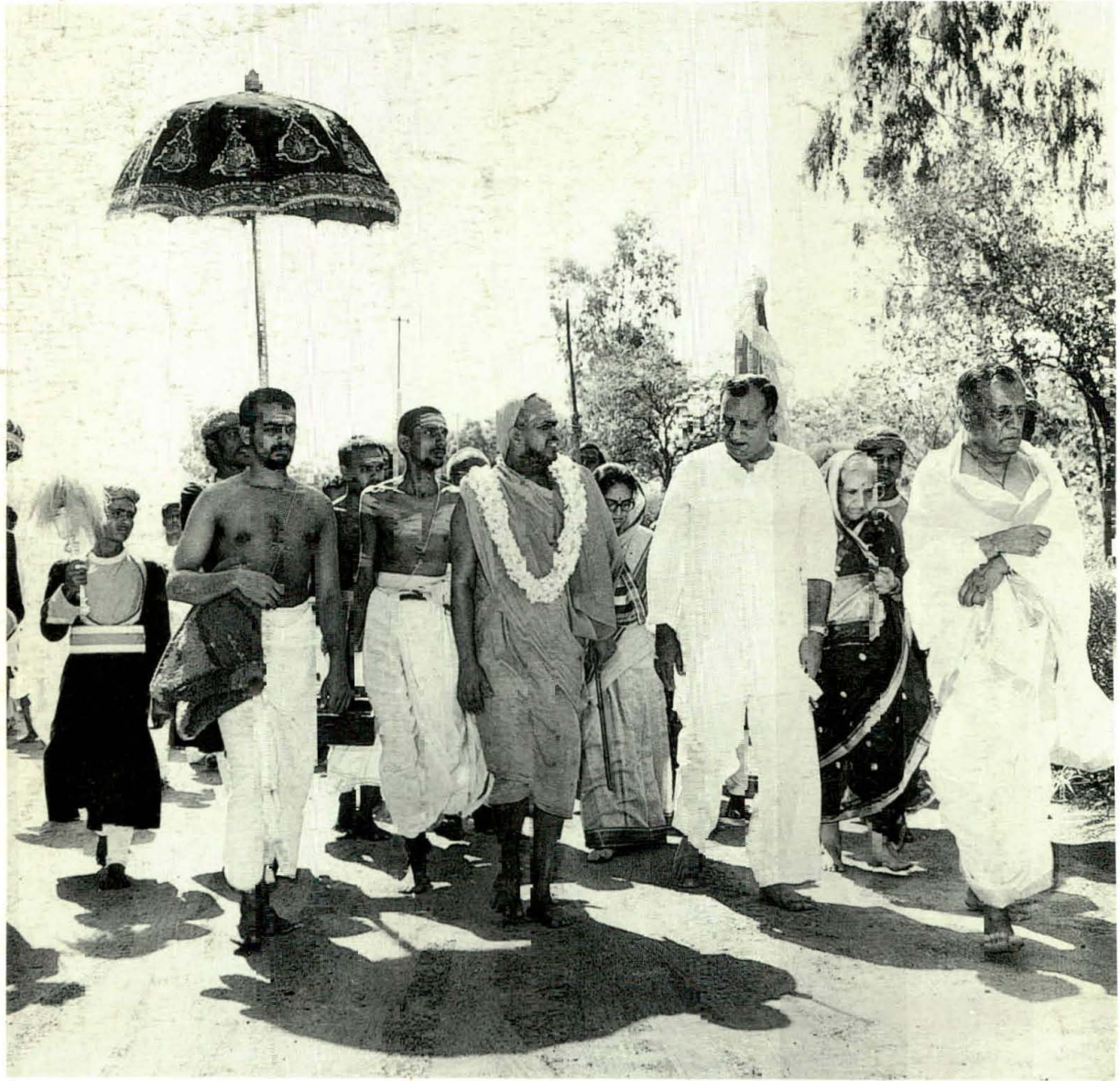






16 Valley of Sandur.





17 Author, his parents and wife with Shri Jayendra Saraswath. Swamiji during his visit to Sandur on 12 June 1979.

29 Photograph of the Swamiji sent to the Author on his 60th birthday.



30 On his *Shashtyabcapoorti* the author and his wife receiving *prasad* and wearing shawls sent by the Swamiji from Kanchi.



28 Author, when he was a member of Parliament, in conversation with the President of India, R Venkataraman on 24 November 1987.



VIDYARANYA VIDYAPEETHA TRUST PATHASHALA  
HOSPET  
WITH THE BLESSINGS OF  
HIS HOLINESS  
SHRI CHANDRASEKHARENDRA SARASWATI  
PARAMACHARYA OF SHRI KANCHI KAMAKOTI PEETHAM  
FOUNDATION STONE LAID  
BY  
SHRI M.Y. GHORPAJE  
HON. MINISTER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT & PANCHAYAT RAJ  
GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA  
ON  
8.12.1993

27 The Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha Patashala at Hospet.  
(Inset : Stone plaque blessed by Swamiji).



24 & 25 Nataraja and Parvathi carved in stone, by D. Vadiraj, and installed in the S. Chandrudha temple at the Sri Srinivas residence at Shivapur, Sandur.



26 Bronze Nataraja by Deva Senapathi Sthapathy of Swamimalai, Tamil Nadu, installed on 24 October 1956 at the Vidya Vihara Vidya Pitha Fatahala, Hospet.



21 Kumaraswamy *vigraha* in the Author's pooja room at Shivapur.

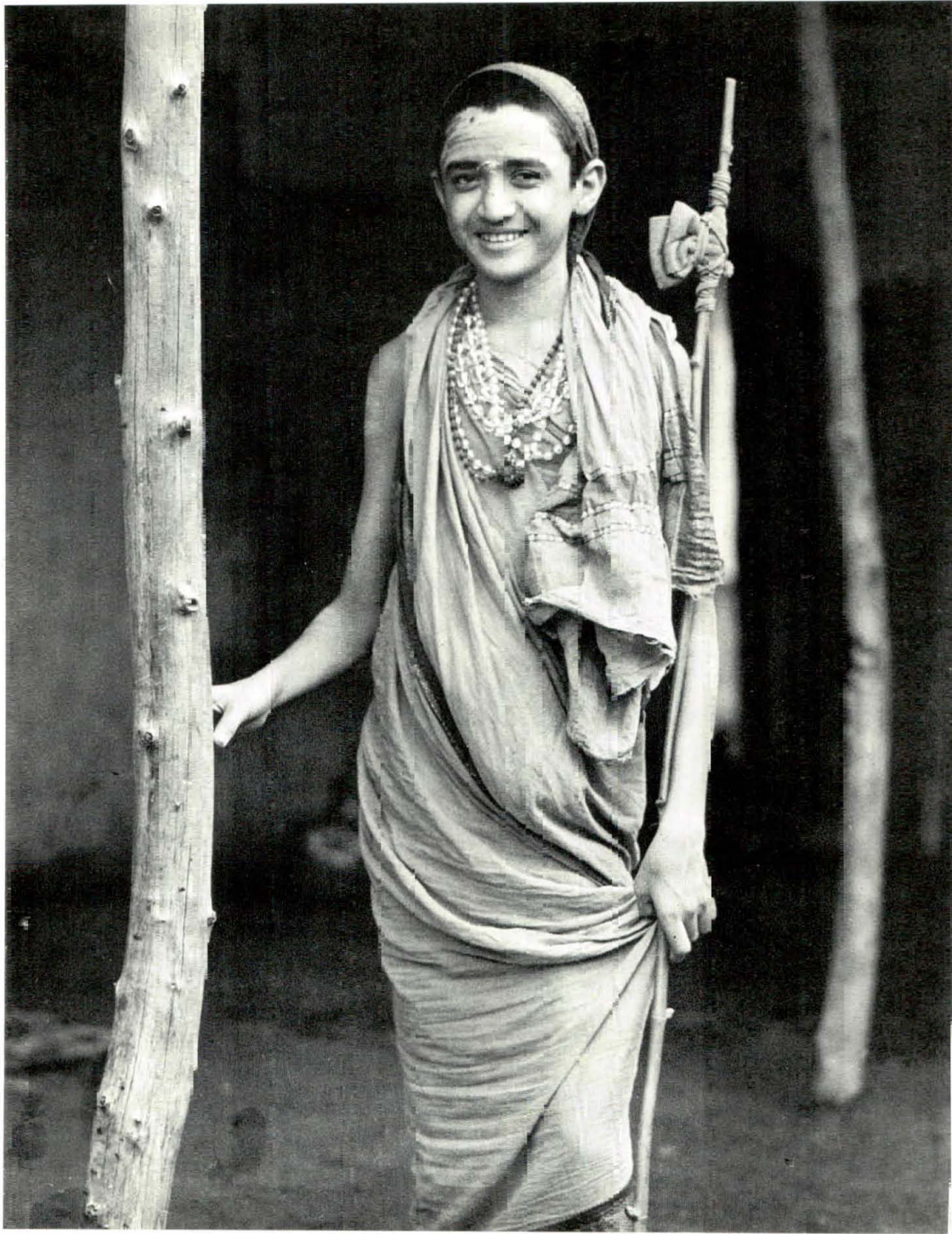


22 Balachidambara *vigraha* installed in Murgod.



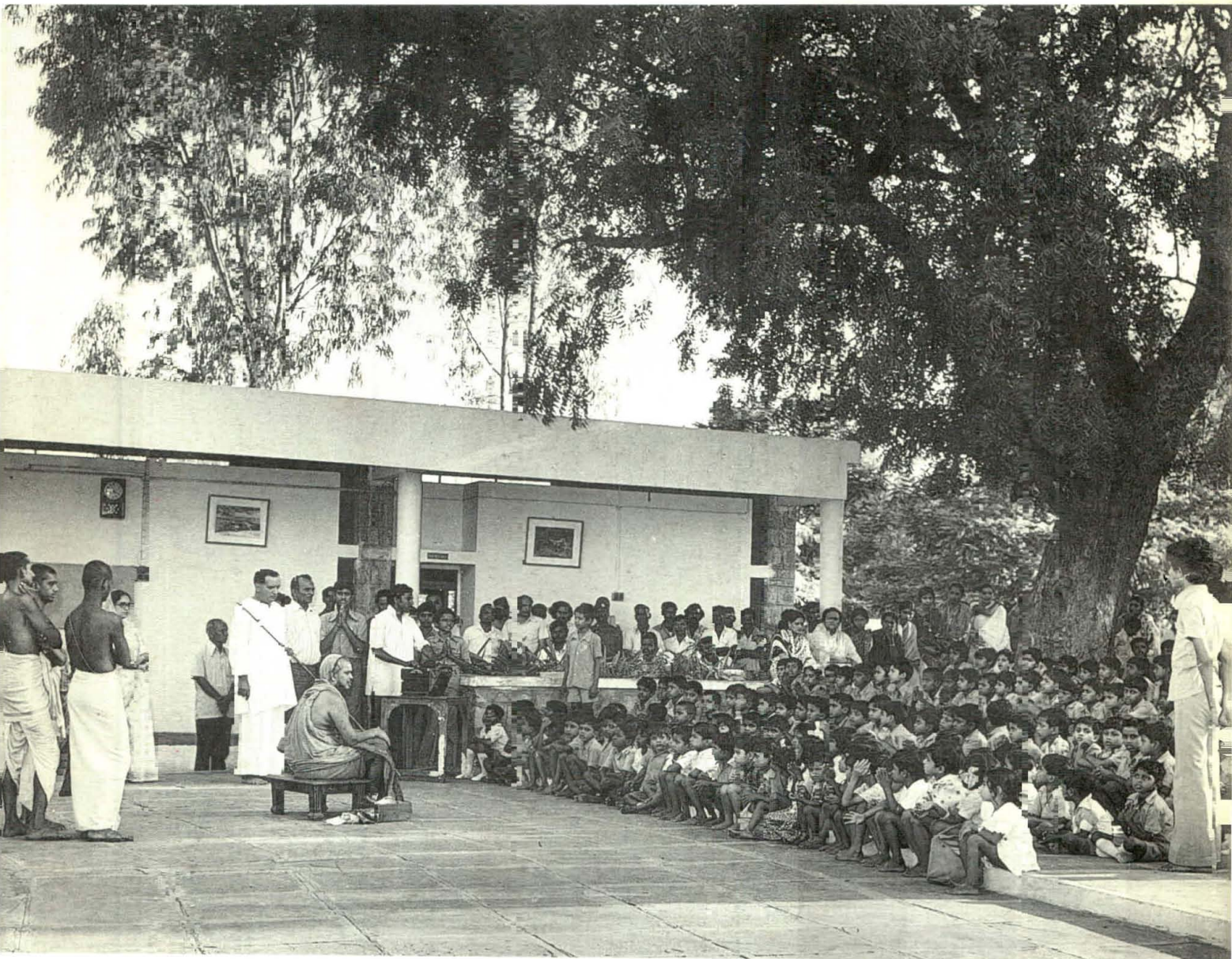
23 Dattatreya *vigraha* installed in the temple at the Author's residence, Shivapur, Sandur.







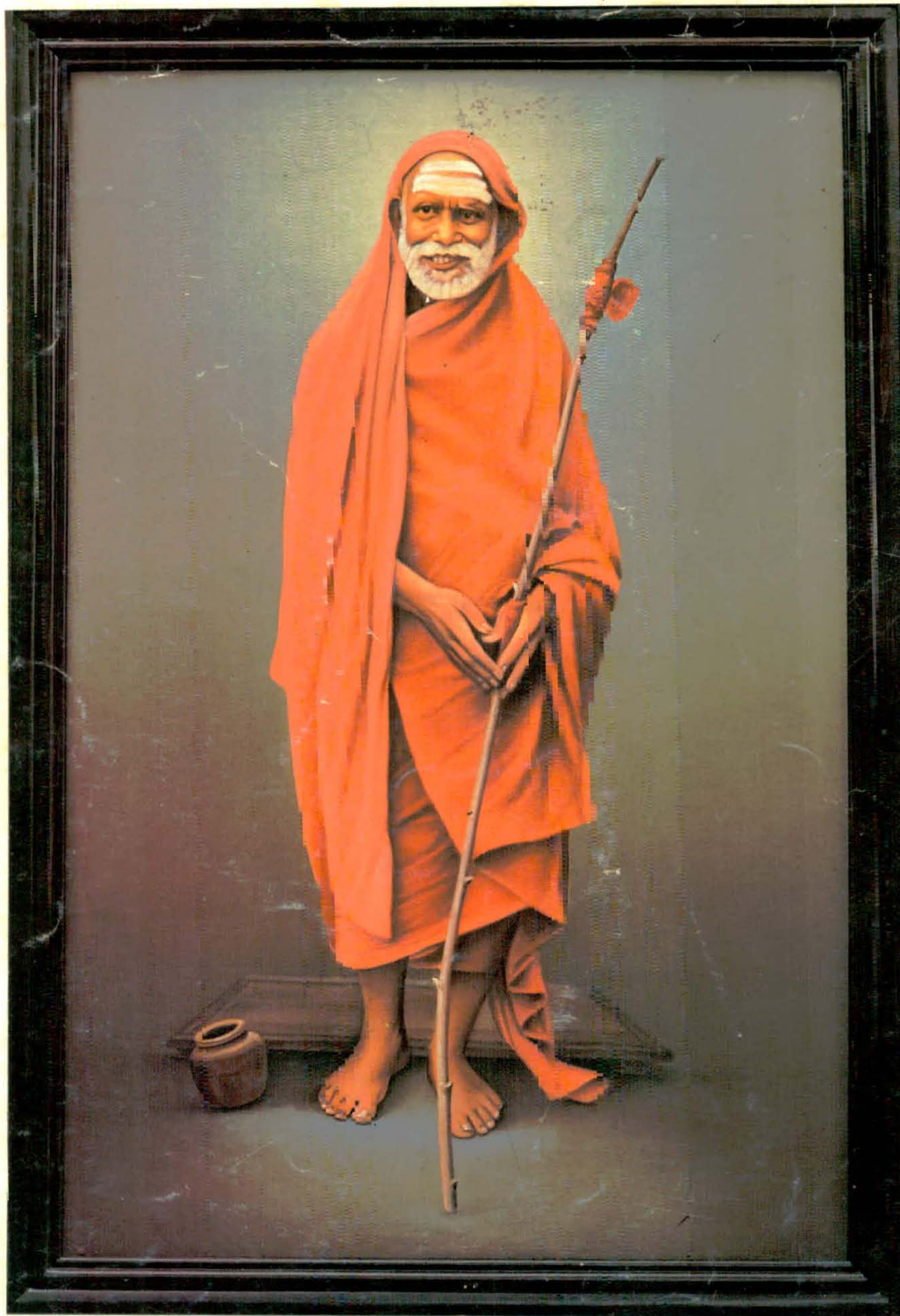
19 & 20 Shri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Swaraj. photographed at Kurnool in 1983.



18 Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamiji talking to children of the Sanjiv Residential School.



31 Mchabhisheka after Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi on 8th January 1994.  
Author at extreme left.



32 A recent painting by V.T. Kale (Art Teacher, Sandur Residential School) from a picture of the Swami ji released in 1980.

Dharwad, Murgod, Banashankari,  
Ugarkhurd, Miraj, Satara,  
Pandharpur, Sholapur and Gulbarga  
(Karnataka and Maharashtra)

The Paramacharya was at the Sanskrit *Pathashala* of Balachandrasastry, Dharwad, accompanied by the junior Swamiji, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi, whose duty it was to perform the daily *pooja* for the benefit of the devotees. The elder Swamiji was sitting in *dhyana* in a dingy room, away from the din and bustle of the activity in the courtyard where *pooja* arrangements were being made. As soon as Balu conveyed to the Swamiji that I had come, he opened his eyes and gave me a broad smile which filled me with so much satisfaction that I kept looking on, wanting nothing more. The Swamiji beckoned me to sit down. After some time I stood up and renewed my request that the Swamiji should return to Sandur or Vyasanakere for *chaturmasa* and perform *Vyasa Pooja*. He only smiled and enquired about a member of the family who was not keeping too well. I said it was my sister, Vijaya, who was at Bangalore. My parents were also at Bangalore and would be coming shortly, I said. He again smiled and started doing *japa*.

The junior Swamiji returned to the *pathashala* after fulfilling some religious engagements. He told me that for *chaturmasa* he would be with the elder Swamiji who was still to indicate his mind regarding the place. He then went for his *pooja* which was performed in full view of the *bhaktas*. The elder Swamiji also came out of his small room in the backyard and sat in a distant corner, at a lower level, behind a doorway, watching the younger Swamiji discharge his traditional duties as the head of the Kanchi Mutt. The Paramacharya himself had performed this daily *pooja* for years until he decided to withdraw from the responsibilities of being a *mutt* head. After *pooja*, by the time I took leave of the two Swamijis it was 2.00 p.m. I said I would again come day after tomorrow and returned to Sandur via Hubli where I had *darshan* at the *samadhi* of Siddharudhaswamy, something which

I rarely miss if I pass through Hubli. I met the Swamiji again on Thursday, the 31 May 1979. This time I showed the younger Swamiji some photographs of the senior Swamiji at Sandur and other places. He liked them very much. I also mentioned, with an uncertain smile, that I had not shown these photographs to the Paramacharya. He smiled and said in a similar light vein that perhaps it was just as well, or else we do not know what would have happened. He wanted an album made and sent to him.

Murgod

2 October 1979

Monday the 1 October was Vijayadashami. 2 October was Gandhi Jayanti. As Navaratri was over, the Swamiji would have ended his *mouna* or silence. But I was not sure where exactly the Swamiji was. He had been in a village called Chachadi, in Belgaum district, during Navaratri, but could have left it by now. As we approached Chachadi, the people on the roadside told us that the Swamiji had left Chachadi and was walking towards Murgod. I vaguely associated Murgod with a Swamiji who, according to my late grandmother, had cured with his blessings my father when he was a small boy and was seriously down with typhoid. The Swamiji had made a *Shivalinga* with sand and given it to my grandmother who put it in a silver casing and, before she died, gave it to my mother to be worshiped daily.

As my car neared Murgod, some people near a culvert informed me that the Swamiji was at the Mallikarjuna temple and not at the Chidambara Mutt. In a few minutes we were there. The Swamiji's cycle *rikshaw* was right in front of the main gateway or the *mahadwara* of the temple surrounded by an inquisitive crowd. Just then I saw the Swamiji come out of the



*mahadwara*. The crowd surged forward. We waited patiently on the periphery. Balu, however, spotted me and informed the Swamiji who walked up to the cycle *rikshaw* and sat inside it, with one side open for people to have *darshan*. He then asked Balu to call me. The crowd made way and I went up to the Swamiji and placed before him the *banni* leaves I had brought from Sandur. Along with the *banni* leaves in a tray were two packets of date fruit and a pair of *khadi dhotis* and *angavastras* with material to dye it saffron. I stood there with folded hands, feeling happy that I could offer *banni* to the Swamiji with all my thoughts and feelings, like last year at Sandur. The Swamiji picked up a few *banni* leaves in his hand and looked happy. I told him how everybody at Sandur remembered every detail of his presence there last year. This year I had come a day late to offer *banni* to him. The Swamiji smiled and directed Balu to give me some *banni* in return, with his blessings conveyed personally by that all-conveying smile and gesture. It is the spontaneous blessedness of such moments which forms an indelible part of one's brighter consciousness. The Swamiji then indicated that the watching crowd could also now take a *banni* leaf each from the tray as he or she passed before the Swamiji. It was like an open-air *banni* distribution function or ceremony. I am sure, each one who picked up a leaf in the presence of the Swamiji felt blessed and very happy.

After some time when the crowd had melted away satisfied, the Swamiji asked me whether I had heard of Chidambara Dixit and the association with my family. I replied in the affirmative and recalled what my grandmother had told me (though the Swamiji who had blessed my father was a later Swamiji in the line called Panduranga Dixit). Chidambara Dixit was a great saint born in Murgod more than two hundred years ago. It is said that he did penance at the Chidambara temple in Tamil Nadu and reached a high level of spiritual attainment. That is how he came to be known as

Chidambara Dixit. A new temple was being built for him at Dharwad but the Swamiji now wanted to show me the house in which Chidambara Dixit was born, a few streets away from where we were. Just then an old South Indian devotee of the Swamiji came for his *darshan*. He had recently returned from his Badarinath *yatra* or pilgrimage where he had met Sanjeeva Reddy, the President of India. The Swamiji wanted him to tell me what the President had said to him. The President had recalled his visit to Sandur and how the Swamiji had given *darshan* to him appropriately in a cowshed, something which Sanjeeva Reddy had also mentioned to me when I had met him in Delhi after his visit to Sandur last year.

The Swamiji mentioned to me about the great temples that the Chalukyas and Hoysalas had built in this area and took me into the Mallikarjuna temple and showed me the beautiful stone carvings and inscriptions there. The temple was poorly maintained and there was slush and rainwater all around it. Inside was a Shivalinga. The architecture was typically Shaivite and Chalukyan. It was amazing how much interest the Swamiji took in these ancient temples and their proper maintenance with all their architectural and religious treasures and historical associations.

After visiting the Mallikarjuna temple we proceeded towards the birth spot of Chidambara Dixit. We moved in a winding mini-procession through the narrow streets of Murgod. Soon we stood before an ancient doorway. There was not enough space for all to enter. The Swamiji entered and asked me to follow him into a small courtyard which led to a small room in which Chidambara Dixit was born 220 years ago. A small symbolic cradle was suspended from the wooden ceiling to signify the birth. Below it was stretched a woollen blue and *jari* shawl presented by the Swamiji. As a matter of fact, when earlier I had placed before the Swamiji a tray full of *banni* leaves, the Swamiji had sent for this shawl, covered the *banni* leaves

with it and then sent it to be placed in this room where we were now standing. In the niche was an ancient photograph of Chidambara Dixit with his two wives wearing nine-yard sarees in the traditional manner. There were other symbols including a stone *Shivalinga* with which Chidambara Dixit is supposed to have played during his childhood. The Swamiji then came out into the open courtyard and sat on a stone bench or platform touching the holy room. He asked his *shishyas* or disciples to spread something on the floor for me to sit. That was a traditional gesture of courtesy on his part, knowing full well that I would prefer to stand and not sit in his presence, especially when he might have something to say to me. At any rate, I had something to tell him about what I was intending to do in public life. He gave me a very patient hearing and smilingly conveyed, in his own characteristic way, that one should always do one's duty and do what seems right, come what may, with full faith in one's highest destiny. What is to happen will happen. The motive and spirit with which we act is what matters. After some time, he gave me permission to go, in his usual manner, as if to say: "You have told me everything; now you can go and attend to your other duties".

Banashankari-Badami

20 October 1979

The previous day at Kolhapur we had learnt that the Swamiji was at Bagalkot. This morning we left Kolhapur for Sandur with the idea of having *darshan* of the Swamiji who was now reported to be at Banashankari, a temple near Badami. When we reached Badami we were told that the Swamiji was in the Dattatreya temple very close to the famous Badami caves.

He had come here last evening from Banashankari. We reached the Dattatreya temple at noon. The Swamiji was sitting in the verandah of the temple surrounded by a small group of men and women who were telling their woes. The Swamiji was listening patiently in his usual kind manner. When we went to him and did *arati*, he enquired who the little girl with us was. I told him that she was my sister Vijaya's daughter Vishwadhara. A little later he went inside the room and sent for us. He had been observing *mouna* or silence for the past three days. But now he was full of speech. He chatted with us in the most informal manner for nearly an hour. He wanted to know from where we had come and where we were going. He wanted to know all about my visits to Delhi, Bombay, Goa and Kolhapur before coming here on our way to Sandur. My daughter, Anuradha, was with us and the Swamiji wanted to know all about her eyes. The Swamiji asked Anuradha whether she could see him and was happy when Anuradha replied in the affirmative. The Swamiji then asked about Ajai, my eldest son. I told him that he was presently at Courtallam, where the waterfalls are very health-giving. The Swamiji suggested the use of *Ayurvedic* oils and ghee. I was greatly touched by the great concern he felt for those who were suffering from some disability or the other. One feels a sense of great reassurance when there is so much goodness in the form of the Swamiji over-seeing everything.

The Swamiji then changed the topic and asked what we did for *Padva* and *Deepavali*. Did we not put on new clothes, he asked. We should but do not always do so, I said. However, the Swamiji asked us to go to Banashankari temple nearby, before proceeding to Sandur. I then referred to the wish he had expressed when he was in Hampi and Hospet regarding the starting of a *Vedic Pathashala* there. I expressed regret that I had not done anything about it yet, but would soon go ahead on the lines suggested

by the Swamiji earlier. The Swamiji gave a benign smile which sought to reassure me that I had not committed any great lapse and he himself had yet to decide what exactly should be done. Before we took his permission to leave, the Swamiji once again asked us to go to Banashankari where there is an ancient temple which my grandparents also used to visit and which, as I learnt later, was close to the religious tradition of the Swamiji himself. This place is not far from Gajendragad, the place of my grandparents, and my father also remembers going to this temple in his younger days.

The annual festival of this temple is quite well-known in these parts. In the courtyard of this temple are two stone pillars with sockets to light lamps all along the surface of the pillar, in an alternating pattern. The *archakas* at the Banashankari temple explained to us how cottonseed soaked in oil is placed in each of the sockets whenever *bhaktas* or devotees desired that they should be lit on important festivals. When these multi-lamp-bearing pillars are fully lighted, it must be an imposing sight which took one's mind away from the routine of worldly things. I asked the *archakas* to light these pillars in full on any of the next few days which were considered auspicious. We gave them some money for this purpose and also to buy some new clothes for themselves. There were some nine *archakas* here who had served the Swamiji diligently during his recent stay at this temple. A few days later we got a letter from them enclosing some *prasad* and informing that the pillars were fully lit as I had wished. My regret was that I could not personally witness this grand sight in the presence of this ancient goddess of Banashankari who has seen so much of life flow past, like a river carrying so much rubbish and yet not without its innate grandeur and strength. It is to glimpse again and again this inner strength and stability that human beings have built, over the ages, countless temples and places of worship which still inspire us and act as havens of peace and well-being.

The next time I met the Swamiji was when he was on his way to Ugarkhurd (Ugar), a sugar factory town on the river Krishna. I joined a procession of people walking along the roughly metalled and muddy road which passed through the town and got lost in the small by-lanes which ultimately led to a Shiva temple. There was a water tap outside the temple which came in very handy to wash the mud off my feet before entering the temple. Balu spotted me and informed the Swamiji who had gone inside the hut which was to be his temporary abode. A little later the Swamiji came out and sat in front of the hut. I did *arati* and was made to sit on one side, within a few feet of the Swamiji, on *patravali* or stitched leaves, as one had to sit on something as per custom and not on the bare floor, and I had declined to sit on a mat or carpet in the presence of the Swamiji, while a number of persons filed past him for *darshan*.

Ugarkhurd

4 February 1980

At 8.00 a.m. when we went to see him at Ugar, the Swamiji was inside his hut, but came to the entrance to give us *darshan*. Vasundhara, Sujai and Kartik had come with me. A little later Annadurai Iyengar joined us and reported to the Swamiji about the proposed Sanskrit *Pathashala* at Hospet. Then a most extraordinary thing happened. The Swamiji who is usually silent or extremely brief in his expression, virtually started giving us a discourse on a variety of subjects. He told us how Vyasa wrote *Brahmasutras* or aphorisms giving the gist of the Upanishads. Adi Shankaracharya, Madhwacharya and Ramanujacharya wrote *bhashyas* or commentaries on the *sutras*. The Swamiji said that Shankara's *bhashya* was a slight deviation

from the *sutras*. I had a feeling that all this was meant to educate me on these matters in the context of starting a *Vedic Pathashala*. At this point, I asked the Swamiji (Annadurai Iyengar acting as interpreter) whether we could go beyond the *sutras* to decide the correctness of interpretation. Are the differences not merely a matter of levels of view points, angles and perspectives? The Swamiji replied with the example of the bridge and the arches, the closer arches appearing bigger than those farther away. This was the classical example to distinguish between perspective and reality or truth. But every experience is relative from our point of view, is it not? How do we know which is the whole truth when we can possibly see only a part of it, I asked. To this the Swamiji said that Truth is, therefore, *achintaniya* — that which cannot be fully comprehended. However, he said that the *Vedas* came nearest to the truth as they embodied the deepest human experience. It is good, the Swamiji continued, that human beings can see only a portion of the truth, as more than a certain amount of the truth or reality could be quite overwhelming. He then narrated the story of Shivaji, how, as a boy of eight, he climbed up to the *gopura* of the famous Tanjavur temple, when a part of it was being built and, when he looked down upon the world from that dizzy height, he found it difficult to retain his confidence or balance and had to be helped to come down step by step. There is a limit, therefore, to what the human system can comprehend, see or stand. This is nature's built-in safeguard.

We were with the Swamiji for three full hours from 8 to 11 a.m. It was a most exhilarating experience, when many doubts were cleared and certain truths fixed more firmly in the mind. The Swamiji said that a human being loves himself or herself the best. It irritates if even one's dearest and nearest deviate in the slightest manner from what pleases us. There is no doubt that self is dearest to us and contemplation of self is sweet. We must, how-

ever, pinpoint the awareness of self by its total identification with something and that is God. That results in the highest and stablest form of happiness. *Prema* or love or the emotional bond is important for the fullness of experience and total identification. I asked the Swamiji pointedly whether withdrawal from external activity was necessary for this inner identification or harmony. The Swamiji answered in the negative. Withdrawal was not necessary but doing something one really likes doing is important, like "visiting temples", for instance (I had been visiting temples lately), or wholeheartedly participating in the "freedom struggle", he said. The conversation then turned to the Gita (which was obviously an attempt to reconcile action with the deepest experience of truth and harmony). The Swamiji felt that the battlefield was not exactly the right setting for preaching some of those fundamental truths which include *jnana* and *sanyaasa*. Bal Gangadhar Tilak had appropriately described it as the gospel of *karma-marga* or the path of action. This was the spirit of what Swamiji said, if I understood him right.

The philosophic kernel of the Swamiji's most spontaneous and heart-moving discourse could be summarised thus :

1. To a human being self is dearest and, therefore, contemplation of the self is the sweetest.
2. To maintain a state of stable happiness or bliss one has to totally identify the self with 'something' and that 'something' is God or the unity achieved in 'God'.
3. The emotions are necessary to forge a firm bond. *Prema* or love is, therefore, important.



4. Withdrawal from the external world and its activity is not necessary, but doing the things one really want to do is important. This is what brings inner peace and harmony.
5. Nothing that happens in the external world need perturb one. What is within one's control is not the external world but one's reaction to it.

It was during this period, when Swamiji was in a garden on the Ugar-Miraj highway that I asked Swamiji about the Balachidambara *vighraha*, which was to be sculptured by Vadiraj from Bangalore for installation at Murgod in that small room where Chidambaraswamy was born — a task which I had taken upon myself with the blessings of the Swamiji. Answering a number of specific queries, the Swamiji said that the *vighraha* should be about two feet in height with only a loincloth (not *kaupina*) round the waist. The *vighraha* could have a light necklace and need not have a *yajnopaveetha*, bracelets, anklets, etc. The sacred *bilva* leaf on one ear could be there as that was the local tradition, according to which Chidambaraswamy is said to have appeared before his mother as a boy of eight with a *bilva* leaf on his ear. The Swamiji nodded his assent. It was a meeting which lasted more than an hour and I left for Sandur deeply satisfied and clear in mind.

Miraj

17 April 1980

We reached Miraj in the morning and learnt that the Swamiji had been staying in Sanglikar's garden since early March. When we went there the Swamiji was sitting in a tin-shed giving *darshan* to a small band of devotees standing in a semicircle in a *mantapa* or covered area just outside the tin-

shed. The Swamiji looked extremely relaxed, sitting cross-legged. We also went and stood there waiting for our chance to pay our respects and do *arati*. It was not long before the Swamiji noticed us, and Balu spread out a cloth piece just outside the entrance to the tin-shed for us to sit in the Swamiji's presence, as was the usual practice. We did *arati* and settled down. Devotees continued to take *darshan* and leave the *mantapa* one by one. After some time, the Swamiji noticed Vadiraj and called him. Vadiraj (the sculptor from Bangalore who had accompanied me to Miraj along with A.S. Venkataraman, the engineer working at Sandur, after visiting Murgod the previous day) placed before the Swamiji the life-size drawing of Balachidambara vighraha that he was to make in black stone. The Swamiji looked intently at the drawing for some time and nodded his approval. He made no comments nor asked any questions except to enquire about Vadiraj and know the purpose for which he had come. After a few more devotees had had *darshan* the Swamiji noticed A.S. Venkataraman and called him. Venkataraman explained in Tamil the purpose of his visit to Murgod and here. The Swamiji asked him how he could speak Tamil though he had accompanied me who did not know Tamil. Venkataraman explained that he was the cousin of "Principal Mahalakshmi" (who was the Principal of the Sandur Residential School and belonged to an old TAMILIAN family of devotees, known to the Swamiji as Principal Mahalakshmi since his stay at Sandur in the Shivapur Eshwaraswamy temple opposite the school). Venkataraman had been instructed by me to see what could be done to strengthen the structure at Murgod where the Balachidambara *vighraha* was to be installed and the place where the Swamiji sat just outside the room was also to be covered. The Swamiji listened and had no specific questions to ask. He seemed to approve of our plans. He nodded his head in that characteristic manner which conveyed more than words could. It is his

total reaction that we had to watch and silently understand.

By this time most of the devotees had departed after *darshan* and the enclosure was no longer crowded. The Swamiji then asked me about the Vidyaranya *Pathashala* which could develop in due course into an institute for higher studies with special emphasis on the works of Vidyaranya. It was felt that we could make a beginning with a few residential students who could be given free boarding and lodging and a small monthly stipend. When we told him that there was some difficulty in getting teachers belonging to the *Bodhayana Sutra*, the Swamiji himself suggested some names after consulting some of the Sanskrit pundits, who had come to Miraj to receive the annual *sambhavana* in the presence of the Swamiji. The studies could be at various levels. There could be a basic two-year course in Sanskrit for the *Pathashala* boys. There could be a six-year course for the study of *Veda Bhashyas* with a couple of students for each of the *Vedas*. There could also be a two-year course for those who have a good college grounding in Sanskrit and want to specialise in the works of Vidyaranya. However, these discussions were still at a preliminary stage. The Swamiji had in mind the idea of building up a library of the works of Vidyaranya and related subjects at Hospet which was not far from Hampi. We already had a list of books in Sanskrit and Kannada connected with Vidyaranya and his works.

The discussion went on for more than two hours, interspersed with devotees coming for *darshan*. One not-too-healthy looking person came and stood before the Swamiji who asked him something in gestures. To make his question clear the Swamiji picked up an yellow flower from the floor and pointed to it or, as it became evident a little later, to its yellow colour, and made an enquiring gesture which disciple Rajagopal could decipher after some initial hesitation. The Swamiji, by pointing to the yellowness of that tiny flower in front of him, was wanting to know whether the person

had completely recovered from jaundice. Rajagopal who knew the background could connect the yellowness of the flower to the jaundice of the devotee. There were a number of such instances of gestures and delicate humanity. Earlier in the morning, I understand, the princess of Greece, who is a great devotee, sat for an hour meditating in the presence of the Swamiji and tears were seen rolling down her face in ecstasy. In her presence the annual *sambhavana* was given to the deserving Vedic scholars, a gesture which must have touched her to the core.

Miraj

18 April 1980

I went to the Sanglikar's sequestered garden accompanied by Vasundhara, Anuradha and Nazim at about 8.00 a.m. The Swamiji was still inside his room and eager devotees were trying to get a glimpse of him through a window on the left of the Ganapathi temple. We went inside the temple and were struck by the beauty of the Ganapathi *vighraha* delicately carved in soft, greyish-olive-green stone. The bearded *pujari* did *arati* and gave us *prasad*. I gathered from him that the temple was built before the time of the Sanglikar rulers who, however, maintained it during their period, but now not many people came here. However, the Swamiji had made the place bustle with activity once again.

Rajagopal joined us and showed us round the place. He took us to the room adjoining the one in which the Swamiji was now staying. He said that the Swamiji was in that room from about the 3rd of March. He did not come out except into the tin-shed on the other side, to give *darshan* to devotees. Sometimes he would give *darshan* from the window itself. No-

body went into the room in which the Swamiji had closeted himself. He cleaned the room himself and even water for his bath was poured into a tub-like structure from the next room and drained out through an outlet. In Kanchi also the Swamiji had similarly confined himself to a small room for a long period, giving *darshan* only from a small window, which was also used to serve him with the few things he might need. Here a tin-shed had been constructed next to his room. This shed had a small window and a door which would be opened whenever the Swamiji wanted to sit at the doorway and meet *bhaktas*.

This is where we were made to sit when the Swamiji came out of his room into the tin-shed at 9.00 a.m. His benign presence affected us in a total way. I could feel the glow and that sacred calm and quiet. However, the Swamiji was in a mood to convey many things and make sure I understood. In a semi-squatting position he assumed the typical Nataraja pose and wanted to know whether I had seen a Nataraja. When I answered in the affirmative he wanted to know where I had seen a Nataraja. I said the south Indian temples were full of Natarajas and recently I had been to Tanjavur and Swamimalai where there was a beautiful Nataraja. The Swamiji then asked whether I had noticed the *damru* or drum in Nataraja's hand. I said, I had. I took this opportunity of asking him whether I could install a Nataraja in one of the places at Sandur which the Swamiji had visited. He approved the idea with a nod.

The Swamiji then went on to tell the story of Panini in gestures and hardly audible sounds. He first referred to Panini's *guru*, Varsha. He made a sign to indicate a long beard and then mimicked the downpour of rain. From these two gestures the *shishyas* could make out that the Swamiji was referring to a sage called Varsha which means rain. The Swamiji took a lot of trouble to convey to me the story of Panini and the significance of the

*damru* or drum. Panini went to Pataliputra for his studies. Under the guidance of his *guru*, Varsha, he did *tapasya* or meditation in worship of Shiva, who eventually appeared before Panini in the form of Nataraja with a *damru* in his hand. The first sound that emanated from the *damru* was 'Ahil'. The first letter of this word was 'A' as in all other languages with a similar tradition, according to the Swamiji. In Greek it was 'Alfa' and in Urdu 'Alif' and so on. Panini wrote *Maheswara Sutrani*. He learnt 14 *shastras* and from this created 14,000 *sutras*. Probably the Swamiji wanted me to understand the scientific origin of the *shastras* and *sutras* from sound and their universal and inspirational significance. He was perhaps preparing my mind to fully grasp the concept and value of traditional *Vedic* learning. He then made the *Vedic* students — innocent little boys who were not even in their teens — recite what they had learnt from their traditional *gurus*. A piece from *Jyotishya Shastra* was recited by a group of boys. The Swamiji then asked me what I had understood. When I said that it was about the planets and their effect on our lives, the Swamiji shook his head in appreciation. After this the Swamiji gave us permission to leave.

Miraj

19 April 1980

When I met the Swamiji in the morning, I was told about the Vighneswara Venkateshwara Rural Development Trust which had been recently started by some chartered accountants for the purpose of running a *Veda Pathashala* with about 4 teachers and 20 students. It was at Tiruvidamuradu where great scholars met in the past to discuss and conduct discourses. Tradition has it that once Parameshwara himself had to settle a dispute by showing

his *hastha* or hand. (There is a small temple there with a *hastha*). In the midst of such delectable stories and anecdotes, the Swamiji wanted to convey that such ventures could be started in a modest way and then developed in keeping with tradition and present day circumstances. He wanted me to ascertain from Annadurai Iyengar and C.S. Ramachandran what was proposed to be done at Tiruvidamuradu. He was suggesting that the Vidyaranya *Pathashala* and Institute at Hospet, near Hampi, could be on similar lines. Basically there were to be three categories of students: (i) students learning the *Vedas* by heart in the traditional manner, (ii) those learning the *Veda Bhashyas* which needed a better knowledge of Sanskrit, and (iii) those with a good knowledge of Sanskrit wanting to learn and specialise on the works of Vidyaranya.

At 10.45 a.m. the Swamiji asked Vasundhara to hand over merit certificates and fruits to the four boys who had recited from the *Vedas* earlier for our benefit. Each of these morning sessions on the 18th and 19th had lasted for two to three hours.

Miraj

2 May 1980

I had good *darshan* of the Swamiji at Miraj on 2 May which was his birthday. A good *darshan* meant sitting in the Swamiji's presence in stillness, inwardness and peace. I suppose this is what *dhyana* and meditation was all about. It was during this period that Annadurai Iyengar narrated to me one of his interactions with the Swamiji, who had asked him to comment on a formula: Man = God + ego; God = Man - ego. I do not know what his comment was or what discussion took place on the subject. But the ques-

rior itself implied that there was divinity in Man who was not merely a bundle of sensory perceptions.

Miraj

9, 10 and 11 June 1980

Vasundhara and I left on the 9th for Miraj for Swamiji's *darshan*. Before that we had received a message from R. Venkataraman's office at Delhi (he was then the Union Finance Minister) that Mrs. Venkataraman, her daughter and two children would also be coming to Miraj and would prefer to stay with us than in the spacious government guest house, where the Central Government tax authorities would have been too happy to make the necessary arrangements. Mrs. Venkataraman had also come to Sandur when the Swamiji was there. That is when we came to know her well. The Venkataramans are old devotees of the Swamiji.

The next morning on the 10th I had a good meeting with the Swamiji which lasted for three hours. Annadurai Iyengar was also present. The subject discussed threadbare was the formation of a Trust to establish the Vidyananya Vidya Pitha. The Trust Deed as drafted by Annadurai was read out to the Swamiji word by word and some changes made as per his directions. I redrafted a sentence or two to suit his wishes. The word "Hindu" had to be dropped because the Swamiji said that our religion and culture is not referred to as such in the ancient scriptures and that the word "Hindu" was of a fairly recent origin. The Swamiji wanted us to emphasise in the preamble to the Trust Deed that Vidyananyaswamy was the only scholar and philosopher to write *bhashyas* to all the four *Vedas* and a number of books on a wide range of subjects. In this sense his contribution to the Indian



culture and philosophy was quite unique. There were to be two or three Trustees including Annadurai Iyengar and myself.

On 11th morning I went to the Swamiji to seek his permission to leave. I thought this would be a short meeting as we had already discussed all matters connected with the Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha Trust. But this meeting also lasted for three hours though not much was said. The Swamiji sat in the doorway of the room and I was asked to sit in front of him as usual. My mind was at the Swamiji's feet. The only prayer that crossed my mind was that I should have the strength to set aside all reservations and be fully guided by the godly wisdom of the Swamiji. There was a feeling of lightness as I had nothing else to ask or worry about. The Swamiji was in deep contemplation. Occasionally he would pick out a cotton strand from his *asana* or seat and put it before him. He put before him three such strands. I had seen him do this on earlier occasions also. I sat there. I did not know how time passed. My whole body and mind felt delightfully warm and peaceful. A little later some simple rural folk came for his *darshan* and one lady placed three *jamoons* fruits before the Swamiji. The three fruits seemed so succulent and tempting. Of course, it was a passing thought and I forgot all about it. But when, after *darshan* I sat in the car to get back home, the Swamiji's *shishya* came running and gave me these three *jamoons* which I had seen earlier and contemplated, for a moment, on their succulence. It was strange, how in the presence of the Swamiji, one's most innocent thoughts and desires reach a most satisfying kind of fruition. In a true relationship, the *guru* knows every little thought that crosses one's mind and, therefore, is in a superior position to give guidance of the kind one needs. He knows what is best. God or the inner voice speaks through him.

Recently the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, while releasing 'Kanchiyil 87' to mark the 87th birthday of the Paramacharya of Kanchi, had described him as one of the greatest of men whose very presence helped in deepening understanding. To meet him was a rare spiritual experience and recalled the three or four meetings she had with him as unforgettable. It is only teachers like the Swamiji who could show us the light, she had said.

The Swamiji was at Satara at the Shankara Mutt for *chaturmasa*. I came here last evening accompanied by Yeshus (my sister's son who was keen to meet the Swamiji), Khem Sawant Bhonsle (my wife's sister's son from Sawantwadi) and Nazim Sheikh, who was also a student of the Sandur Residential School. The Swamiji was in a small room, behind the temple in the central hall, where the chanting of Sanskrit *slokas* could hardly be heard. Soon I was beckoned to enter the small room and sit facing the Swamiji, who sent for Rajagopal to act as the interpreter. I informed the Swamiji of all that we had been able to do with regard to the *pathashala* at Hospet. We had taken a building on rent in the Nehru Colony where the *pathashala* was to be housed temporarily. Two students and two teachers had arrived at Hospet as per Swamiji's instructions. This place was quite central and had a drinking water well and a compound suitable for a little gardening. The two students belonged to the *Bhodhayana Sutra*; four more were expected in a week and a couple of boys from Shimoga in early September. Pundits had also come to deliver some lectures on various subjects connected with the works of Vidyananya. Balasubrahmanyasastry of Madras was to lecture on *Āimīniya Nyayamala* and Balakrishnasastry on *Vaiyasaka Nyayamala*, both books written by Vidyananya on the rules of *Vedic* interpretation or *Mimamsa*. Sripada Dixit, the pundit from Mulugund, was to speak in

Kannada on Vidyanaraya's *Sarva Darshana Sangraha* (a book on comparative philosophies), on the 27th and 28th of August at the Venugopaldaswamy temple at Hospet. I also informed the Swamiji that the Pathashala Trust Deed would be registered on 30 August at Bangalore.

After some time the rest of our party arrived. Vasundhara and Anuradha did *arati* and the rest paid their respects in that cramped space and mingled with the surging crowd in the corridors of the *mutt*. There were a couple of *jaya patris* in front of the Swamiji. He was playing with one of them which he suddenly gave me and asked what it was. I took it in my hand and smelt it. Vasundhara quietly supplied the answer. She knew the *jaya patri* was used in cooking. I put a piece in my mouth and tasted it. It was a precious inflorescence which I had got directly from the Swamiji's hands. The Swamiji also wanted to know what it was called in Kannada. We said *jaji kayee*. Not *kayee*, but *patri* said the Swamiji.

While we talked of the *pathashala* and other related matters, there was a regular flow of devotees who passed by the Swamiji for *darshan*. Amongst them was a boy who looked so very happy and made no secret of it. There was something special about this boy's expression. Joy was writ large on his face and he told the Swamiji that he felt devotion in his heart and wanted this feeling of *bhakti* to increase. The Swamiji blessed him with a broad smile and told me with warm elation how happy and buoyant the boy felt. There was another boy who spoke to the Swamiji in English and told him through Rajagopal that his brother who was in hospital felt less pain and could even get up with the help of a rope (his father was connected with the Shankara Mutt). In sharp contrast was a sordid-looking grown up who abruptly asked the Swamiji when his son would get his transfer from Bombay. Rajagopal told him firmly that the Swamiji was not an astrologer and does not answer such questions. Another pathetic grown up wanted to

know how he and his family could be saved from great danger. The Swamiji asked him to pray to *Bhavani*. A frightened woman said that her mother-in-law suffered from a spirit possessing her body. The Swamiji asked her also to pray to the goddess. Finally, a sombre-looking gentleman had come a great distance only to tell the Swamiji that he had experienced great *shanti* and *sukha* (peace and happiness).

The time was 12 noon. The *purohits* in the Shankara Mutt, who had performed *homa*, brought an unbroken coconut and placed it before the Swamiji who got up and went out. They wanted him to come on to the stage. The Swamiji did not oblige. Instead he stood in front of his small room and continued to give *darshan* to a wide assortment of humanity. In the midst of all this, the Swamiji picked up a champak flower and raised it to savour its scent. He had a delicate feeling for flowers and when some over-enthusiastic and insensitive visitors threw fresh flowers in his path, the Swamiji was very careful not to tread on them.

Satara

24 August 1980

Pramilabai Chavan (Member of Parliament from Karad in Maharashtra and an elderly relative), wanted to have Swamiji's *darshan* and so she accompanied me to the Shankara Mutt at 7.30 a.m. It had rained and the ascent to the *mutt* was somewhat slippery but the atmosphere was clear. The Swamiji sent for us almost immediately and made us sit in the room inside. The Swamiji gave me a couple of books and an old print of a painting of Shri Adi Shankara with his four disciples to be taken to the *pathashala* at Hospet. Pramilabai Chavan posed some questions to the Swamiji through me. She

expressed concern at the state of affairs in the country, the law and order situation and the communal riots and wanted to know whether the country would come through all this.

It was crystal-clear from what the Swamiji said that he was fully aware of the political situation in the country. Political parties had deviated from the policy of not having anything to do with communal forces for the sake of the votes. The Swamiji said that all political parties must make up their mind not to have anything to do with communal parties, Hindu or Muslim, as in the early years of independence. He said that the wrong doer must be punished without fear or favour but without anger or hate. Even a child had to be prevented physically from putting its hands in fire. So also the wrong doers must be firmly restrained in their own interest and that of the country; otherwise indiscipline will spread and affect others. When the judge passes a death sentence, it is not with any hate or anger, but only to uphold the law. The Swamiji said that a person became what his environment made him. The Swamiji made well-informed enquiries about the Hindu-Muslim riots in Maharashtra, at Kalyan and Aurangabad. Pramilabai Chavan was impressed by the range and depth of the Swamiji's knowledge of current affairs. We then returned to the Circuit House where we met R. Venkataraman, Union Finance Minister, who had also come for the Swamiji's *darshan*.

*Bangalore*

*30 August 1980*

The Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha Trust, blessed by the Swamiji, was registered at 4.00 p.m. at Bangalore. Annadurai Iyengar and I, accompanied by B.S.

Anantha (who has helped me with the typing of this manuscript) went to the Sub-Registrar's office a little before 4.00 p.m. The Sub-Registrar, who was somewhat heavily built, was sitting in a small crowded room, raising his voice to establish his authority. There were a number of persons who had come to register documents in his presence. It was almost like performing some rituals in the presence of a God, surrounded by all the noise and bustle of a gregarious temple. However, in spite of his preeminent position, the Sub-Registrar rose to greet us with an affable smile. We were a bit awed by his corpulent courtesy. But he quickly put us at ease and offered us the seats in front of him. With absolutely no trace of any visible insincerity, he said that he was genuinely happy that this formality of registration had brought us to his office. We had no option but to say that we were troubling him when he was so busy. The Registrar told us with unflinching honesty that it was only now that he appeared to be so busy, because a whole lot of employees from an industrial concern had come in a group to have some documents registered. Normally there is hardly anybody in the room, he said. "You mean, normally the office is peaceful enough for meditation" I said, to which he replied quite seriously: "I do meditation. Otherwise it would be difficult to keep my mental balance".

Satara

18 and 19 September 1980.

The Swamiji was at Satara in the Shankara Mutt. 18th was *Moola Nakshatra* when the Swamiji observed *mouna*. But we had good *darshan* of the Swamiji in the evening, standing before the deity in the temple with a bright glow on his face. We did *arati*. Rajagopal said that it was a very auspicious

hour and we had been right on time.

The next morning the Swamiji was in deep meditation. A *vigraha* of Ganapathi had been placed on a platform to the left of the main temple dedicated to Shri Adi Shankaracharya. The Ganapathi *vigraha* was made of clay for immersion in water or *visarjana*, while the *vigraha* of Shankaracharya was in marble with a golden crown. Right in front and a little below was a small square pedestal for *padukas* of Shankaracharya. Just then the door of the small room in which the Swamiji was doing *dhyana* opened and people surged forward. The Swamiji was standing erect with his *danda* or spiritual staff and a beehive of *rudrakshas* on his head, resembling a miniature model of Mount Kailasa. But it was the spiritual aura around him, after hours of deep meditation, which held everybody spellbound. We did *arati* and made way for others. The Swamiji stood there statue-like for a long time. Then he slowly walked down the steps on to a platform to his right, where he stood with folded hands before the *vigraha* of Ganapathi, and then bent a little to his left to look at the *murti* of Shankaracharya and touched the *padukas* with his *danda*. The women in front were exchanging *kumkum* by way of mutual greeting at this holy hour. Some put *kumkum* on the forehead of Vasundhara and Vijaya. It was a beautiful traditional way of feminine greetings which one hoped would not get lost in the hurry and bustle of advancing modernity. A little later we were called by the Swamiji who was squatting in the narrow corridor behind the Ganapathi *vigraha* and then given permission to leave.

When I went to the Shankara Mutt in the evening, Annadurai Iyengar told me that the Swamiji had observed severe *mouna* or silence during the whole of Navaratri, so much so that even Balu was not allowed to enter the room where the Swamiji was immersed in silence and meditation. Small quantities of powdered dates and parched rice were pushed into the room in a packet form, and even water for drinking and ablutions had to be supplied from outside without anybody entering the room. However, for the past two days he was giving *darshan* to the devotees though he had not yet broken his silence.

The Swamiji was in one corner of the room. Some devotees were peeping through a window which had eight iron bars, the central two bars being bent a little in an attempt to widen them. Annadurai informed the Swamiji that I had come. The Swamiji moved close to the window and saw me place before him a trayful of *banni* leaves which I had brought all the way from Sandur. Immediately the Swamiji took a big handful of *banni* leaves and put them on his head after touching his eyes with them. He repeated this twice or thrice while I looked on with folded hands and a deep sense of gratitude. It was positively thrilling to watch the Paramacharya pick up these leaves with childlike avidity and sacred joy. It was fascinating to see the way he played with the *banni* leaves, as if the secret of life could be felt through them and conveyed to the rest of the world. Symbols acquire meaning by those who use them. By themselves they convey nothing. The spirit behind an offering and its acceptance is what counts as a positive force in life. The Swamiji's acceptance of the *banni* leaves was un-premeditated and totally free from the cramping dead habit or traditional conditioning. It was absolutely spontaneous and therefore childlike or godlike. I returned



to the Circuit House deeply satisfied.

Satara

23 October 1980

In the morning, the boys chanting Sanskrit *slokas* were the grandchildren of the Shastriji who runs the Shankara Mutt and whose sons have never been to a formal school but have been brought up on a strict diet of traditional Sanskrit learning. Annadurai Iyengar explained how the system works. It takes a couple of years to learn the basics of the Sanskrit language, including *dhatu*, *samasa*, *shabdha* and *Amara* (or the *Amarakosha*, the traditional dictionary of synonyms). With this grounding, the boys were introduced to simple *slokas* and verses, and then to progressively more difficult passages. It takes six to eight years to learn Sanskrit reasonably well in the traditional way (which is not merely learning a few declensions and passages or verses prescribed for an examination, as in the modern school where Sanskrit is learnt as a second language). The next six to eight years can then be spent in mastering one or more *bhashyas* or commentaries on the *Veda Sutras* and the *Upanishads*.

The Swamiji was not in his room. After his morning dip in a nearby water place, he was sitting in a small shed doing *japa* and was observing complete silence. But Balu said that I could see the Swamiji pray. This was more than what I could expect. It was a little past 9.00 a.m. when I walked towards the hill where the Swamiji was immersed in prayer. It was an absorbing sight. He had closed his eyes and was sitting with folded hands. To his right, lying on the floor, were his spectacles. He had folded his legs, not horizontally but vertically, with his feet firmly planted on the cane mat on

which he was sitting, lost in meditation. Only his head and folded hands swayed a little occasionally. That was the only external sign of what went on inside him, deep down in his consciousness. It was as though he was silently conversing with the Gods within. After nearly an hour he held the *danda* or spiritual staff in both his hands and brought it close to his heart in prayer. Then he supported himself on his left knee, the right foot resting on the mat. It was a pose which much younger persons would find it difficult to get into without losing balance. It strangely reminded me of an Olympic long distance runner getting ready to commence the race as soon as the whistle blew. In this case the whistle was in the hands of God, and Swamiji, at 86, was making all the movements he was used to during a glorious lifetime of prayer and invocation to the mysterious forces that one was heir to. Even to witness it was to be transported to a different world. The Swamiji again settled down on his simple mat and interlocked his fingers in a twisted pattern, under the light cover of his saffron robes. A little later he unlocked his fingers and pointed his palms upwards to the skies. Finally, as was his habit, before concluding a session of prayer or *japa*, he sipped water from his *kamandala* thrice, wiped his mouth moving the fingers of his right hand lightly over his lips from right to left, and then made a gesture as if to touch his eyes alternatively with his right thumb, the other fingers pointing to his forehead in a symbolic effort to sprinkle water over his head. I was completely engrossed trying to feel the inner movement and the mood. It seemed sacrilegious and insensitive to make any move, verbal or otherwise. I was just content to sit and be still. The Swamiji looked at me with eyes which seemed to see much more than what the eyes normally do. The moment was too precious to be fritted away in routine matters. I whispered to Annadurai to keep still and mention other matters to the Swamiji only later when he was less preoccupied at a different level.

When Swamiji comes down to earth, so to say, he happily gets into every detail and has to be told everything.

In the evening the Swamiji was engrossed in *Purnima pooja* in his small room. Balu had kept for his *pooja* the *banni* leaves I had brought from Sandur, as well as some *bilva* and *tulasi* leaves, as sacred offerings to the Gods. Later he brought some neem leaves as well. The Swamiji sat with folded hands worshiping a form or force which he had created before his mind's eye or rather his soul's eye. His folded hands moved from side to side and his eyes were closed in total devotion. There was no *vighraha* or photograph of God before him. Yet what he was worshiping must have been very real and part of the core-stuff that one is made of. I sat outside the window of the room and could feel the peace of prayer, and that quality and grace which permeates deep into one's innermost consciousness. Everybody seemed, obviously, happy to get a glimpse of the Swamiji in this ecstatic state. After about an hour the Swamiji moved to another spot from where he could watch the full moon and see beauty and beatitude reflected in it. What a charming way of praying. To those who know how to pray it must be such a great source of joy. Even to watch the Swamiji pray was such a great delight.

After about half an hour of moon meditation, when Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Swamigal (whose name itself contains the moon) descended the steps, he himself looked like the moon — cool, bright and benevolent — to whom one spontaneously bowed in response to an inner urge. The Swamiji in turn bowed to Adi Shankara and sat behind the window with an indescribable expression of compassion and light.

Before leaving, Rajagopal showed me a collection of line drawings by one Sthapati from Andhra. The sketch of Madurai Meenakshi with a parrot on her right hand was good. Kanchi Kamakshi was the presiding deity

at Kanchi whom the Swamiji worshiped day and night. I felt I must have a picture of Kamakshi placed opposite to Swamiji's oil painting (from my photograph) in the small room in which the Swamiji had stayed in the Eshwaraswamy temple at Sandur. (A painting of goddess Kamakshi has been placed in an enclosure opposite Swamiji's room, where *Chandramouleshwara pooja* was performed by Shri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamiji of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha on 12 June 1979 (17&18)).

Satara

23 December 1980

I showed the Swamiji photographs of the Balachidambara *vigraha* which was now ready for installation and sought his guidance. The Swamiji referred me to persons who were well versed in these matters. When I told him that we had recently visited Mantralaya and Ganagapur (Dattatreya *Kshetra* in Gulbarga), he nodded his head in approval and suggested that we also visit Sajjangad where the great Saint of Maharashtra, Shri Ramdas Swamy spent the last years of his life (1676-1682). He is the author of the famous *Dasabodha* on *Advaita* and the simple *vachana*-like verses called *Manache Sloka* in Marathi. Saint Ramdas was a very tall person and kept in the room in which he had stayed at Sajjangad fort, were long wooden arm supports of which one was supposed to have been given by the great Shivaji. At the spot where he took *samadhi*, a temple had been built by Shivaji's son Sambhaji. Our guide showed us the wooden *padukas* supposed to have been given to Ramdas by Dattatreya himself and considered very sacred. Swamy Ramdas was quite a revolutionary and had tried to give spiritual status to widows by permitting them to join his order along with other disciples, at a

time when society was extremely conservative. On Sajjangad there is a small temple dedicated to one *Venabai* who was a great devotee of Ramdas. The *bhakti* movement had a powerful revolutionary impact on society in the seventeenth century in many parts of the country.

In the evening when we had *darshan* of the Swamiji, a number of *arati* songs were sung by children, including some composed on our Swamiji, the content and spirit of which was *bhakti*. When we sought permission to leave, a small piece of paper was given to me, in response to my earlier request, with regard to the *muhurtam* for the installation of the *Balachidambara vighraha* at Murgod.

Date	..	25.1.1981
Day	..	Sunday
Time	..	12.30 p.m.
Lagnam	..	<i>Mesha-Simhamsam</i>
Star	..	<i>Uttara Phalguni</i> (or <i>Hastham</i> )
Tithi	..	<i>Panchami</i>

The next morning (24 December) we left for Sandur after some time in silent prayer in the presence of the Swamiji, the incoming and the outgoing breath synchronising with the *mantra* or the name of God.

A group of devotees and friends had planned to go from Sandur to Satara on the 9th for Swamiji's *darshan*. I sent with them a letter to Rajagopal to be conveyed to the Swamiji, in which I had said that I would be sending the Balachidambara *vigraha* to him on Monday the 12th, as I would like it to be with the Swamij, as long as possible before the installation at Murgod. I would myself be reaching Satara on the 23rd to have *darshan* of the Swamiji and leave for Murgod with the *vigraha* on the 24th for installation on the 25th. (In that letter I had also mentioned that I would be releasing a book on Siddharudhaswamy written by Dr. Mallikarjuna Sindhagi at Hubli on the 14th). On 11th afternoon, Vadiraj arrived at Sandur from Bangalore with the statue or *vigraha* of Balachidambara carved beautifully in black stone. It was a very pleasing statue of about two and half feet in height, of a smiling boy with a *bilva* leaf on his right ear, his left hand placed sportingly on the waist, and the right hand pointing downward in one of the well-known *mudras* (22). My parents also came and saw the *vigraha* at Shivapur, where it was placed in my *pooja* room, just below the photographs of the Swamiji (which I had taken at Sandur in 1978). There it remained till the next morning, enabling all family members to have *darshan* and take in its beauty. When my letter was read out to the Swamiji, he had indicated his approval by his benign smile and hand raised in blessing.

On the 15th I could have *darshan* of the Swamiji at noon and placed before him a tray of *til-gul* along with a copy of the book on Siddharudha, which I had released the previous *Sankranti* day at Hubli. Swamiji's whole visage was as though dripping with white light. His beard was more silvery than ever and his eyes spoke compassion. Indira Gandhi had had *darshan* of the Swamiji on the 14th and had said that she did not do anything by

way of blind faith but the Swamiji was a person of great intellect and compassion and it is this that she felt drawn to. Only T.M.P. Mahadevan who served as interpreter had accompanied Indira Gandhi to the Swamiji. However, Bahadur (our security man from Sandur who was serving Swamiji) who had been permitted by the Swamiji to be present, had helped to carry the tray of fruits and flowers which Indira Gandhi placed before the Swamiji and recalled how the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had said "thank you" to him, and how the Swamiji had informed her that he (Bahadur) was from Sandur and was doing very good work. These are little links and associations which are not easily forgotten and go a long way. All this was narrated to me on 15th evening and I left Satara on 16th morning.

On the evening of 23 January, the *vigraha* of Balachidambara was exactly where it was when I last saw it with the Swamiji on the 16th, except that it was looking more seasoned and mellowed with flowers and worship. The Swamiji's loving attention seemed to have given it a soft look. A stream of devotees were filing past the Swamiji and the *vigraha* close to him. I noticed quite a few ladies taking some *kumkum* off the *vigraha* and putting it in the parting in their hair. In the midst of all this activity, Annadurai Iyengar and I were trying to explain to the Swamiji regarding the *pathashala* at Hospet and how we had located some land on the other side of the distributary canal on the Hospet-Sandur road, which would be very useful for the future development of the *pathashala*. Just then a disabled boy with crutches pushed himself forward and stood with folded hands before the Swamiji. I could see the face of the Swamiji light up with compassion as he gave his blessings with both his hands and all his heart. A little later another cripple, who could not even stand up, crawled up to the Swamiji for his blessings. Then a group of little girls did *arati* and sang the *asthakam* sweetly. Later a rich Indian family from abroad paid their obei-

sance. The Swamiji blessed them also but declined to say, when asked, as to what they should do with their money connected with some vows. Even the more humble folk were not allowed to keep any coins or currency notes in front of the Swamiji.

The Balachidambara *vigraha* had been with the Swamiji for about ten days and the idea of keeping it with the Swamiji had been triggered off by my brother Vijaysimh, who had casually mentioned to me how he had visited the Skanda temple at Hyderabad along with his friend on a Friday (2 January), where the *archaka* had given him a white metal circular piece to be given to me, on one side of which was embossed the outlines of Durgadevi, whose *vigraha* had been installed at Skandagiri with the blessings of the Kanchi Swamiji, after it had been kept with him for seven days before installation. Intuition and such subtle and timely intimations make us do what we do and what must be done. The Swamiji had said the previous evening that I should leave for Murgod before sunrise on the 24th with the *vigraha*. When I went there at about 6.00 a.m. the window of Swamiji's room was closed. Within a few minutes after I went and stood there with folded hands, the Swamiji pushed open the window. I did *arati* and hymns were sung which awakened us to the glory of this auspicious early hour. The Swamiji then signalled me to take the *vigraha* and leave for Murgod. I lifted the statue, put it in a wooden box which fitted in comfortably on the back seat of my Ambassador car and left for Murgod.

After a little while, I saw a soft red ball raise its head over the low lying dales to indicate that we had left Satara well before sunrise. By noon we reached Murgod where, at the place of installation, Subrahmanya Dikshitar and the Vidyaranya Pathashala pundits were busy getting things ready for tomorrow. The fragrance of the smoke and incense pervaded the atmosphere. Ashok Deshpande, whose house was opposite and whose mother



was a great devotee, helped in the preparations. He was to be closely associated with me in the proper maintenance of this historic and sacred spot, though we were both only instruments of the Swamiji's wish.

Murgod

25 January 1981

It was the day of installation. We reached Murgod by about 9.30 a.m. by which time Kumaraswamy Dikshitar and his team were busy chanting *Vedic* hymns appropriate to the occasion. They performed the *puṇahuti* at 10.00 a.m. and poured ghee in the sacrificial fire with the help of vertically cut half-sections of plantain stems. This is how the *rishis* must have performed these rites in the dense forests of the distant past. Kumaraswamy Dikshitar also explained to the gathering in Kannada the significance of the *kumbhabhisheka*. The essence of his sermon was that the *kumbhabhisheka* symbolised the fullness of the inner experience, the full awareness of the spiritual space inside. Each one in the gathering understood the sermon at the level of experience one had attained. Words cannot take us beyond one's own experience in matters of the spirit.

My parents and other members of the family came to participate in the installation ceremony. At about 12 noon we moved into the small room where the *murti* or *vighraha* was to be installed. While pots of water were being brought for the *abhisheka*, I stood at the door gazing in sheer delight at the beauty reflected on the face of Balachidambara. On the central wall, behind the *murti*, were three arch-like shelves or hollow spaces. On the left was a photograph of the Kanchi Swamiji, below which was a rock-inscription containing historical data regarding the birth date of

Chidambaraswamy, recorded at the instance of the Swamiji when he had visited Murgod. My mind went back to that day, two years ago, when I had come to Murgod the day after Vijayadashami to offer *banni* to the Swamiji. I remembered how the Swamiji had himself led me to this room and told me that Balachidambara *murti* should be installed here. This was the moment of fulfillment of a divine wish. At about 12.30 p.m. the installation ceremony had reached its peak of spiritual warmth and one-mindedness. After the water from the main *kalasha* had been poured on the *vigraha*, the coconut which had been placed at the mouth of this silver vessel was given to me by Subrahmanya Dikshitar. He also sprinkled holy water on all of us with mango leaves and gave us all a locket or *raksha* each. I was given a *japamala* of pink *pavala* cylindrical beads and shown a metal sheet or *yantra* with the appropriate geometrical patterns engraved on it. We also distributed commemorative silver lockets to mark the occasion.

This was followed by a spontaneous public reception where the people of Murgod expressed their joy and satisfaction at the successful installation of the *murti* of Balachidambara. The public meeting was presided over by Shri Neelakanta Mahaswamy, the head of the Veerashaiva Mutt (Durundeshwar Mutt) at Murgod and was an expression of spontaneous unity and oneness of feeling. The installation had obviously created a special atmosphere of amity and goodwill. The public function was followed by mass feeding. Huge cauldrons of food had been prepared, which all of us helped in serving. About ten thousand persons belonging to all sections of society, including colourful Lambanias in their traditional costumes, participated in the mass lunch and general jubilation. This was in keeping with the Swamiji's wish.

When, on 17 March 1981, I met the Swamiji at Satara, Kumaraswamy Dikshitar placed before the Swamiji all that he had brought from Murgod

including the *yantra* that had been shown to me along with a sheet of paper on which was written the *mantra* of Chidambaraswamy. The Swamiji touched both these and asked me to take them for worship. The Swamiji then made us sit down and asked Kumaraswamy Dikshitar to read out the *guruparampara* from an ancient manuscript called the *Guruparampara Charitre*, which traced the *parampara* or spiritual lineage from *Akasha Chidambara* or Shiva to Adi Shankaracharya and Chidambaraswamy. The Swamiji then showed me a photograph which was part of the *Guruparampara Charitre* and wanted me to notice that both *sanyaasis* and *grihastas* or householders were amongst the *shishyas* or disciples. The Swamiji said that the *guru* in the photograph was Chidambaraswamy, whose *murti* in boy form we had installed at Murgod. The Nataraja we wanted to have at Shivapur, Sandur, could be modelled on the Nataraja at the famous Chidambara or Shiva temple in Tamil Nadu. The Swamiji also mentioned that the *Sahasra Lingas* (1008 *Lingas*) that may be installed later could be modelled on the lines of the one hundred thousand *saligrams* that Dr. Karan Singh had installed in Kashmir, in a spiral column, so that people could go round it without difficulty. “*Bana Lingas*” he said could be got from the river Narmada.

Later Kumaraswamy Dikshitar explained to me the ancient texts and sources he had depended upon for what he did at Murgod. He said he had prepared the *yantra* with reference to the *Chidambara Mantra, Tantra, Tatva Vivarane* in *Prapanchasara Sangraha* by Guruvendra Saraswathi (available in the Saraswathi Mahal library at Tanjavur or Tanjore). He said he had also based his calculations on other well-known treatises such as *Prapanchasara* of Adi Shankara, *Chidambara Mahatatva* by Patanjali and *Chidambara Mantra Paddhati* by Aghora Shivacharya. He said that the main *Chidambara yantra* was behind the Nataraja in the *sanctum sanctorum* at the Chidambara temple. He also depended on other sacred texts and on

the *lakshanas* : *Yantra Lakshana* (grammar of *yantras*), *Avarana Lakshana* and *Mantra Lakshana*. But, he said, it was essentially Swamiji's *prerana* or inspiration. It was only for the Swamiji to judge whether he had done his job well. Apparently he had. Otherwise the Swamiji would not have approved it.

Kumaraswamy Dikshitar then explained for my benefit the general background and salient features of the *parampara*. Dakshinamurty (the silent God) came first, followed by Nataraja (the dance and drum sound form) and later Shankaracharya who was vocal, his disciples and Chidambaraswamy who were in direct line of the *guruparampara*. He also explained how Adi Shankara had established five *Spathika Lingas*: *Yoga Linga* at Kanchi, *Bhoga Linga* at Sringeri, *Vara Linga* at Kedar, *Mukti Linga* at Kailasa and the *Akasha Linga* at Chidambaram. He said that there are four or five Natarajas at the Chidambaram temple but the one which the Swamiji was referring to was the Nataraja called *Ananda Tandaveshwara* in the *garbhagudi* of the Chidambaram *Moolasthanam*, which was the main Nataraja. *Akasha* denotes space or emptiness and suggests the *nirvikara* or *nirguna* form. How beautifully the Swamiji had made me aware of the *guruparampara*, the essence of which was love and harmony. Obviously the Swamiji himself was a direct representative of the great *parampara* or line of spiritual masters, to me the most relevant, living, loving and lovable *guru* with an unforgettable smile. How much concern he had for us, imperfect mortals, and in what subtle ways he guided us softly to our destiny.

Early in the morning was the best time for *abhisheka* to Lord Panduranga of Pandharpur. The ancient *murti* of Panduranga was roughly hewn and full of pit holes due to the ravages of time and history. But Panduranga or Vithala was still standing on the stone slab given by an ardent devotee, Pundalika, in the hoary past. Those who were conducting the *abhisheka* or ritualistic bath to Panduranga had a story to tell about every dent on the Lord's body. There was a depression, the size of a fingertip, on the feet of Vithala which was said to represent the deflation of the ego of a great beauty of those days. This celebrated beauty was so proud of her looks that she considered herself softer than a flower. But when she touched the feet of the Lord with her delicate finger, it sank deep into the hard black stone, with devastating effect on her inflated ego. There was a bigger dent on the chest of Panduranga which was said to have been caused by the kick of Bhrgu who was known for his arrogance and haughtiness. Vithala is supposed to have borne the kick without a murmur, the moral being that once you reach an elevated spiritual state, you do not feel such things and can afford to ignore the so-called insults of the mundane world. (But we were not told what happened to Bhrgu and his errant leg). The cylindrical fez-cap-like projection on the God's head, used to fit a *mukuta* or crown, was explained as the *Shivalinga*, the symbol of energy crowning the *Sahasrara* or the seat of supreme consciousness. The *abhisheka* itself was a messy business. Potful of milk, curds, and honey were poured on the head of un-complaining Vithala and devotees were asked to scrub the Lord with all the might of their devotion. For many this was a great moment as they could feel and touch the Lord with their own hands. It gave them a sense of belonging and broke down many physical and psychological barriers. The

great popularity of Vithala of Pandharpur was, perhaps, in no small measure, due to this physical contact with millions of devotees. The sensuous side of spirituality was, consciously or unconsciously, fully catered to. For those who worshipped more with the mind than with their hands, the devotees were asked to have a good look at the milk and curds trickling down in flowing patterns of white against the black face and body of the *vighraha*, until the flow slowed down and almost came to a standstill, like the spirit which is moved by the emotion of *bhakti* or devotion only to settle down into a supremely pleasurable state of inner stillness. The deity was then washed clean with several potsful of water. One could not fail to be impressed with the great cleansing quality of aqua. What could we have done without water? Obviously the world could not have existed without water even for a moment. But still we take water for granted, like air and the other elements, until something happens which focuses our attention on them and their vital importance. Perhaps rituals also served this purpose, which were only steps in our deeper understanding of ourselves as part of nature. Finally, the Lord was duly decked in silk and brocade. Later, *abhisheka* was done to Rukmini Devi whose *vighraha* was clothed in the stone carving itself. The *vighrahas* of Satyabhama and Radha were also there, carved at different times. On the pillar carvings, Purandaradasa was unmistakable. But close to him was a hunting scene. The sacred and the profane are mixed quite freely in India and the East. The distinction is not emphasized and therefore does not necessarily jar. Tao in China, for instance, is based on the principle that one need not make a distinction between sacred and profane love. They make it a point to emphasize that the two are not different but spring from the same source, the holistic unity of life.

By the time we finished these two *abhishekas* and went for Swamiji's *darshan* it was 9.30 a.m. The Swamiji was just returning after his bath in

the river, Chandrabhaga. One instantly felt that the moment was auspicious in those beautiful surroundings. The Swamiji beckoned me to come to his right side, perhaps to ensure that I paid my respects to him facing in the right direction and not south. In the evening the Swamiji went to the Vithala temple, unconcerned with the big crowd and moving at his own pace. Finally he settled down in the open courtyard of a High School surrounded by a large number of students and teachers. He asked me to sit close to his left. We sat there for more than an hour with the children and teachers in hushed silence. Then the Swamiji went inside a small room and again sent for me as he sensed that I had something to convey to him. It was about the Vidyaranya Pathashala at Hospet. Suddenly the Swamiji puffed up his face, as if he was blowing air into a balloon, while with his right hand he was trying to question me about something which I could not understand. The blowing gesture was so vigorous that Swamiji's face became red. It took some time for even Balu to follow what he was saying and to whom he was referring to. Finally Balu hit upon the right answer and the Swamiji's face relaxed. The Swamiji was asking, not without a sense of humour, about the attitude of a rotund political figure with a name equally suggestive of roundness. Before giving me permission to leave, the Swamiji conveyed with nine of his fingers that I should come again at 9.00 a.m. tomorrow.

Exactly at 9.00 a.m. I was in the presence of the Swamiji who was in deep meditation but had instructed Balu to make me sit in front of him with only a doorstep in between. The spot where I was to sit for one full hour in meditation was effectively cordoned off by a row of tables from others who would soon start pouring into the courtyard and file past the Swamiji for just a glimpse of his restful visage. I soon fell into a very satisfactory and smooth meditative experience. In Swamiji's presence it all seemed

so simple. The inward peace and poise seemed to come almost automatically. Such were the vibrations in that orbit that nothing external could intrude or disturb. Even my legs did not cause the slightest discomfort though I was sitting cross-legged for one full hour. At the end of that blissful hour, the Swamiji opened his eyes slowly and almost imperceptibly like some shy flower at dawn. Seeing this the devotees thronged forward and sang hymns while the ladies did *arati*. I had never experienced such a perfect meditation. It was as though the Swamiji was teaching, gently and without words, how it feels to look inwards and get lost in meditative devotion. The experience would undoubtedly remain ingrained in my inner consciousness for ever.

Pandharpur

9 October 1981

It was the day after Vijayadashami. I had brought from Sandur some *banni* leaves to be offered to the Swamiji, a practice I have been able to follow every year for the past three years after 1978 when the Swamiji was at Sandur for Navaratri. I reached Pandharpur at 7.30 p.m. and went straight to the Swamiji who was resting. But when I placed before him a basket full of *banni* leaves, he picked up a handful, touched his forehead with them and put them back in the basket for me to take.



Reached Sholapur from Ganagapur (a well-known *Kshetra* of Dattatreya) at noon after a three to four hour car journey, to meet the Swamiji who had come here from a nearby village where he had been staying for the last few days. He was in a room near a temple dedicated to Lord Venkateshwara. My wife and I were made to sit in his presence. In front of him were a few copies of a magazine called *Dharma Sudhakara* published by an organisation interested in *Vedic* works for more than half a century. On the back cover of one of these booklets was a picture of Dattatreya which attracted my attention. Later the Swamiji gave me precisely this booklet which contained some valuable information about Dattatreya. The booklet said that Dattatreya was incarnated in the form of *Vishwa Guru* or *Sadguru* to teach humanity the path of Happiness. The *avatara* of Dattatreya was as old as the *Vedas*. Dattatreya attained *atmajnana* or self-realisation and the devotee got the *darshan* of Dattatreya by his *antaryami sakshitva* or internal presence. Dattatreya gave the *diksha* of *Shiva upasane* to the *Mahanubhava Pantha* and also to others such as those belonging to the *Natha Sampradaya* and the *Varkari Sampradaya*. The booklet said that Dattatreya was *karunamaya* or compassionate and showed himself in different forms at different times or *kalakhanda*. His second *avatara* was as Shripada Vallabha and placed before his devotees the highest ideals of meditation. His third *avatara* was Narasimha Saraswathi when he visited many places and pilgrim centres such as Ganagapur, Mahurgad, Girnar, Chowl, Kuruvapur, Audambar and Narsobavadi. The Swamiji then asked a young man, who was teaching philosophy in the local college and was well versed in Sanskrit and *Advaita*, to sit next to me and give a brief discourse on two topics: (i) the philosophy of Adi Shankaracharya and (ii) the gist of Panchadasi written by Vidyaranya.

The young teacher's exposition was quite clear and consistent though he spoke extempore and without any preparation.

The next morning when we met the Swamiji there was a continuous stream of visitors trying to get a glimpse of him and file past him for *darshan*. We waited for the crowd to thin before going closer and doing our *arati* near the steps of a small room in which the Swamiji was standing. The Swamiji asked us to come into the room and be there while he blessed the devotees and found time to ask questions about the *pathashala*. A group of policemen, who were handing over charge to another set of policemen, came and bowed to the Swamiji in a group; the Swamiji noticed one of them and asked whether his name was Yusuf and blessed him while he answered in the affirmative.

Gulbarga

30 April 1982

The Swamiji had left Gulbarga the previous day and was on his way to a village about 25 to 30 km. away from Gulbarga towards Kalagi. The village where he was to camp for the night was on the Shahabad road. At about 5.30 p.m. we were on the Shahabad road in search of the Swamiji. Some people had seen him pass that way. Eventually when we caught up with the Swamiji he was quite close to the village where he was to halt for the night. We had the opportunity to walk with him for some distance. It had rained and the atmosphere had cooled down a bit. The Swamiji sat on the verandah of a small school building and poured some water from his wooden *ka-nandala*, in a slow trickle, on to his feet which he had used to walk about 15 km. that day and an equal distance the previous day. Then he did his

*sandhyavandana*, while I sat there silently repeating the *Chidambara Mantra*. The whole atmosphere was so very fresh and peaceful. The soul felt at rest and very much at home in this strange and remote village of Gulbarga.

I told the Swamiji that I had come for his *darshan* before attending the function at Hospet on 2 May, to honour some scholars who had successfully participated in the *Grantha Prachara* Scheme of our *pathashala*, to popularise the works of Vidyananya. Out of about 54 available works of Vidyananya, 25 had been selected by the Swamiji to be made available for study in the first five years, at the rate of five books per year. 1981 was the first year of this scheme. Five scholars from different parts of the country had completed writing a synopsis in English or their regional language of five books selected for the year. These scholars were to be honoured on 2 May with a shawl on which would be inscribed the name of the books. If any scholar completed writing a competent synopsis of all the 25 books in five years, he would be specially honoured. The *pathashala* would help in making the books available to interested scholars. The scheme was designed to make the country aware of the depth and range of Vidyananya's scholarship and contribution to Indian thought. The need to prepare an authoritative biography of Vidyananya was also felt.

I informed the Swamiji about the use to which the Eshwaraswamy temple near Shivapur (where the Swamiji had stayed) was being put to, how marriages especially of the poor were being performed there and had been quite popular, apart from other cultural activities to describe which the Swamiji added the word "socio" to cultural. He repeated the expression "socio-cultural" thrice, the emphasis being on involving all members of the society in which one lives and works.

Hospet

2 May 1982

The function at Hospet to honour the Sanskrit scholars of the *Grantha Prachara* Scheme was a memorable one. I had the honour to preside over this function. Shankarasastry, one of the five scholars who were honoured, presented to the audience a synopsis of *Drig Drisya Viveka*, which was one of the five books of Vidyanaraya selected for the year. He lucidly explained the distinction between the 'Seer' and the 'Seen' and said: "The Seer is unseen and it is the Seer whom we should know". He went on to say that "in *nirvikalpa samadhi* there is a flow of peace or *shanti*". At the end of his talk I could not resist the temptation to ask him a couple of questions to try and elicit his valuable reactions born of valuable experience. I wanted him to take the argument to its logical conclusion. I wanted to know what happens to this distinction between the 'Seer' and the 'Seen' when the 'Seer' is known. Does the 'Seer' or the 'Seen' distinction disappear? If the flow of *shanti* is the symptom of deep union with the 'Seer', is not one conscious of the *shanti*? He said that one is not conscious of anything at that stage. I decided not to press the point any further. When I returned to Sandur from Hospet after the function, I was informed that Shankarasastry suddenly died of heart failure, a little after the function. He had complained of a slight chest pain and passed away peacefully into a realm where there were no distinctions and one is conscious of nothing.

## Ganagapur

1 August 1982

On our way to Mahagaon (a small village about forty minutes drive from Gulbarga), for Swamiji's *darshan*, we halted at Ganagapur. Ajai, Sujai and Kartik were also with us and also my wife's sister's three children who were studying in our school at Sandur. We visited the temples on the bank of the river, hallowed by meditation and spirituality of the great saint Narasimha Saraswathi, who was believed to be an *avatara* of Dattatreya. We went round the *audambara* tree which is said to answer the prayers of devotees. Nearby there is a spot where *vibhuti* is available in plenty; I saw a visitor filling a gunny bag with it to be taken to Bombay, an example of how everything was getting commercialised and the innocent common touch was lost.

## Mahagaon

2 August 1982

When we reached Mahagaon, we were asked to have *darshan* of the local deities and then sit in the verandah in front of the window behind which the Swamiji was sitting listening to a Sanskrit *parayana*. We mentioned to him the names of the children who had come with us. I also told him about the book I intend writing on one of my ancestors, Murarirao, who ruled from Gooty in the 18th century. The Swamiji blessed the idea and told Annadurai Iyengar and others, with great animation and inimitable gestures, how one of my ancestors, several hundred years ago, had conquered a difficult fort by training a *uda* or "ghorpad" (monitor lizard) to scale it, giving our family its surname. The Swamiji's response was a thrilling experi-

ence which greatly strengthened my resolve to write this book.

We came to Gulbarga for lunch and returned to Mahagaon at 4.30 p.m. The Swamiji had been listening to Sanskrit pundits without any rest. It was amazing how he sat erect and attentive for hours without any sign of fatigue. The Swamiji called us all again and made us sit in two rows in front of him, taking care not to obstruct the view of other devotees. He then went on reading silently from a small book, *Hanuman Chalisa*. We had nothing to ask him and felt blessed that we were permitted to sit so close and feel his full presence in prayer.

Mahagaon

30 August 1982

Reached Gulbarga in the afternoon and proceeded to Mahagaon in the evening. Had *darshan* of Swamiji who, when asked, indicated by his silence that I was not to leave the next day but the day after. August the 31st was the day of *pradosha pooja*. Sripada Dixit of Mulugund who addressed the gathering in the evening was honoured with a red wool and jari shawl. The Swamiji pushed the shawl through the iron bars of the window behind which he was sitting and indicated to me that I should put it on Sripada Dixit. Pundits and students from our *pathashala* at Hospet had also come for Swamiji's *darshan*. In the morning they had been asked to recite what they had learnt. It was quite an exhaustive test they were put through, but the Swamiji was happy with what they had learnt at the *pathashala*. In the evening the Swamiji brought out a big bright umbrella and wanted me to hold it, for a brief while, over the head of a Brahmin, who had come for his *darshan* from Erode in Tamil Nadu after performing the *Vajrapayee Yajna*.

The Swamiji then explained how *Vajrapayee* was an important *Yajna* performed by Brahmins under the umbrella of kingly protection and support, unlike the *Ashvamedha* and *Rajasuya Yajnas* which were performed only by Kshatriyas. Before giving me permission to leave, the Swamiji told me that a book of source material on Vidyaranya, which is being prepared under his guidance, should be released on Vijayadashami day by my father.

Sandur

27 October 1982

As desired by the Swamiji, my father released this book on Vidyaranya at an elegant function at the Shivapur Eshwaraswamy temple. An oil painting of *Kamakshi Devi* painted by V.T. Kale, the art master in our school, was installed in a small room opposite the room where the Swamiji had stayed when he visited Sandur in 1978, and where we have now put a painting (also by Kale) from a photograph taken by me when the Swamiji was doing *japa* on the banks of the Narihalla which flows through Sandur.

The next day I motored to Gulbarga and reached Mahagaon at about 7.00 p.m., just in time to listen to the *Trotakashtaka*. As the Swamiji came and sat near the window, I placed a trayful of *banni* leaves in front of him on my side of the window. The Swamiji asked me to pick up a handful of *banni* leaves and put it in front of him on his side of the window through the separating iron bars. He then picked up the *banni* and put it on his head after pressing the leaves to both his eyes, and then put it back into the trayful of *banni* which I was holding in my hands. It was once again a spontaneous and moving gesture, similar but not the same as the previous ones.

The Swamiji did not give me permission to leave for Sandur on the 29th which was the day of *Tulasi pooja*. In the evening of 29th the Swamiji enquired of Balu whether I had had my afternoon meal at the *mutt*. Such instances of his great concern for our everyday needs were very human. He also asked Annadurai Iyengar whether I had been informed about the Swamiji's brother's son who was not keeping too well, and was reported to have been lost in a crowd at a wayside station and had not yet been located. The tone of his question implied that as one who was so close to him, I should be kept informed of such human events in connection with his family. One of Swamiji's brother, I was told, was blind in both eyes and was living in Hospet.

Shahabad

14 March 1983

The previous day was a Sunday and I suddenly felt that I should proceed to Shahabad for Swamiji's *darshan*. I later realised that Monday the 14th happened to be the day of *aradhana* of Swamiji's *guru*. But the thought to go had surfaced without any conscious preparation or planning. This was often the case with my meetings with the Swamiji. I reached Shahabad at about 4.00 p.m. The Swamiji was in a small shed. Sitting behind the Swamiji I could listen to the evening chanting from 6 to 8.00 p.m. It was a most peaceful two hours. The next morning I left for Sandur after Swamiji's *darshan* at 6.00 a.m. I told him about the *ratha* or chariot that was being made for the Shivapur Eshwaraswamy temple. The Swamiji looked pleased and asked me to take the coconut in front of him as *prasad*.



Kurnool and Kancheepuram  
(Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu)

24 July was *Gurupurnima*, a day very holy to all devotees. Swamiji was at Kurnool. The junior and junior-most Swamijis of Kanchi were also going to join the senior Swamiji for *Gurupurnima* and *chaturmasa*. So we decided to proceed to Kurnool on the 23rd. Ours was a large party consisting of more than a dozen persons including my uncle (D.B Ghorpade) and aunt, brothers and sisters-in-law, Shivarao and Yeshodhara, Venkatrao and Vidya and the children. After a cold water bath in a motel we reached Kurnool at about 5.00 p.m. Swamiji was inside what looked like a godown from outside. He was standing on a table inside, smiling, in the midst of a jostling crowd. We managed to catch his eyes which gave each one of us a feeling that he had seen and blessed us. In spite of the rush and confusion we had good *darshan*.

After that we went to see the junior-most Swamiji, Shri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswathi, who was a boy of 13 and had been installed recently. He looked so very innocent and charming that he won our hearts. He had taken to his duties as a duck to water and made all the right enquiries and asked all the right questions about our large family, including the photographs I had taken of the senior Swamiji at Sandur and my wildlife photography. It was as though the little Swamiji had sensed much more than what he might have heard from his close associates. The poise, dignity and natural grace with which he performed his duties under the guidance of the elder Swamijis was quite remarkable. He even asked Gopal Bhat, who had come with us, what was his *Veda*, which the latter answered as *Rig Veda*. The boy Swamiji, as if to the manner born, opened the *ahimsa* silk shawl that we had taken for him, put it on his young shoulders, touched the raisins which were returned to us as *prasad*, while the coconuts and the

plantains were retained to be distributed to others.

On 24 July, *Gurupurnima* day, the Swamiji as usual went to the river in the morning for his bath. What caught our attention was Shankara, the little temple elephant, who was swaying his tiny trunk and head from side to side and keeping time with his feet, as he had been taught to do, while *arati* was being performed to the Swamiji. Apparently Shankara was in a happy mood and knew that he would also be taken to the river to be bathed and then draped in colourful clothes. The senior Swamiji was very fond of Shankara and always spoke to him in endearing terms after ensuring that he had been fed with the choicest fruits. Shankara naturally knew that he was the centre of attraction and enjoyed the full love and care of the Swamiji. The youngest Swamiji came to the river with the senior Swamiji and returned with the junior or middle Swamiji. I had got some good pictures of the senior and junior Swamijis at Sandur and hoped to get one of the junior-most at some appropriate time.

The three Swamijis bathed at three separate spots. I could watch from a distance the senior Swamiji bathing next to an improvised hut, from which he emerged clean shaven. He then stepped into the shallow waters of the river, went knee-deep before slowly bending forward to plant his two hands on the sand-bed and then bend his knees to be on all fours, so that he could proceed to lie flat in water, fully stretched, with only his head raised from time to time to be scrubbed with both his hands with a material which looked like mud powder or finely powdered clay. He did not use anything else to clean his body or allow anybody to touch him even after he had finished his bath and replaced the wet clothes with dry ones — a one piece saffron cloth made of *khadi*. He then came on to the bank of the river and walked back to the venue of the *Vyasa pooja*. The other two Swamijis also followed a little later in a procession led by Shankara carrying a red um-

brella and looking dark and clean after his river bath. Shankara knew that bath time was the best time. He had also enjoyed himself thoroughly lying alternatively on both sides in the shallow waters of the softly flowing river. He was now draped in red to resume his ritualistic duties which also he seemed to enjoy as much as the crowd surrounding him and the Swamiji.

Kurnool

25 August 1983

It was about 4.00 p.m. when we reached Kurnool from Sandur. The Swamiji was in an open enclosure listening to *Bhagawat parayana*. I did *pranam* to him and placed before him the first copy of my book 'Sunlight & Shadows', published by Victor Gollancz (London), which had just been released. The Swamiji asked Rajagopal to pick up the book, bring it close to him and turn the pages, from right to left and then from left to right, until he had seen every picture including that of the Indian Great horned owl carrying a field mouse in its mouth. When he came to the picture of the tiger sitting half-submerged in a small water pool, he looked up and smiled at me and asked with a childlike expression whether it was not the same as the one on the cover page of the book. I nodded affirmatively with folded hands as his smile of recognition of that photograph was so heartwarming. I felt that I had received my full reward and the photographs their highest recognition. When some devotees dumped their offerings rather carelessly on my book, the Swamiji immediately had the book placed close to him where it would be quite safe. The Swamiji's care and concern for the book could only be compared to his natural sensitivity to flowers and things which he considered beautiful.

I then placed before the Swamiji the *vighraha* of Kumaraswamy, beautifully carved in stone by my sculptor-friend Vadiraj, who had accompanied me to Kurnool for the Swamiji's *darshan*. Swamiji's face lit up as he had a close look at this inspired piece of art, about two feet *vighraha* of Kartikeya or Kumaraswamy standing with a *velu* or spear, similar to the full-size one at the ancient Kumaraswamy temple, near Sandur, worshiped as *Deva Senapati*, the Commander-in-Chief of the divine forces. The Swamiji conveyed his joy and satisfaction by warmly blessing Vadiraj. He then had the *vighraha* or statue placed facing the scholar who was reciting *Bhagavata*. There could not have been a more traditional or appropriate setting for such a personally important occasion when I wanted to place before the Swamiji this *vighraha* before keeping it in my pooja room at Shivapur for worship. Incidentally, the Swamiji hails from Swamimalai and Kumaraswamy is his family deity from his earliest days. Later in the evening the Swamiji had the *vighraha* placed in his room, where he sat looking at the photographs in my book till late in the night. The Swamiji himself was interested in photography in his earlier days. This, I believe, is mentioned in the life of Swamiji (*Divyacharitam*) written in Tamil by Shyamamurtisastry, the younger brother of the Swamiji. Before leaving I gave a copy of my book to the junior Swamiji, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi, who recollected seeing some lions in the Gir Sanctuary in Gujarat and said that animal reaction depends very much on our own. I also gave a copy to the junior-most Swamiji, Shri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswathi, who graciously agreed that I could photograph him the next morning at 8.00 a.m.

I got up at 4.30 a.m. in order to leave Cementnagar at 5.30 a.m. and reach Kurnool by about 6.30 a.m. As I sat sipping tea in the verandah of the well-located guest house, I could hear *Allah oh Akbar* floating across the sky from the factory residential area. Even the birds had not woken up from their night's slumber. The smoke from the factory chimneys seemed strangely suspended and frozen in the neon lights in the morning stillness. How still was the morning breeze could be seen in the smoke which was unmoving and looked like an etching against the purple sky which was yet to be stirred by the morning sun. My mind was all on the photograph of the boy-Swamiji which I was to take. I was keen to make best use of this opportunity and take a good picture of the young Swamiji before his innocence took some other form, in course of time, more difficult for the lens to record.

When we reached Kurnool it was 7.00 a.m. The senior Swamiji had gone for his bath. The young Swamiji had also gone to the river and was expected to return by 8.00 a.m. He returned exactly on time, wearing his saffron clothes, *rudrakshamala*, and carrying the *danda* which Shankaracharyas are always supposed to carry. He went to his hut when I went close to him and did *pranam*. I saw that his feet were still wet and the river water was still shining on his bare legs. To put him completely at ease, I requested him to forget about me and carry on with his normal conversation with the devotees who had also trickled into the front enclosure of the hut along with me. There was not much space but I had put the 150 mm lens on my camera (a lens in whose performance I have great faith) and had to push myself into a corner to get enough of the Swamiji in the picture. There was just sufficient light near the wooden pole of the verandah for me to give an exposure of f4 and 1/250th of a second. The Swamiji was standing next to

this pole and talking but a little self-consciously. Initially I clicked because I wanted the Swamiji to get used to the idea of my clicking and forget all about me. It is because the clock ticks away constantly that the mind decides not to pay any attention to it. I hoped something like that would happen even during the brief moments that I was allowed to take pictures of this youngest occupant of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha. It was his innate joy and innocence that I wanted to capture in the tender morning light. I clicked 12 times and I knew that on one or two occasions the Swamiji had an unself-conscious look and his mind was free of me and my camera. I could see the catchlight in his eyes, which I knew were in good focus, though it is the *rudrakshamala* round his neck that I had focussed on for the sake of speed and convenience. In one picture he was clutching his clothes and looked every inch a boy. In one other picture he had a very relaxed smile on his face which his mother would be pleased to see (19 & 20). When I told the Swamiji that I had finished the roll and was most grateful for the opportunity, he nodded with a smile.

A little later the young Swamiji went for his Sanskrit lessons. We were told that the senior Swamiji himself, along with the junior Swamiji and the pundits, was supervising the lessons and was even teaching him personally. I was allowed to sit in the adjoining room where I could clearly overhear stanzas from *Raghuvamsha* (which I had learnt in my college days) being chanted by the young Swamiji in the presence of the senior Swamiji, who would softly intervene whenever it was absolutely necessary and even ask some questions to test the boy's comprehension. After the lessons were over, I was asked to come into the room and allowed to perform the ritual of *bhiksha*. I was to put some grain and fruits in a shallow basket in front of the Swamijis and request them to accept the offering as *bhiksha*. To me it was an opportunity to see all the three Swamijis together. How I wish I could

have photographed them together, but I thought it may not be appropriate for me to make such a request on so formal an occasion, knowing full well the senior Swamiji's general reluctance to be photographed. The junior-most Swamiji continued to sit by the side of the senior Swamiji while Annadurai Iyengar and I were telling him about our Sanskrit *Pathashala* near Hospet. I then left for Sandur after partaking of *prasad*. A basketful of dry fruits were given to me to be taken home for all other members of the family.

Sandur

16 October 1983

It was Vijayadashami. In the temple area at Shivapur, I planted an *oudumbara* tree (*Ficus glomerata*), opposite to the coconut sapling from Belvantara which had its own story to tell. My intuition said that close to the *oudumbara* tree and opposite the Siddharudhaswamy temple at Shivapur, a new temple should be built and a Dattatreya *murti* installed with the Paramacharya's picture on the wall overseeing everything. (Subsequently in 1991 this feeling took form in a new temple which we visit every morning). The day when the Swamiji walked into Shivapur and went straight to the Siddharudha temple and touched the *padukas* with his spiritual staff in front of the *Shivalinga*, was still fresh in my mind and would always remain so.



I left Sandur at 7.30 a.m. and reached Kurnool at 11.00 a.m. to offer *banni* to the Swamiji, as I had done for the last five years. The Swamiji was sitting at one end of a room. He had bent forward completely, resting his head on his two hands crossed on the floor for support. I had never seen him in such an unusual posture before. He was listening intently to something which was being read out to him by a person who had written a manuscript on *yoga*. He had read some five chapters when they told the Swamiji that I had come to offer *banni*. He sat up and took a big handful of the *banni* leaves, spontaneously rubbed his head and eyes with it, and put it back in the tray in front of him, for me to take back home. But the experience went home straight, sanctifying and conveying much more than the gestures. These things have the power to create an atmosphere which is whole-hearted and wholesome.

I was then permitted to sit close and listen to the reading of the manuscript on *yoga*. I could follow it because it was in English with a few Sanskrit quotations from the *Upanishads* and texts on *Yoga* and *Kundalini*. The author who was obviously a *sadhaka* had put down clearly his understanding of the process of joining our limited consciousness with the limitless consciousness, the union of Parvati and Shiva through a proper experience of *Shakti*, the primeval source of energy which we often fail to fully realise. He talked of symptoms to know the state in which one is and how to ascend the ladder of subtle energy in balance and equilibrium.

After I had listened to these readings for one full hour, the Swamiji gave me permission to leave and take with me the Kumaraswamy *vigraha* which had been close to the Swamiji for so many days, ever since I had brought it to him on 25 August 1983. The Swamiji had bestowed great personal

attention on the *vighraha* and had put a garland of hard seeds suitable for *japa*. There was also a garland of sandalwood flakes, and another garland and cap made of jute. There was honey also on the *murti*. According to Annadurai Iyengar and some others, somebody had brought a bottle of honey a few days ago and kept it in front of the Swamiji; when the bottle opened the honey squirted out like a jet, falling on the Swamiji, the *murti* and the wall behind. Wittingly or unwittingly honey had been sprinkled on the *vighraha* of Kumaraswamy which was looking soft and serene. The rough-hewn jute cap was looking like a spiritual crown, like the crown of thorns that Jesus had to wear.

We drove back to Sandur with the *vighraha* of Kumaraswamy (21) and put it in my *pooja* room where it was always intended to be. Kumaraswamy was in the form of a resplendent *Kumara* with a captivating smile. Vadiraj had created it after *darshan* of the *murti* at the ancient temple of Kumaraswamy near Sandur. To add to it, this one was filled with the loving grace of the Swamiji. Symbols were such powerful media of communication and for seeing oneself at our deepest and best. The readings on *yoga* also spoke of God being but a reflection of our innermost self. When we pray to him, we try to tune our smaller self to the universal self and try to become one with it. A new consciousness is born which transforms one's whole life and angle of vision, and ushers in a new plateau of total experience and balance.

For his halts during his extensive *padayatras*, the Paramacharya showed a marked preference for small remote villages in the countryside, where the real India lived and devotion helped to sustain the everyday life of the poor and the not so poor. The previous day was *Sankranti* when *til-gul* (gingili and jaggery) are exchanged in auspicious greetings and *poojas* are performed. *Til-gul* is supposed to be very healthy in this season. Sugarcane, sweets and new clothes are closely associated with this festival.

The Paramacharya along with the junior and junior-most Swamijis happened to be camping at a small village near Pileru in Andhra Pradesh. I decided to go for their *darshan* on the day after *Sankranti* accompanied by my eldest son, Ajai. The thought crossed my mind of ascertaining whether my sister Nirmala and brother-in-law, R.V. Dhaiber, would also like to come. Just then my brother-in-law and sister said, synchronistically, that they would also like to come for the Swamiji's *darshan*. We journeyed from Sandur to Pileru by road via Bellary, Kadari and Madanapalli, in the dry and rocky terrain of Bellary and Anantapur districts, an area my ancestors, who moved on horseback, knew very well even in the 18th century because of their territorial stake in Sandur and Gooty. This area gets inhospitably hot in summer but January is cool and the journey to Pileru was pleasant. When we reached the small village where the three Swamijis were camping, we saw a small crowd of devotees and heard *Vedic* chanting. The Swamijis were attending to the *pradosh pooja* in the compound of a school building, where there were some cows decked with flowers and *kumkum*, as the day after *Sankranti* or *Pongal* was *Cow-Pongal* when cows were worshiped by way of thanksgiving. I gave the younger two Swamijis four photographs I had taken earlier of the junior-most Swamiji who was silently pleased to

see them but was not very sure how much open and enthusiastic interest it would be proper for him to exhibit on an occasion like this. The junior Swamiji smiled and joked with the youngest in order to create the right atmosphere of permissible informality.

The senior-most Swamiji was in a different room and at his spontaneous best. I had only a plastic container containing *til-gul* which I placed before him. The Swamiji had the container pulled closer to him and started eating from it avidly like a child. He put his hand into the container several times to pick up *til-gul* which he put in his mouth with obvious relish, tilting his head back a little each time. This was the first time I had seen the Swamiji eat anything placed before him and not just touch it ritualistically. I stood there folding my hands in gratefulness and a sense of personal satisfaction. The Swamiji then picked up a *ladoo* or ball of sweet and gave it to Ajai. When Ajai hesitated to eat the *ladoo* in his presence, the Swamiji picked up a few particles of *til-gul* from the plastic container (from which the Swamiji himself had eaten earlier) and asked Ajai to eat it then and there which, of course, he now did without any hesitation, feeling doubly blessed and happy that the Swamiji had shown so much personal care and consideration for him. I could see it made a tremendous impact on Ajai's mind and the headache from which he was suffering seemed to vanish in the exhilaration of such touching blessedness. When we returned to Pileru for the night, the moon was high up in the sky and we ate on the terrace bathed in silvery light, when my brother-in-law, R.V. Dhaiber, came out with a spontaneous couplet in Marathi, his mother tongue, in which he had compared his *darshan* of the Paramacharya to the "sparkling moonlight of happiness".

We reached Kanchi from Madras at about 3.45 p.m. with my wife and some close friends on 26 January which happened to be *Vasantha Panchami* (also called *Lalitha Panchami*), considered auspicious to make a traditional offering to goddess Kamakshi, the presiding deity of the ancient Kamakshi temple. A ceremonial sari and an ornament we had brought for Kamakshi was first shown to the Swamiji before being placed on the *utsav murti* of the goddess Kamakshi, a beautiful *vighraha* made of *panchaloha* or the traditional alloy of five metals. (The *utsav murti* of Kamakshi is flanked by two other female *vighrahas*, *Mantrini* and *Dandini*, Minister and Commander-in-chief, and is taken in procession in the place of the main *vighraha* sculptured in stone, which cannot be moved out of the temple).

The Swamiji then gave as *prasad*, three handfuls of *til-gul* (which we had brought following *Sankranti*) for us to take home for the children and the rest of the family. The whole thing was very informal and obviously had the blessings of the Swamiji. We dress and decorate the deities for our own aesthetic satisfaction and joy. The same morning the Swamiji had himself put a copper and gold *kavacha* or covering on the goddess Annapoorna. It indicated that what we had done later in the day for the *utsav murti* of Kamakshi was most appropriate.

I took this opportunity to inform the Swamiji that the *jathra* or the annual car festival of the Eshwaraswamy temple, near Shivapur at Sandur, will take place on the 5th of February, when a new *ratha* or chariot, carved in the temple premises by a guild or group of traditional craftsmen, would be used for the first time for the procession in which the decorated chariot with the *utsav murti* was pulled and the people of Sandur participated with enthusiasm and fervour. Such festivals have a healthy effect on the

individual and collective psyche of the people and was a happy gregarious occasion in which men, women and children participated with joy and got an opportunity to step out of the humdrum of their daily routine existence. The popularity of such festivals was on the increase and only partly due to the increasing population.

Kanchi

16 June 1985

We reached Madras on 16th morning and proceeded to Kanchi in the afternoon with Vasundhara, Anuradha and Annadurai Iyengar whose wife was seriously ill. Anuradha was to receive laser treatment for her eye on the following day at the Shankar Netralaya, which had had the rare privilege of surgically attending to one of Swamiji's eyes for cataract. The Swamiji raised his right hand in blessing and proceeded to comment on my book, 'Sunlight & Shadows', which he was obviously reading from time to time. He recollected what I had written in the book about my preference for black-and-white photography, though Anuradha had joined me on one of my photographic trips to a wildlife sanctuary with a 35 mm. colour camera. The sanctuary was Bandhavgad in Madhya Pradesh where I had managed to get some good black-and-white tiger photographs. It now all came back to me. But what struck me most was how the Swamiji had paid such close attention to my book and remembered details so clearly and used them so effectively to divert Anuradha's attention to pleasanter memories on the eve of her eye treatment. To me his photographic interest and human consideration was amazing, to say the least. The Swamiji then suddenly thought of Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda (my wife's great-grandfather) and asked us

whether we remembered the incident when, during the visit of King George V to India, Sayajirao, the then Maharaja of Baroda, had not saluted him and had turned his back on him at the Delhi durbar. We had heard of this incident which obviously had made a tremendous patriotic impression on the country at that time.

The Swamiji then made enquiries about my three sons, Ajai, Sujai and Kartik. I also conveyed to the Swamiji my father's *pranams* and that he was perfectly all right after his major operation. Before returning to Madras we had *darshan* of Kamakshi Devi and saw that the *utsav murti* was still wearing the necklace we had brought for her on a previous occasion, as a token of our *seva*. I also wanted to send to Kanchi a couple of high-yielding crossbred cows from my dairy at Sandur, as a gift which would be traditional and modern. But I always remember what the Swamiji once said that the *sadhaka* must always be humble and not make or think much about such acts.

Kanchi

25 October 1985

Gifts are often a part of tradition and have to be received in the spirit in which they are given. On 25 October 1985, a couple of days after Vijayadashami, I had gone to Kanchi to offer *banni* to the Swamiji, which he always received appreciatively and spontaneously. This time before I departed, a red shawl with a jari border was brought and given to me in the presence of the Swamiji and after he had symbolically touched it. It was this shawl which I used when, at the instance of my father, for the first time, I had to hoist the vermilion temple flag on the main Kartikeya temple at

Sandur during the *Mahayatra* on the 27 November 1985, watched by thousands of devotees and pilgrims who had come from far and wide to participate in this festival which is celebrated twice in every five years. Tradition must always maintain the live touch. I could not have worn a more appropriate apparel for the occasion than the one touched by the Swamiji.

Kanchi

17 October 1986

As usual, after Vijayadashami (12 October), we went to Kanchi via Madras on 17 October, accompanied by Anuradha who was about to graduate from the Women's Christian College, Madras. We reached Kanchi at about 4.30 p.m. The Swamiji was in a very relaxed mood. I conveyed to him that the orange-coloured saree given to Anuradha, when she had come from college for his *darshan* a few weeks ago, was beautiful and was worn by her on Vijayadashami. I also told him that Anuradha would like to do her post-graduate studies after finishing college at Madras. (Anuradha did her post-graduation in 1989 by completing her Master of Arts in Social Work, with specialisation in Medical and Psychiatric Social Work, at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay.) The Swamiji blessed us and was so very considerate that when he saw us sitting a little outside the room in the sun, he beckoned us to come closer and sit inside the room. He then examined closely the *banni* or *shami* leaves I had brought from Sandur and with child-like exuberance picked up a palm full of these leaves and rubbed them to his head and chest before putting them back in the basket in which we had carried them. After some time, when we sought his permission to go, the Swamiji again picked up some *banni* leaves and put them along with a packet



of *khajur* or dates for us to take home. It was such a sweet gift given with so much care and affection that one could not ask for anything more. Love and compassion was a state of mind which was not the result of thought or calculation. Therefore, gestures arising out of such a state were the gift of Gods and grace in its most spontaneous form. To sit before the Swamiji was itself a state of indescribable satisfaction and fullness, which was also a state of stillness, devoid of all negative thoughts and emotions.

Kanchi

30 November 1986

It was a Sunday and Anuradha could also come with us to Kanchi from her college in Madras. It was about 11.45 a.m. when we reached Kanchi. There was a long row of devotees wanting to have *darshan* and so we waited, at a distance, at a quieter spot where we were told the Swamiji would come after some time. When the Swamiji came we did *arati* and placed before him a tray of fruits and a piece of *ahimsa* silk which Anuradha had thoughtfully got for him from Madras. The Swamiji felt the cloth knowingly and placed it close to him to indicate that he liked it and would use it. I had to mention to the Swamiji, amongst other things, that though I myself had no idea of contesting an election, the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, had himself asked me to contest a by-election to Parliament, from Raichur in north Karnataka. The Swamiji was interested in all that happened to us, and so it was our duty to mention everything to him though, one often felt, he knew everything, including the thoughts that pass through our mind, and our mentioning was only a matter of form or convention. After I had finished what I had to say, the Swamiji opened a packet of sugar candy and poured

it into a plate before him with two apples. This was *prasad* with a personal touch which made all the difference. Then on behalf of the Kanchi Mutt, my wife and I were presented with a golden stole and a brown shawl respectively. The junior-most Swamiji was also present on the occasion. (I represented Raichur in Parliament from 1986 to 1989).

Kanchi

15 July 1987

On reaching Kanchi from Madras, I was content to feel the peace of the place and the Swamiji's presence. He had come out of his small room and was sitting in the verandah behind a bamboo screen. I then mentioned, as is customary, the names of the persons who had accompanied me from Sandur which included Nazim. The Swamiji asked whether Nazim was a Muslim. When I answered in the affirmative, the Swamiji lifted his right hand and made a pleasant gesture of blessing everybody.

The Swamiji asked me about the Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha function at Sandur. He was interested in every detail including the names of the pundits and the number of people who had attended it. Finally, before departing, I told the Swamiji that from Kanchi I proposed to go via Arcot and Arni to Gingee, an ancient fort which figured prominently in the illustrated history book I was writing about my ancestor, Murarirao Ghorpade who, as the Swamiji himself emphasised, ruled from Gooty for many years. My narration was spread over a period of a hundred years from Gingee in the last quarter of the 17th-Century to Gooty in the last quarter of the 18th-Century. Geographically it was spread over the present day states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. (My book: "The Grand Re-

istance" was published by Ravi Dayal Publishers, Delhi, in 1992).

At this point of time the junior-most Swamiji came and was trying to tell something to the Paramacharya, close to his ears and with the right hand placed in front of his own mouth out of customary respect. I do not think the Swami took in what he was saying but told him something instead. I was asked to come closer. A green coconut was brought and, after the Paramacharya had touched it, the young Swamiji was asked to give it to me which he did with traditional grace, followed by an embroidered pink shawl which was put on me in the Swamiji's presence. (These two symbols of the Swamiji's affectionate grace and blessings are placed in my *pooja* room at Shivapur). I then proceeded to Gingee which Balu correctly pronounced as Senji, the name of the guardian goddess on the fort, worshiped to this day.

Kanchi

4 October 1987

The 2nd of October was Gandhi Jayanti and also Vijayadashami, after which I went to Madras and Kanchi on Sunday the 4th to offer *shami* or *banni* leaves to the Swamiji as was my annual practice. On reaching Kanchi I put the *bann*: I had brought from Sandur in a broad circular tray or basket along with a piece of *khadi* cloth and some fruits and wanted to place it before the Swamiji who was inside his little room with a crowd waiting for him at the doorway. Pawar, who was a security guard from Sandur who had earned an excellent name for his devoted service to the Swamiji, conveyed to the Swamiji that we had arrived. It was as though the Swamiji was expecting it, for we were sent for immediately and taken inside the room. I placed

before the Swamiji the *banni* basket and did *arati*. The Swamiji was in a very talkative mood and was speaking fluently in Kannada, so that I could follow directly without any interpreter. After the Swamiji asked me some details about my journey from Sandur to Bangalore, Madras and Kanchi, I informed him that the room at Murgod, where the Balachidambara *vigraha* had been installed had to be renovated or rebuilt and a *kalasha* would have to be put at the apex, after it had been blessed by the Swamiji, who gave a benign smile of approval. As I had nothing more to say or report, I sat listening to the Swamiji who was recollecting so many past events.

The conversation then veered to *jyotishya* or astrology and the predictability of a person's life span. I made bold to ask the Swamiji whether each person's life was limited to a certain number of breaths. The Swamiji said that this did not apply to *akala mruthyu* or sudden untimely death and, even otherwise, normal life depended on the length and quality of breathing. He pointed out that some *yogis* could deliberately slow down their breathing by *darshana* or spiritual mindfulness while devotees could achieve the same result by *bhakti* or placing one's mind on God. The Swamiji confirmed that during meditation the breath slows down considerably.

Kanchi

27 October 1988

The previous day my wife and I reached Madras from Bangalore accompanied by Ajai, Kartik and Anuradha, in order to go to Kanchi the next day, once again to offer *banni* after Vijayadashami (22nd). At Pumpuhar in Madras we could get a traditional Thanjavur painting of Gajalakshmi which now adorns the entrance to our living room at Shivapur. We also saw some

traditional bronzes made by master craftsmen on the lines of the Chola masterpieces of the 11th century and the *Shilpa Shastras*, at Swamimalai in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, for the Handicrafts Development Corporation and others. These beautiful bronzes in the hands of the truly talented and inspired craftsmen express the fullness of the human body and emotions, from simple joys to ecstasy, tenderness, tranquility and that primordial stillness from which all energies flow and into which they return. The Nataraja or the cosmic dance of Shiva is a masterpiece of spiritual poise, beauty and balance. One went to the Paramacharya to experience, to whatever extent possible, the same kind of dynamic tranquility and balance in our everyday lives. As I have recorded in my diary, "one goes to the Swamiji again and again for peace and more peace and there is an element of surrender to the will of God — the deeper, integrating, compassionate experience in which problems disappear and peace remains".

We reached Kancheepuram from Madras on the morning of 27 October at 9.30 a.m. On the way we had stopped at a wayside restaurant which served paper-thin *dosas*, *idlis*, *wadas* and different kinds of *chutney* and, of course, excellent coffee to be taken in the South Indian style, in a brass tumbler placed in a wider and shallower container which is used to cool the coffee to the desired temperature.

We had gone to Kanchi to offer *banni* to the Swamiji after Vijaydashami. We also had some family events to mention to the Swamiji such as the recent birth of our granddaughter (Supriya) on 15 October; Kartik was to get married at Baroda on 5 December and Anuradha after she finishes her final M.A. examination. The Swamiji wanted to know at what place Anuradha would get married. I told him that it would be at Shivapur, Sandur, quite close to the temples next to my house which the Swamiji had visited during his stay at Sandur. It was here I wanted to install that beautiful

*vighraha* of Dattatreya, presently with the Swamiji, delicately carved by the sculptor Vadiraj. Vadiraj was also doing a big stone Nataraja and Shivakami or Parvati (24-25) which would take a couple of years to complete. It would be quite fascinating to see the whole process of carving, which was to be done in the temple area itself by Vadiraj and his assistants. The Eshwaraswamy temple across the road also had a new look and a fresh spiritual atmosphere after the Swamiji's stay there more than a decade ago.

The Swamiji suddenly remembered a philosophical piece I had written in those days on the 'Human Quest and Experience' (Annexure). He wanted to know whether I still had it with me and whether I could send him a few copies. I said I could do so and remembered how I had written that piece in those days when some questions I had in my mind had sorted themselves out after meeting with the Swamiji. The Swamiji then picked up a handful of *shami* leaves from the basket and placed them on his own head; he picked up another handful of *shami* leaves and placed them gently in my hands. It is the complete absorption in the moment that one felt and deeply experienced in his presence that was so holy and transforming. It lifted one to areas of consciousness which would be normally out of one's reach. That is why it was called *darshana* or revelation.

Kanchi

14 January 1989

My wife and I, accompanied by my son Kartik and Ambika who were recently married, and Anuradha and Viresh who were recently engaged, reached Kanchi on the morning of *Sankranti* or *Pongal*, when *arati* to the God was about to be performed by the junior-most Swamiji in the presence

of the senior-most Swamiji, the Paramacharya. The Swamiji sent for us at about 11.30 a.m. to his room where our *vighraha* of Dattatreya was kept and worshiped everyday. The Swamiji asked us all to sit down in his presence and when I told him the happy news, he spontaneously took out three carcamom garlands he was wearing and asked Balu to put one on Viresh and one on Kartik who gave the third one to Ambika to wear. It was Swamiji's personal blessing apart from the nine-yard sarees and shawls given on behalf of the Kanchi Mutt. I made bold to ask the Swamiji to suggest a date for performing Anuradha's marriage at Sandur. The Swamiji put his right hand on his chest as a gesture of assurance and promise that a suitable date would be suggested for the auspicious occasion and all will be well.

Kanchi

25 May 1989

The President and Vice-President of India, R.Venkataraman and Shanker Daval Sharma, respectively, had visited Kanchi yesterday for Swamiji's *darshan*. When I reached Kanchi this morning at 9.00 a.m., all was quiet and the Swamiji was still doing *japa* or meditation. I was called after half an hour during which time we could get some *tulasi* leaves, flowers and a piece of ocher-coloured cloth to be placed before the Swamiji in the traditional manner along with a hundred copies of my booklet: "The Human Quest and Experience", (Annexure), which the Swamiji had wanted and which was written a decade ago at Sandur but printed recently, with my favourite photograph of Swamiji taken at Sandur in 1978, on the banks of the Narihalla, at a wonderful moment when he had just finished his *japa*.

Swamiji asked me to sit facing him, in the passage where he was seated,

with devotees coming in a regular stream from one side. The Swamiji then opened the packet containing my booklets and started distributing them to such of the devotees who were educated and standing before him for his blessings. The Swamiji called for those who were graduates and double graduates to come and receive the booklet from his own hands. The Swamiji distributed selectively about twenty-five of the booklets in a matter of an hour or so. He would also tell each of them to translate its contents into Tamil and send the translations to him. He mentioned to Annadurai Iyengar that the idea of asking them to translate it was to ensure that they read it carefully, understood fully its import, in order to impart it to others. I was quite moved by the consideration and attention he showered on the booklets, and it indicated to me, in no uncertain terms, that the Swamiji fully approved of what I had written. It was the greatest assurance that I need have no more doubts in this regard and could concentrate on fully living up to these values every moment of my life, with the supreme satisfaction and certainty of his grace and guidance. This is the function of the *guru* and this is why the *guru-shishya parampara* is so very important to life and spiritual development in this ancient land. Before leaving he gave me a sweet-lime fruit with his own hands and asked Annadurai Iyengar to drape me with a sober- rust-gold shawl and tell me that this was for Shankara Jayanti. I also conveyed to the Swamiji that the date for Anuradha's wedding had been fixed on 10 November, as suggested by him, and that the whole family was happy and grateful, including my aged parents who had also sent their respects to the Swamiji.



My wife and I with Anuradha and Annadurai Iyengar reached Kanchi at about 4.30 p.m. We had to wait patiently till about 5.30 p.m., before the door of Swamiji's little room opened and we could pay our respects and place before him a plate full of *shami* leaves, along with the invitation cards of Anuradha's wedding on 10 November. The Swamiji first took the *shami* leaves, touched his head and heart and gave each one of us a handful of those hallowed leaves himself in a personal gesture of reciprocity and love. This was the whole idea behind this beautiful custom and the Swamiji, as usual, paid full attention to it, appreciating its simplicity and spirit. I carefully tied in my handkerchief my share of the leaves the swamiji gave me, so that I could later transfer it to a small box to be kept in my *pooja* room. The Swamiji once again asked what these leaves were called in Karnataka and elsewhere, and whether we were aware that they were referred to as *sona* in Marathi, which was derived from the Sanskrit word *suvarna* or gold. The Swamiji then picked up a couple of Anuradha's marriage invitation cards, and noticed that one was in English and the other in Kannada and not in Marathi. He then got a big coconut brought from his room and placed it carefully in our hands and said that we should worship this coconut during the wedding and give it to Anuradha who could keep it in her *pooja* room in her new home. This coconut symbolised his care and concern for Anuradha and the family. It was one more of his inimitable gestures which had brought so much of peace and fulfillment in our lives. I felt happy for Anuradha who always had great faith in the Swamiji who had also evinced great concern for Anuradha. Vasundhara, my wife, always reminded Swamiji of the great Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda, and this time of his *Dewan* Sir T. Madhavrao who was from Thanjavur. The Swamiji was

aware that the old rulers of Thanjavur were Bhonsles connected with Shivaji and thus closely related to the Ghorpades. Thanjavur and Kanchi had old historical links being in the same region of the present Tamil Nadu.

We were with the Swamiji for about an hour and also met the other two Swamijis before departing from Kanchi. The junior-most Swamiji (Shri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswathi) was growing up towards manhood. He no longer had that soft and boyish look which are recorded in the photographs I had taken of him at Kurnool. He had the reputation of being a very good student. Annadurai Iyengar recollected how he had mastered the portions from the *Rigveda* in record time, when he was a student of a Sanskrit *Pathashala*, before he had been chosen to be initiated at Kanchi. The young Swamiji was also in a talkative mood and, in a voice which was more mature, he recalled how he had been interviewed by the senior Swamiji, before being chosen for initiation. He had had several meetings with the Swamiji including one at Mahaboobnagar sitting under a neem tree. He said that he had felt greatly drawn to the Swamiji like the leaves that drop from the tree and get drawn to the trunk of the tree. The Swamiji had held him in his gaze after asking a number of questions earlier, including whether he knew the meaning of *vajra mula* (square root) mentioned in *Leelavati Ganitam*. Before leaving Kanchi we also had the satisfaction of having the *darshan* of the *Dattatreya vighraha* which was still with the senior Swamiji in his room and which was to be eventually installed in the new temple at Shivapur, Sandur.

I reached Kodaikanal on the 2nd from Bangalore, a ten hour journey, for a brief holiday. But the same night at about 10.00 p.m., the D.I.G., Tamil Nadu, contacted me over the phone to convey a message from the D.I.G., Karnataka, that Veerendra Patil, the Chief Minister of Karnataka, wanted me to meet him the next morning at 8.30 a.m., as I was to be sworn in as Minister in a Cabinet reshuffle and the oath-taking ceremony was slated to take place at 9.30 a.m. on the 3rd. I told him that it was not fair to man or machine to immediately undertake another ten hour journey back to Bangalore and even if I left Kodaikanal at 4.00 a.m., I could meet Veerendra Patil only on 3rd afternoon and not in the morning, as I had no idea about my being sworn in as a Cabinet Minister. Accordingly, I met Veerendra Patil only at about 4.30 p.m., on the 3rd afternoon at the Raj Bhavan, when I was asked to accept the challenging portfolio of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, something close to my heart. The Chief Minister said that he first wanted to consult me before making the announcement and accompanied me to a separate swearing-in ceremony which was held for the purpose at the Raj Bhavan where the Governor administered the oath of office in Kannada. I remembered the words of the Paramacharya of Kanchi when I had gone for his *darshan* after having been elected to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly. The Swamiji had said that though I may not approach Veerendra Patil for anything, but if he calls me and asks me to take up a ministerial assignment, I should accept it to serve the people of Karnataka.

On 5th afternoon, after the day's work, I motored down to Kanchi, accompanied by my younger brother Shivarao and my sister-in-law, Yeshodhara, who had just returned from their sojourn in Europe. We stayed

overnight at Kanchi and returned to Bangalore the next day after a soul-satisfying *darshan* of the Swamiji in the morning. The Swamiji was sitting huddled on a mat in a narrow passage behind a door which was open to the devotees. A Supreme Court judge and his wife had gone in for *darshan* while we sat in the hall where a *homa* was being performed for the welfare of mankind. Annadurai Iyengar, who was familiar with such religious practices and the *Vedic* lore, was explaining the exact meaning of what was being chanted, while I could also follow generally the letter and the spirit of it, as Sanskrit was not totally unfamiliar to me as it had been my second language from the school at Sandur to graduation at Bangalore. The sonorous intonation of *Vedic* chanting was something very enchanting and captivating. The sounds seem to emerge from different levels of the human physical and spiritual personality.

When we were called in, the Swamiji beckoned to me to enter and sit near him, which I did in deference to his wishes. The Swamiji was obviously very happy in a paternal kind of way. Even before I could say anything he said : "You have accepted the Cabinet post at my instance (putting his right hand on his heart). Go ahead and serve the people", as if to emphasise that I had accepted ministerial responsibility to serve a higher purpose of service and not self-interest. All doubts in my mind vanished and I knew that I had done the right thing in accepting to join the Karnataka Cabinet with the portfolio of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, which would enable me to serve the people in the rural areas. The Swamiji then had a beautiful ocher-coloured silk and *jari* shawl brought for me, which he felt and fondled with his own hands for some time before having it put on my shoulders. With great affection he selected a sweet-lime fruit from the tray in front of him and dropped it in my hands, as if it was an extension of his own thought and feeling, an all-embracing care and consideration.

It was not just a mechanical ritualistic act of giving a fruit as *prasād* but something much more. It was as though he was giving a deep and sensitive part of him to be savoured and made part of me.

Kanchi

7 June 1990

I had a wonderful *darshan* of the Paramacharya or the senior Swamiji of Kanchi who had completed 96 years. They were celebrating his 97th birthday and thousands of devotees had come from everywhere to get a glimpse of him and his heart-warming smile. When I was called, the Swamiji was sitting cramped and huddled in the corner of his little room, near a rickety door which opened into a narrow passage where I was allowed to sit and pray in his close proximity and benign presence. I told the Swamiji that I had agreed to speak at the evening meeting to be presided over by Rajiv Gandhi who will be delivering the *Jayanti Address*, as the organisers had put it, and where Justice Ranganath Mishra who was a devotee would also be speaking. I also conveyed to the Swamiji the respects of my father who was about 81 years old. I placed before the Swamiji a tray of fruits with a green shawl and the sacred *bilva* leaves and did *arati*. The Swamiji wrapped the shawl round him and placed the *bilva* leaves on his head. He picked up a fruit and gave it to me. He then removed from his body some garlands made of cardamom and one *rudrakshamala* made of 54 *rudrakshas* which he was wearing and gave it to me. I said I would put the cardamom garlands on the Kumaraswamy *vighraha* which is in my *pooja* room and give one to my father to be kept in his *pooja* room. The *mala* of 54 *rudrakshas* could be used for doing *japa*, though I normally revolve the *mantra* mentally without any

*japamala*. Perhaps, it will be easier with this *mala* given by the Swamiji. He also gave me a lovely turquoise-blue shawl with his blessings.

In the evening at about 6.30 p.m., there was a meeting organised by the *Shri Shankara Bhakta Jana Sabha* and attended by Rajiv Gandhi. After Justice Mishra I was called upon to speak. I bowed to the photo of the Paramacharya on the dais and spoke what came from my heart for about ten minutes. I recalled how the Swamiji had visited Bellary district and Sandur in 1978 when I first had his *darshan* and was drawn to him, and how I had the good fortune to walk with the Swamiji in the district, especially when he visited the hilltop temple of Kumaraswamy near Sandur, which is a thousand years old and as sacrosanct and hoary as the six famous Subrahmanya temples in Tamil Nadu (Tiruttani, Tiruparamkundram, Tiruchendur, Palini, Swamymalai and Marudamalai).

During his *padayatra*, the Swamiji had visited a number of villages and stayed in temples including those at Hampi and Sandur. The experience had had a profound effect on me and many others who saw him and walked with him. It made us understand how Adi Shankara, several centuries ago, must have walked the length and breadth of India, bringing home the message of peace, compassion and the spiritual oneness of mankind. Later Vidyanaraswamy, another great spiritual master in the line of Shankaracharyas, had been the spiritual founder of the Vijayanagar empire in the 14th century, which was an inspiration to the whole country. In contemporary India our Swamiji, the Paramacharya, was doing very much the same to strengthen goodness in our heart. We were drawn towards him in such large numbers because he was a storehouse of peace and compassion and we felt it directly; it helped us immensely to strengthen the positive forces within us and realise our spiritual oneness which transcended man-made castes and creeds. The urge to serve mankind was born out of this spiritual

realisation and experience of oneness of humanity. It is only in this way we can say that the ideal of selfless service flows naturally from within and was not something that could be imposed from without. The *jeevan muktha* is one who is in touch with the very source of spiritual energy within, while taking part in the duties of the external world. Only such a realised person can fully follow Lord Krishna's injunction in the Gita to do one's duty without expectation of reward. A *jeevan muktha* is not affected by the rewards and rebuffs of the external world. His greatest reward is to be constantly in touch with his spiritual nature, his or her essential oneness, the meeting of Heaven and Earth where there is perfect harmony and balance. This is the greatest concept given by our country to the world. It is not just a concept, but can be a living experience as personified in the life of a true *jeevan muktha*, like the Paramacharya, who has been in our midst for nearly a century to guide our steps. Even after a thousand years the same light will continue to guide humanity in one way or the other. What made me happy was that when I spoke, the words flowed freely with a feeling that they had the blessings of the Swamiji. (Incidentally my "Human Quest and Experience" was distributed by the organisers to the participants and the press).

This meeting had been well organised in quite a spacious school quadrangle. Both Justice Ranganath Mishra and Rajiv Gandhi made good speeches appropriate to the occasion. Rajiv Gandhi was relaxed and had come dressed in a *lungi*, and when I said he must be comfortable in that dress, he replied "very. I do not have to wear any pins".

Kanchi

7 October 1990

Every year after Vijayadashami I have been offering *shami* or *banni* leaves to the Swamiji wherever he might be. This year was no exception, except that the Swamiji had not been keeping too well lately. For some unaccountable reason, tears welled up in me in his presence. When I looked up there were tears in his eyes as well and a couple of them rolled down his cheek into the unshaven lower portion of his face. His face was flushed and his body, which was hardly covered, did seem to quiver to shake off the emotion or feeling, whatever may have been its cause which was impossible to divine. I was not imagining things, because Annadurai Iyengar and some others who were with me had also noticed the tears and the quiver. The body and the heart has its own logic which the mind often fails to understand. That is why many things remain a mystery. After all I was in the presence of one of the greatest mystics of our times when tears decided to flow and sanctify the occasion. This time no words were exchanged but only looks and *banni* leaves which the Swamiji was so fond of.

Kanchi

22 December 1990

We had *darshan* of the Swamiji in the early hours of the morning, along with Viresh and Ajai who had come with me. The Swamiji had just a loincloth and an upper *kavi* cloth thrown casually across his body which looked bright as usual. He had stretched his legs and was leaning awkwardly against a backrest which had been put there after his recent illness. I said I had come to convey the good news that Anuradha had given birth



to a baby boy and both mother and child were doing well. The Swamiji raised his hand in blessing and put in my hand a block of sugar crystal as *prasad* but the personal care and feeling with which he gave it made all the difference. A traditional red shawl was also given which on returning to Bangalore I gave Anuradha for the baby, who could wear it when he was big enough to go to the temples and perform *poojas*, and who was later named Adarsha as suggested by me.

We then had *darshan* at the Kamakshi temple and met the other two Swamijis, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi and Shri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswathi. I said the senior Swamiji looked physically better but had a far-off look and we do not know how long he will choose to inhabit this earth. The junior Swamiji said the senior Swamiji will complete a hundred years as his body was strong (*vajrakaya*) and the mind immersed at a deeper level, unless he himself chooses otherwise. Lately he was mostly silent he said and did not say a word even to the Dalailama when he met him recently.

Tomorrow I was going to Ghati Subrahmanya, a temple with which one of the Rulers of Sandur was closely associated in the past, as depicted on one of the paintings on the inside of the temple walls. The temple authorities were very much alive to this traditional association and had arranged a special *seva* or religious service for me on the 23rd, which was the day of the car festival when devotees assemble in a spirit of thanksgiving and prayer. Ghati Subrahmanya is a beautiful temple tucked away in the hills near Doddaballapur, in Bangalore district, reminiscent of the low-lying hills of Sandur.

Kanchi

20 June 1991

We reached Kanchi from Bangalore by car last evening with Viresh, Anuradha and the little one, Adarsha. This morning at about 8.45 a.m. we were to have *darshan* of the Swamiji who was resting inside his little room. When the doors were opened for us we went in and did our *pranams* and *arati*. The Swamiji looked up and there was a glimmer of recognition in his eyes but he did not say anything. He was looking weak and had to be propped up a bit by Balu and one other person. After a little while the Swamiji stretched out one leg and with one hand picked up the garland of *bilva* leaves that were in the tray of fruits that I had placed before him. He put these *bilva* leaves on his head and gently rubbed the top of his head with these cool green leaves, which remained on his head like a crescent for some time and then slipped down by his side. I laid Adarsha on the floor in front of him, intently watched by the Swamiji. The Swamiji fixed his gaze on Adarsha several times, while I conveyed to the Swamiji all that I had to convey to him regarding the construction of a temple at Shivapur for Dattatreya and the Kalyanamantapa and Community Centre at Sandur, also named Adarsha, with universal sayings from all religions engraved on it to emphasise the oneness of God and the spiritual experience.

Kanchi

20 October 1991

Once again it was a day to offer *shami* or *banni* leaves to the Swamiji, as I had been doing regularly after Vijayadashami for the past so many years. I was happy to see the Swamiji's health better. He could sit up, listen

intently, take in everything that was said to him and even convey his reaction by thought word and gesture. Now that the stone temple built in traditional style was ready at Shivapur, the Swamiji said I could take the Dattatreya *vighraha* (23) which had long been with the Swamiji, and keep it in my *pooja* room for a while, before being installed in the new temple on the date suggested by the Swamiji, 1 December 1991. I also mentioned to the Swamiji that we were now thinking of getting Ajai, my eldest son, married to Suryaprabha from the Savant family of Kolhapur. The Swamiji's reaction was very heartening. He immediately raised his hand in blessing and clearly indicated that we could go ahead. It seemed as though he knew everything and that it was all for the good. That is the feeling I got. The Swamiji did not make any enquiries or ask any questions about Ajai or the girl, though I had with me the place, date and time of birth of both the boy and the girl. I came away with the distinct feeling that all will be well with both Ajai and Suryaprabha. Before we left, the Swamiji put a palmful of *banni* leaves in my two open hands along with a fruit. I was then draped in a deep-red shawl with an embroidered border which, I said, I will wear at the time of the Dattatreya installation ceremony at the new temple at Shivapur, built in memory of the Swamiji's visit to this place, and also on the occasion of the *Kartikeya Mahayatra* when I have to hoist the temple flag. What the Swamiji gave me cannot be assessed in words or articles or objects. It was a total feeling of being blessed fully.

Yesterday (4 December) was my 60th birthday according to the Indian calendar and today was Thursday, *Guruwara*, the day of the *guru*, and also of the Swamiji's star or *nakshatra* which was *Anuradha*. I was sitting out in the porch at Shivapur when Pawar, who had been with the Swamiji for several years, arrived from Kanchi with gifts from the Swamiji with his personal *ashirwad* which touched me to the core. In addition to sending me a garland which he had been wearing and a shawl, the Swamiji had very thoughtfully sent a laminated colour photograph (29) of himself wearing the temple robes from the famous Subrahmanya temple at Thiruchendur, with a yellow flat cloth case containing *tulasi* seeds on his head, looking like a spiritual chancellor presiding over the convocation of mankind. He had, of course, his *danda* or spiritual staff in his hand, and was caught unawares in the photograph taking a forward stride reminiscent of Gandhiji's *Dandi* march. Somebody must have taken this colourful photograph of the Swamiji on that special occasion and sent it to him, which the Swamiji felt would interest me as a photographer and a devotee. However, it took me completely by surprise and will always remain a thrilling experience. I put on the garland and the shawl sent by the Swamiji and, with this unique photograph of his, I went to the newly built temple at Shivapur for Dattatreya and the Swamiji whose photographs taken at Sandur were put on the wall for daily worship. I simply sat on the steps of the temple contemplating the manner in which this day had begun with the Swamiji's personal blessings (30) conveyed in this unique manner.

The Swamiji was talking and laughing more than usual, though he was physically weak and could not quite walk on his own. When I asked him about his health he smiled and waved his hands as if to say that there was nothing much one could say or do about his physical health. But his mind and speech were clear as ever and his spirit shone forth from him. The Swamiji was reclining on a chair, which was not his normal practice, with a red shawl draped round his shoulders, his feet outstretched and his toes sticking out even after they put on him the two shawls, red and green, that we had brought for him. The Swamiji asked us all to sit down in front of him, which I did in deference to his wish only to get up the next minute to tell him how the ceremonies and programmes at Sandur, both religious and public, from the 1st to the 7th of December, had filled everybody with great satisfaction. On the 1st was the consecration of the temples at Shivapur as directed by the Swamiji, and the 7th was my 60th birthday as per the calendar (not the Hindu calendar according to which it was on the 4th of December). The pundits who had come from Kanchi with Swamiji's instructions must have also reported to him what they did each day. The Vedic chanting was enthralling. The Swamiji wanted to know how many had come on the 7th. He was very happy to know that many people had come from Sandur and the surrounding villages and all ate together as one family on the grounds opposite Shivapur. I also told him about *Adarsha*, the *Community Centre and Kalyanamantapa*, and *Arogya*, the Community Health Centre for eye care, which were started as part of our welfare activities. Universal sayings from all religions including the words of the Swamiji had been inscribed on Adarsha. I also told him how extremely happy I was to receive the Swamiji's colour photograph sent on the 4th with Pawar from Kanchi,

along with a shawl which I wore for the *poojas* and the public function on 7 December. He smiled in satisfaction and in remembrance of what he had done and made me do from time to time. It is this personal aspect of his divinity which was so heartwarming.

I also told him that Ajai's marriage had been fixed for the 10th of February, as suggested by the Swamiji. Spontaneously he removed his red *jari* shawl which he had been wearing and which had come as *prasad* from Kashi Vishwanath, and asked Balu to put it on my shoulders. He also asked him to put round my neck the garland of *bilwa* leaves that he was wearing like a circular crown on his head and then gave me an apple with his own hands. This shawl which he was wearing and which was given to me on his own personal impulse was a precious gift which I would treasure in my *pooja* room and wear on auspicious occasions. As I came out of the *mutt* premises after a very satisfying *darshan*, I wrote in the visitors book which was mechanically brought to me by the person concerned: "This morning I have once again experienced the blessing of Swamiji's *darshan* and his unbounded love" which about summed up everything. His *darshan* was itself a blessing every time.

Kanchi

20 February 1992

Visited Kanchi with the family including Ajai and Suryaprabha who had been married at Sandur on 10 February at the *Adarsha Community Centre and Kalyanamantapa*. It was the first wedding to be performed at Adarsha. The Swamiji had already been fully informed of the details of Ajai's wedding by the persons from Kanchi who had attended it and had conveyed

Swamiji's blessings. The Swamiji was very happy and presented a red woolen *jani* shawl to Ajai and a saree to Suryaprabha. We had kept some fruits in front of the Swamiji who picked them up one by one and gave it to each member of our fairly large party. Then we visited the Kamakshi temple where I could photograph the civilised temple elephant blessing the married couple by placing its trunk gingerly on their heads. The elephant trunk is quite rough and heavy and Suryaprabha, I am sure, will long remember this experience, though she dutifully bowed her head before the temple elephant as was traditionally expected of her. Ajai, of course, was more circumspect in accepting this elephantine blessing, as he was more familiar with elephants in the wild.

Kanchi

8 October 1992

The Swamiji was looking bearded but bright after his recent illness. When I stepped into the small room where he was lying with his feet towards the door, I felt transformed by his heart-moving smile, which had lighted up his face and remained there for quite some time, as my eyes became moist with some inner emotion and spiritual feeling. I felt a kind of warmth which was both physical and of a subtler kind which seemed to course through my system filling every pore of my being. It was an immediate and altogether overwhelming experience of total well-being. If one could remain in that state all the time there would be no problems or struggle of any kind. But even a brief experience seemed to seep through one's being and take one a step forward from which there could be no return.

This was not the first time I was placing *banni* leaves before the Swamiji

after Vijayadashami. But this time the inner feeling was something more penetrating than ever before for some unfathomable reason. It was *Guruwara* or Thursday and my only prayer was that I should have the good fortune to have such a *darshan* every year after Vijayadashami, with the symbolic *banni* leaves which the Swamiji now picked up and placed on his lap. He played with them with his fingers for a while before carefully putting some in my hands, making sure that not a single leaf dropped down or missed its mark. There was so much concentrated love and affection flowing into these simple leaves from his whole being that they became at once the most precious gift I had received from the Swamiji from his own highly sensitive hands. It was a unique one-to-one interaction which one can never forget. My gratitude flowed in tears. When the moment of intensity had passed, I remembered that next year (1993), the Swamiji would be completing 99 years.

Kanchi

17 January 1993

After *darshan* I informed the Swamiji that we will soon be laying the foundation stone of the Sanskrit *Pathashala* on about a ten-acre plot on the outskirts of Hospet. It had been designed as a modern but simple complex to house the students and teachers of the *pathashala*, which was being run in rented premises since 1980. It would be appropriate to do so in the year of the centenary celebrations of the Paramacharya who had inspired this idea during his visit to Sandur and Bellary district in the late seventies. Balu took his face close to the ear of the Swamiji and tried to pour into it as much of this as clearly and distinctly as possible. The Swamiji took some



time to take in the full import of what was being conveyed to him; after a while there was a shy smile on his face which went straight to one's heart. He was in better health than when I last saw him and his captivating smile made up for everything. The Swamiji did not ask any questions but simply raised his hand in blessing. A green shawl was brought to him and kept on his lap. He felt it with his fingers for some time before it was given to me. What was more precious was the pomegranate fruit which he picked up from the basket next to him and dropped it in my grateful hands with great care and feeling. Subsequently, I ate this fruit with considerable relish and satisfaction.

Bangalore

21 February 1993

An article in the Hindu dated 19 February entitled: "Centenary of a Saint" was about the Paramacharya or *Periyawal*, the Senior Swamiji of Kanchi who would be commencing his hundredth year on the 7 May 1993 according to the Hindu calendar (date of birth: 20 May 1894). The article made some telling points. It said that the secret of the great appeal and attraction of this traditional and conservative saint was just the power of love. He was love embodied, compassionate, sympathetic and forgiving to the core. It also pointed out how the Acharya was the perfect fusion of simplicity and sublimity, a *jeevan mukta* (one liberated even while living in a body) with his omni-sympathy to be one with the common people. His intellect was razor-sharp but his heart was lotus-soft. His versatility, both in the spiritual and secular fields, arose from his perfect attunement with cosmic intelligence rather than from the ego-intellect. But the Swamiji himself made

light of all these weighty qualities and accomplishments attributed to him by so many of his admirers and devotees. However he could, at will, empty himself of the individual ego and totally give himself up to the grace of goddess mother Kamakshi and, in her *guru* manifestation, to Adi Shankaracharya. But the Swamiji himself never claimed to be a *sarvajnya* or all-knowing. He used to jocularly remark that if there is one subject he could claim to know very well, it was thanks to his capacity to lend his ears to the prayers and petition of all manner of people, almost round the clock and year after year. That is how, he said, he came to know thoroughly the endless afflictions of humanity. The devotees, of course, knew how much peace and stability the Swamiji's presence brought to their lives.

Kanchi

28 August 1993

I was content to have *darshan* of the Swamiji at 10.00 a.m. To me *darshan* was to spend a few quiet moments near the Swamiji, savouring silently the peace and compassion that surrounds him, filling our hearts to the brim. It was an internally elevating experience which did not require any external pomp or show. True spirituality is a state of mind and consciousness which is contagious in a positive way.

Vijayadashami was on the 24th at Sandur. In the evening, as was usual and customary, it gave me an opportunity to meet a large number of people from all walks of life and from all castes and creeds and exchange greetings with *banni* leaves, informally in the open ground or lawn in front of my house at Shivapur, Sandur. The mythology connected with the *shami* tree and the Pandavas is as old as the Mahabharata but the practice of exchanging leafy fresh greetings still survives at Sandur as in many other places.

We reached Kanchi on the 26th morning from Madras to offer *banni* to the Swamiji for the fifteenth year in succession. It was also his centenary year. Adarsha, my grandson was a little boy who sat on my lap and was watched intently by the Swamiji who gave him also some *banni* leaves, a green shawl and a red apple. Adarsha did not hesitate to plunge his little teeth into the lush red apple as soon as he got it from the Swamiji. He did not just nibble at it but ate the whole apple systematically. He was obviously hungry and happy.

I also met the junior-most Swamiji and conveyed to him that we were preparing to lay the foundation of the new building complex for our Sanskrit *Pathashala* near Hospet. He suggested that I should complete this formality on an appropriate date in November by placing slabs blessed by the senior Swamiji in three languages, Sanskrit, Kannada and English. I agreed to do so. He also agreed to give a letter to one Devasenapati, who was an outstanding craftsman in bronze, and who could be entrusted with the task of making a large size traditional Nataraja in *panchaloha* (26), similar to the Nataraja at Shivapur carved in stone by Vadiraj, the well-known sculptor.

This was a memorable day. At 11.00 a.m. the foundation of the Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha was laid, using slabs in Sanskrit, Kannada and English blessed by Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the Paramacharya of Kanchi (27). It was his wish when he came to Bellary district and visited Sandur, Hampi and Hospet in 1978, that a Sanskrit *Pathashala* for the study of the *Vedas* should be started here. Accordingly, in 1980 a Sanskrit *Pathashala* was started and named after Vidyaranyaswamy, under whose spiritual guidance there had been a resurgence of culture at Hampi and Vijayanagar several centuries ago (14 and 15 century A.D.). Shri Vidyaranya has written *bhashyas* or commentaries on all the *Vedas*, and is credited with having written about hundred books including the Panchadasi, a well-known treatise on *Advaita*. He was one of the greatest Shankaracharyas after Adi Shankara who had established religious centres or *pithas* in the four corners of this great country, and also at Kanchi, by travelling on foot. The present Paramacharya of Kanchi also travelled only on foot by *padayatra*. I recollected how I had had the good fortune to walk with him on several occasions, including from Sandur to Hospet, and experience the real worth of *padayatra* as a vehicle of maintaining one's contact with mother earth and the people. There cannot be a better way of meeting people in their natural habitat and establishing a direct contact with them. I remembered also how the Swamiji had given *darshan* to the President of India, Sanjeeva Reddy, in a cowshed at Sandur in 1978. All these memories came back to me as I laid the foundation stone of the *pathashala* and addressed a large gathering of people who had come to participate in this function. I was happy to notice that people from different castes and creeds were part of this gathering including some Muslim religious heads or *Pesh Imams* and an Ukranian couple

working at our plant at Hospet. I took this opportunity to remind the audience that never in the history of ancient or medieval India did anyone try or succeed in establishing a kingdom only on the basis of one religion or a theocratic state. The armies and administration of Vijayanagar and the contemporary Bahamani Sultanates consisted of Hindus and Muslims and persons belonging to all castes and creeds, a historical fact which is often overlooked or not adequately emphasized. This remark was enthusiastically welcomed by the audience. Books on history should bring out these important aspects of the composite culture of India which has developed over the centuries. It should emphasize the common life and values of the people, the growing interaction and cultural osmosis, instead of just dealing with the fortunes of battles and kings and the rise and fall of dynasties.

The Vidyaranya *Pathashala* was meant to teach Sanskrit in Sanskrit (and not Sanskrit in English as it was taught to me) in the tradition of the *gurukula* and the *guru-shishyas parampara* or tradition. The buildings were designed by Chandroo and his father, K.R. Iyer, with modern simplicity but in keeping with the traditional requirements. Sanskrit is a language we cannot afford to ignore. It was in a sense the mother of languages which, along with *prakrit*, had a major influence on all the modern Indian languages of India. When we speak Kannada, for instance, one uses a number of Sanskrit words without even being aware of it. No culture could afford to ignore the classical languages. Greek and Latin were learnt in the West though English may be one of the major languages in use in the modern world. Sanskrit undoubtedly is a language which holds the key to our classical values and cultural roots. No country can afford to ignore its own roots if it is to grow in the right direction and modernise itself without getting swept off its feet. In the presence of big enlargements of Swamiji's photographs taken at San'cur more than fifteen years ago, the occasion had a special

atmosphere of intellectual and spiritual aura and attention. It was as though the Swamiji was watching us intently though he was physically at Kanchi. (The *pathashala* complex has now been completed, fulfilling the Swamiji's wish).

Kanchi

8 January 1994

On Saturday evening the radio and television announced that Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the Paramacharya or senior Swamiji of Kanchi, who was in his hundredth year, had passed away peacefully at about 3.25 p.m. on the 8th at Kanchi, and that his body would be kept for *darshan* and *Mahabhisheka* before being interned in the premises of the *mutt* at Kancheepuram. Only a month ago he had personally blessed the three stone slabs that we had used to lay the foundation stones at the Vidyaranya Vidya Pitha function on 9 December 1993. In spite of his weakening health the Swamiji had made the effort to personally touch each of the three slabs in Sanskrit, Kannada and English and had wanted to know all particulars about the proposed foundation laying function of the Sanskrit *Pathashala* on which he had set his heart. I would have never forgiven myself if the foundation laying function had not taken place when it did and had been delayed for any reason. At one time we were thinking of inviting an important person for the function but I had been asked to do it myself early when I had last visited Kanchi. All this and much more came to my mind when it was announced that the Paramacharya was no more.

Early next day on Sunday I left for Kanchi in the hope of getting one last glimpse of the revered Swamiji who was like a spiritual father to me and

from whom I had received so much love and guidance through the spoken word as well as silence. How much peace and understanding he had generated at all times, from close and from far. How could I ever forget it or fail to be moved by it.

When I reached Kanchi it was nearly 1.00 p.m. The Swamiji's body had been placed at the same spot where he used to give *darshan* to countless devotees who used to file past and still continued to do so. The other Swamiji, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi, was presiding over the rituals. With great difficulty, I managed to squeeze my way through a tightly packed and stunned humanity, and found myself standing very close to one side of the Swamiji's head, which was as peaceful in death as in life, while Shri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamiji was standing close to the other side, pouring milk on the Parmacharya's head on which they had kept a *saligram* (31). In the thick of that mourning melee, I had managed to bring with me four red roses, still fresh, all the way from Bangalore. I was so numbed by the situation that I did not know what I should do with the flowers. Shri Jayendra Saraswathi saw my predicament and took the roses from my hand and placed them on the lap of the Parmacharya, which is where I would have liked them to be and where the Parmacharya himself would have placed them. I stood there for ten to fifteen minutes, transfixed and stunned by what had happened. And yet it was like standing close to him on any previous occasion, while tears rolled down in a continuous stream in remembrance of everything and the thought that this would be the last time I would be able to see him in flesh and blood. But the spirit seemed to communicate and would continue to do so without any constraints of time or place.

The whole world acclaims him as one of the greatest mystics of our times, who was an embodiment of great compassion and care, a personification of the highest human values and spirituality. Some newspapers carried a

photograph I had taken of the Swamiji at Sandur. An editorial in the Kannada daily, the Samyukta Karnataka, had done a good job in mentioning the qualities that made the Swamiji what he was, a preceptor who wanted everybody to follow their respective religions faithfully and live in peace and harmony. He had developed such spirituality that his mere *darshan* often dissolved all doubts and gave a new direction to one's life. He was considered a reincarnation of Adi Shankara and, for years, walked the length and breadth of India on foot, giving *darshan* and showing the way to so many. He was looked upon as a walking God. I had experienced the great joy and soul-filling satisfaction of walking with him for miles and miles when he visited Sandur and Bellary district in 1978. It was an unforgettable experience which did change the course of my life internally. It became easier to realise the spiritual oneness of mankind and understand better the much used expression 'unity in diversity'. It was the spiritual unity which was at the root of everything and everybody, to whatever caste or creed they may belong or be born into. This was the hallmark of a true saint. No wonder there were quite a few Christians and Muslims amongst those who paid their last homage to the Swamiji at Kanchi. The Swamiji was a living example of a *jeevan muktha*, one who lives in this world but whose mind and spirit is always steeped in something higher and deeper in our nature, a secret spot within which reflects God.

His very presence had the power to transform one's perceptions from within, as he was the very embodiment of gentleness, spirituality, peace and harmony. The light had merged in the vastness of the universe but his memory will remain evergreen and unforgettable. The light will continue to shine in the hearts of his countless devotees and provide solace and spiritual guidance to the whole of humanity. I remember the Swamiji's words distinctly: "Whenever you are in doubt and need inner guidance,



stand before the *samadhi* of your *guru* and you will get it and see light".  
Every year after Vijayadashami I will continue to visit Kanchi and place  
some *banni* leaves before the Swarniji's *Samadhi* and sit for a while in  
silence.

Annexure

*The Human Quest and Experience*

THE HUMAN QUEST is essentially a search for deep happiness or *ananda*. Instinctively and intuitively, nature helps us to do what is conducive to our well-being. But intellectually, do we always know what is best for us from the point of view of our greatest happiness and good? The phenomenal development of the brain gives us great freedom to think. But do we use this freedom to be in tune with nature or to create an endless stream of thought-forms which inhibit and distort the flow of life and existence?

Every human being is a unique combination of instinct, intuition and intellect. In this respect, no two human beings are exactly the same. Different individuals attain different levels and degrees of happiness during their lifetime. Man also experiences a great deal of unhappiness born out of excessive identification with his superficial thought-created ego and the external world. He is not able to adequately control his reaction to external events. He is worried and confused by ideas and expectations which may not be consistent with his inner peace and deepest satisfaction. This disturbs his inner equilibrium and starts a chain reaction which causes misery and sorrow.

There is a pronounced tendency in man to overreact to situations. This is because he is endowed with a brain or thinking apparatus which seems to be far in advance of the needs of evolution. Scientists have come to the conclusion that the human cortex has grown at a speed unprecedented in the history of evolution. As Arthur Koestler has put it, "the consequence of this explosive process was the chronic conflict between the new brain which endowed man with his reasoning powers, and the old brain, governed by instincts and emotions. The outcome was a mentally imbalanced species, with a built-in paranoid streak, mercilessly revealed by its past and present history". Thus in creating the human brain, evolution seems to have overshot the mark, leaving the human system deficient with regard to

the basic questions of existence, equilibrium and happiness. If the human brain and the nervous system are not able to cope with this imbalance, the result can be very self-destructive. The human race can destroy itself, without making any difference to the cosmic order. Have not many living species disappeared from this planet? This is the materialistic apprehension and fear.

It is of paramount importance to consider to what extent we can correct this situation by transforming or tuning our inner system to restore balance for survival and real satisfaction. A number of choices are before us because we can think. In this sense the human being has greater freedom. But the basic question is how to use that freedom to our best advantage, not in a narrow commercial or arrogantly worldly sense, but in the context of survival and growth in evolution and happiness. Deep happiness and a feeling of wholeness is certainly a sign of balance and equilibrium. But how can we attain it and keep ourselves in line with the balance of nature, the cosmic rhythm and harmony, the dance of Shiva?

The wise and the sensitive have tried to do this by looking inwards and taking consciousness to the source of human energy, thought and action. The mind is first controlled and not allowed to behave like a drunken monkey as in the classical example. When the mind is freed of its wasteful vibrations and circumambulations and consciousness is able to go to the root of thought and human activity, there it finds a pool of quiet energy and refreshing stillness and silence. Dipping into this area of inner peace, man is able to revitalise himself and experience a conscious contact with the source of his *Being*, his essential *Is-ness*. Remaining in this state is called *dhyana* or meditation, the quality of which is aided by *bhakti* or devotion. *Samadhi* is the name given to the deepest meditation or contact that man can attain with his essential spiritual nature. It is a deep experience which

transforms one's perspective in a fundamental way. Mere intellectual formulations and verbal dissection of *samadhi* have their obvious limitations and can easily reach a point of no return.

What is undoubtedly of great value is the deep experience of unity and wholeness, that is and can be felt in the centre of one's being. Practices such as *yogasanas* and *pranayama*, which refine the nervous system and breathing, greatly help this process of bringing thoughts under control and guiding consciousness to deeper layers of rest and revitalisation. This is the closest we can consciously go to the springs and inner reservoirs of nature. This inner culture of consciousness results in the development of our intuitive faculties, which must aid the instincts in the case of man to remain in the deep mainstream of nature, and avoid the debilitating distortions of superficial thought and action. In this way, the disproportionate growth of the thinking brain could be counterbalanced by a new intuitive capacity for peace and harmony.

In the case of other animals, the instincts are adequate to keep their system in balance at a certain level. They do not have the overgrown thinking brain to create conflicts and excessive stresses and strains. Man cannot stop or reverse the progress he has made in the growth of his mental powers and consciousness. He can only try and achieve a new equilibrium at a higher and more comprehensive level of awareness.

Equanimity, poise and the release from tension invariably go hand in hand with this process of finding the inner stillness, the psychic pool without the distorting ripples. One of the first results of this is health, for ill health is basically a symptom of imbalance. Modern medical science is discovering that much of ill health can be traced to the mind and its problems. On the moral plane, questions of right and wrong create a great deal of guilt, though the greatest wrong is unhappiness and imbalance and the

greatest right is happiness and balance.

A child is secure in the mother's womb. It is breathing deeply and steadily through the navel. But as soon as it is born, it seems to forget the practice of deep breathing and starts breathing through the nose, and not very evenly. As it grows, breathing becomes an index of all the disturbances and mental states it experiences. Every one knows that breathing is hurried and uneven when one is agitated; it is soft and steady when one is calm. There is an intimate connection between the nature of our breathing and the state of our mind. They influence each other. This is an area which needs to be much better understood. The body becomes vulnerable to all types of harmful influences when our subtle body or inner energies are not perfectly tuned to be in full control of the body with which we are born. It is said that we are born with certain tendencies depending on our past *karma* and the law of action and reaction. But we are not helpless. We can establish closer, conscious contact with the source of human energy and cope with the external magnetic field. Meditation or the practice of conscious quiet is meant to do precisely this.

Once this process of being drawn towards our spiritual centre starts, artificial barriers and inhibitions drop away and we are content to be breathing and living in tune with Mother nature. We no longer labour under the illusion that we can win the crown of happiness by ordering the external world. We begin to learn the secret of contentment and the meaning of spiritual fullness. It is this spot of perfect inner balance that one has to find and live in. One has to take part in life, with the full consciousness of this spot and its spiritual harmony, just as a good cricketer always tries to play the ball with the centre of his bat which contains the sweet spot as it is called — the spot where the strength of the bat converges, resulting in

maximum effect with minimum effort. The so-called effortless drive or action proceeds from this centre spot whether in cricket or in life. Thus, to find the spiritual sweet spot becomes the natural mission and the only real hope of mankind.

Once we taste this bliss or *ananda*, the secret is revealed and the awareness of this experience of true freedom or perfect harmony brings about a sea change in our attitude. The ultimate meaning and the essential nature of life begins to dawn and, in the glow of the spiritual morning light, man is able to find his true bearings, and breathe fully and freely in tune with nature. This is how the doom of disintegration and the chronic conflict can be overcome and a balance restored at a deeper level. At this level, perhaps, our perspective becomes multidimensional. New dimensions of perception or awareness get added to the length-breadth-height concept of the universe. The time-space limitations of this world may also appear in a new light. We may be able to create more space and find more time in our inner lives for the more worthwhile experiences which give meaning to life and also greater strength and security. Albert Einstein tried to work out mathematically some of the implications of the space-time continuum in his *Theory of Relativity*, and focussed attention on the idea that what appears to us depends on the point of view of our consciousness. The same has been expressed, in terms of philosophy, in our *Vedanta*. Einstein significantly states that "everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe — a spirit vastly superior to that of man and one, in the face of which, we with our modest powers must feel humble." This is where science and spirituality meet.

In this whole process the mind and its reasoning or discriminating faculty has a role to play. Nature could not have developed the thinking fac-

ulty in man without a purpose. We may not be always able to cope with certain faculties but we must not fail to understand their significance. The thinking mind has an important role to play in this process of man going from one level of equilibrium to another. The process may seem hazardous and fraught with dangers. That is partly because the mind can see these dangers and has got into the habit of thinking on a limited time-space scale. But the so-called civilisation of mankind is only about ten thousand years old, which is a tiny speck in the time-scale of evolution. What will happen to Man in another ten thousand years, whether he will disappear ingloriously from the scene or succeed in achieving balance at a higher level depends on what we do now and what is our vision of the future. While we plunge into deeper levels of experience for sustenance and survival, the mind will have to help us, to the extent it can, in assessing and evaluating and intuitively reading the spiritual signs and signals leading to our development towards greater balance and bliss.

The developed human mind has given us power to influence our evolution and vary the speed at which we proceed in a particular direction. The other animals do not have such power or freedom. In this sense, they are safer at a stabler, lower level of existence. But man has to meet greater challenges born out of his special freedom to think and do as he likes. Unless he weighs his experiences carefully and with wisdom, he will not be able to cope with the situation and proceed from darkness to light, from sorrow to happiness. In his quest for greater inner freedom many faculties and types of awareness are bound to come his way, which are different from the normal experience of the average human being. These may appear as miracles to the common man whose consciousness is tied to a particular set pattern of functioning or degree of body control. The body is the safety



valve for all practical purposes. It is the field in which matter and spirit have to reach a workable reconciliation in the form of energy patterns which are stable and in tune with the universe.

Certain spiritual propensities do not by themselves mean that the person has attained a higher level of equilibrium or understanding. Extrasensory perception, for instance, does not mean that the person concerned is wiser. Often he does not know how he got these extra faculties and uses them to show off and impress the naive and the innocent. This distorts the ego more than would have otherwise been the case. Thus the discriminating mind will have to help man to see these things in the right perspective.

If the goal of life is to live in bliss and balance, then the supreme test of worthwhileness is equanimity. The person who is using his inner resources in the best possible manner must be obviously peaceful and be able to create an atmosphere of peace all around him. It must be seen on his face and in his every action. This is the supreme test and the only test by which we can know whether we are on the right or the wrong path.

When the human system is in reasonable balance, the body must feel light, the mind alert and the awareness whole. Thus, there are a number of inner references to guide us on the right path; only one must have the humility and the openness to listen to their promptings. It is not enough for the mind to be sharp; the motives must be sound and true. One must really want to find that spot of true peace within oneself. It is remarkable how easy it can become if one is clear what one wants to do. A well integrated personality tends to get everything he wants or needs for that stage of his development, because there is minimum conflict or friction between him and the forces of nature. Fortunately, as he progresses on the path, his wants become fewer and he has a better total awareness of what is good for him and what is not. This is not a static concept. It is a dynamic

awareness of the natural flow of life, so that one is not wasting one's energies trying to swim against the current, to satisfy whims or intellectual norms calculated to subdue man and nature.

Lifemanship is not a question of suppressing nature but placing oneself in the centre of nature, so that we are not limited by excessive attachment to the peripheral manifestations of nature or confused by mental illusions and half-truths or weakened by inability to see and feel life as an integrated current, fully consistent with nature and its rhythm.

The life of a person who is on the right path becomes simpler and simpler and his wants get reduced progressively. That is because he realises that happiness is essentially internal and not something to be achieved by running after external things. This has been beautifully expressed by the senior Shankaracharya of Kanchi, His Holiness Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, in a piece entitled "Secret of Happiness" in his book '*Aspects of our Religion*', published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: "Desire is what 'exists outside', that is, it has an external reference. It is directed to an object which lies outside one's self. It has also an external locus. If a man believes that he can be joyful only if he gets an object which is outside of him and directs his desires outward, he would never attain peace of mind or *shanti*. How can one get *shanti* if he continuously goes out in quest of external things? Such an outside object would come and go. What does it matter if it comes or goes? Let it come if it does. Then it shall be made one with that which is the nature of supreme joy and which is resident inside of one, which is the very core of one's being. A number of big rivers flow into the ocean. The ocean admits them into its bosom. Those rivers originally went out from the ocean. They now come back into it. When they come back, they become one with the ocean".

To be in constant touch with the centre of peace and harmony, deep within us, is the way to live in happiness and fulfill our lives. All creative expression and dynamic action spring from this source. All that is truly beautiful and inspiring has its origin at this level. The real test of capacity for peace and harmony is to maintain calm and joy in the midst of activity. This is the hallmark of the *karmayogi*. He acts dispassionately and without fear, because he is always aware of the centre of his being or God or whatever name one might like to give it. The external situation cannot disturb this. And he acts with great compassion and without hatred because his inner peace and satisfaction are full and permeate all that he comes in contact with. It is our inner state that gets reflected in external things. When we are aware of the basic oneness of life at the source, existentially and not just intellectually, our heart naturally tends to understand all, without judging persons from a restricted point of view that has a limited relevance or purpose. Thus, compassion and true justice must flow from the heart and not from the head. The spiritual heart of man is located in the centre. It is this that we must pay attention to, so that it blooms like a lotus and brings deep fulfillment and satisfaction in life.

This is a gradual process. Our ancients have wisely delineated what the different stages in a person's life ought to be, viz., *brahmacharya*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sanyaasa*. *Brahmacharya* is the period of celibacy and concentration on study and the full development of the body and the mind. Therefore one is fit to enter into the second stage of *grihastha* or the discharge of family and social responsibilities. This is the stage with which most people are mostly concerned. The norms and nature of these responsibilities of citizenship may vary from age to age and country to country depending on the existing structure of society and environment. These are adumbrated as duties and obligations from time to time. What is important spiritually is