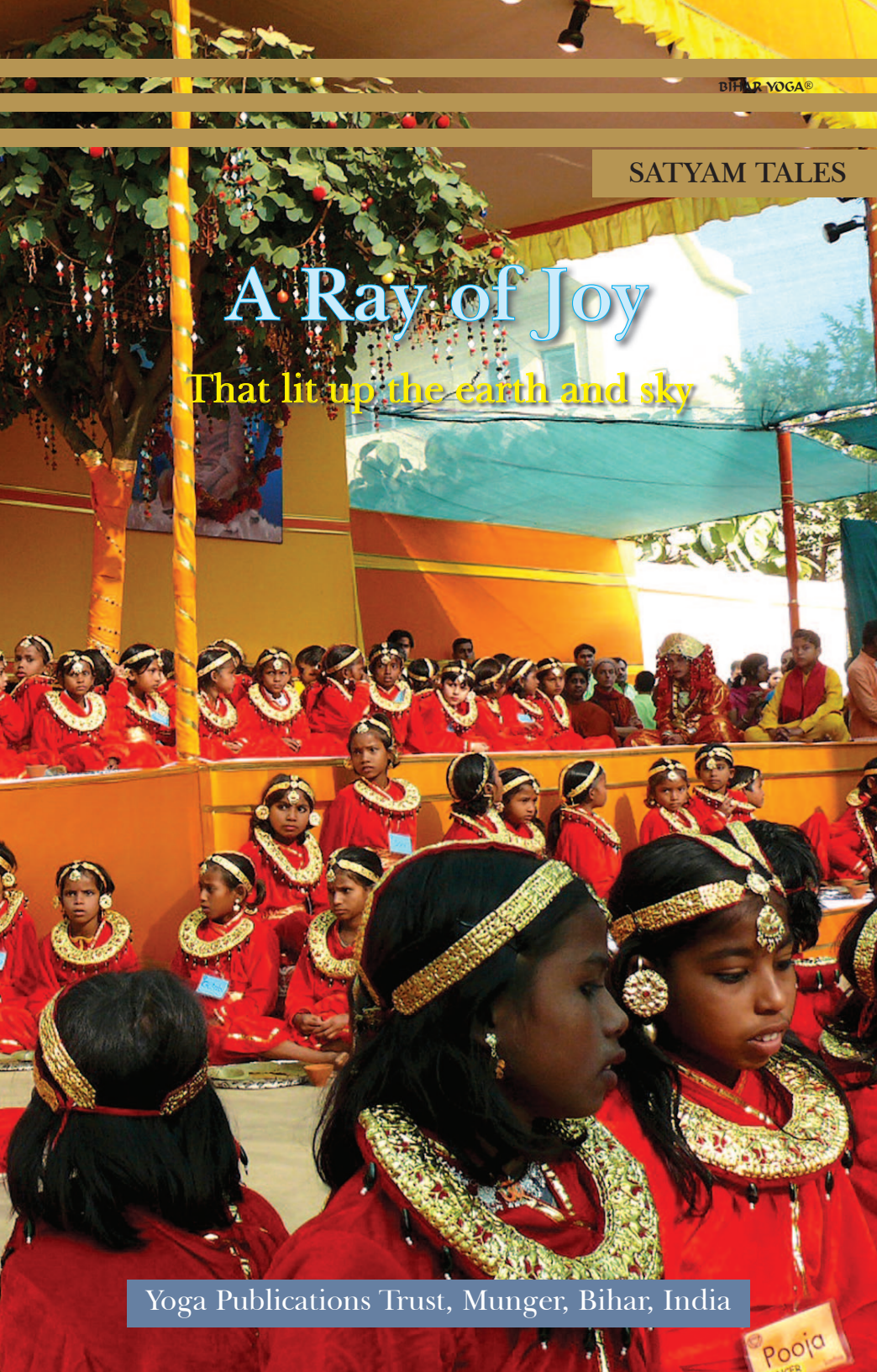
SATYAM TALES

A Ray of Joy

That lit up the earth and sky



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

SATYAM TALES 20



Satyam Tales

Commenced on the occasion of World Yoga Convention & BSY Golden Jubilee, 2013

A Ray of Joy is the twentieth in the series of *Satyam Tales* depicting the life and teachings of our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati. Through the medium of these simple narratives, we hear the voice of Sri Swamiji inspiring all, irrespective of age.

Ananda, the celestial harbinger of joy, is at his wit's end when faced with a place that stubbornly resists all efforts to bring in joy and happiness. Many years later he visits the place and its people once again, only to find that someone has quietly worked wonders. Listening to the story behind this miracle, Ananda is filled with renewed inspiration and determination to spread cheer and happiness.

This story is a delightful read for children, adults and old alike. It is an invaluable message for those engaged in the world and for those seeking the spirit. This journey is your journey, these challenges are your challenges, and this victory is your victory. It is a story that will touch your heart, give you joy, hope, conviction and, above all, faith. Yes, you too can make a difference and bring a ray of joy into the lives of people around you.

—Editor

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Please note:

- This collection of *Satyam Tales* is dedicated to our masters, Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati and Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, and is the vehicle to bring their spiritual and yogic teachings in an understandable and applicable form into the lives of individuals throughout the world.
- *Satyam Tales* will be exclusively published by Yoga Publications Trust to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the teachings and the context in which they are being presented.
- *Satyam Tales* is a loving offering to all the children and the future generations of the world to remind them of their true nature and inspire them to explore and enhance their own potential.
- We invite all aspirants to share these tales with your group and if you have some tales of your own, we request you to contribute as well. You can also publish these tales in your own language, fulfilling the conditions of YPT, for which you may contact:

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A Ray of Joy

I am Ananda, the spirit of joy. I travel ceaselessly through the different lokas, trying to bring hope where there is despair, cheer where there is gloom, happiness where there is sorrow, and joy where there is misery. Working quietly and unassumingly in the background, sometimes I succeed, sometimes not, but in the Gita-like spirit of *siddhyasiddhyo samo bhootva,* equipoised in success and failure alike, I do my duty as the head of the cosmic Department of Joy to the best of my ability.

This story begins twenty-five years ago. While travelling over planet Earth, a place I've been visiting quite often



lately as the quantum of joy there seems to have gone down drastically, I espied a particularly dark and gloomy stretch of land. I promptly descended to investigate.

It was the midnight hour, but the blinding darkness all around was not just physical. The turbidity of tamas seemed to have permeated every nook and corner of the region, and made everything dark and dismal at subtler mental and emotional levels as well.

I decided to have a better look. Desolate, destitute villages lay scattered here and there, like stalks of useless hay thrown hither-thither from a grain-thresher. Poor villagers, clothed in tatters, lay huddled close together inside ramshackle huts, in a vain attempt to thwart the biting cold that intensified with each passing hour of the wintry night. Forget electricity, heat or other amenities, even a rickety lantern was a luxury.

As I floated in and out the huts and hearts of the people, their pathetic condition melted my heart. Their misery was plain to see. The onward march of civilization on this planet had somehow totally bypassed these people. It may have been the twenty-first century in the jazzy cities I'd seen on this planet, but here it seemed the clock was turned many centuries back.



I had barely turned the corner of a street in one of the most abysmal areas, when I saw three figures under a big banyan tree some distance away. To be lying in the open on such a bitterly cold night was the depth of destitution! I had already started chalking out improvement plans for this place, but the situation in front needed emergency intervention, otherwise these people would've frozen to death.

As I approached the trio, an even stranger sight greeted me. Leaning against the trunk of the tree was a withered, old woman, moaning piteously. Sprawled near her feet were two corpulent youths, snoring contentedly.

I hurried up to the woman and asked, "Who are you and what's happened to you?"

I had pyschically tuned into the local language to say the right words, but to my great surprise, the response came in the *pashyanti* mode of speech, something used by celestials and evolved souls only. In hindsight, it must have been the extreme agitation brought about by all the misery I had seen, that clouded my cognition, otherwise I would have recognized the other-worldly nature of these individuals straight away.

"I am *Seva*, the spirit of service," came the terse reply from the emaciated woman.

"And who are these fellows?" I asked, throwing a disgusted glance at the obese youths lying at her feet.

"My elder son, *Prem*, the spirit of love, and the younger one, *Daan*, the spirit of giving."

I shook my head in disbelief. The mother suffers in want while the slothful sons sleep in blissful ignorance! After I had introduced myself, I asked Seva how things had come to this sorry state.

"Ananda, don't forget that Kali Yuga has begun on this planet. In this age everything turns topsy-turvy. The spirit of service has all but vanished from human hearts. That is why I have become so lean and weak. People have become selfish narcissists. They love themselves only, or their near and dear ones at most. They are miserly and tight-fisted. They are

always ready to receive but loathe to give. If their hands ever open in the gesture of giving, it is only for the ones they call their own. The outcome is plain to see. My sons, Prem and Daan have become extremely tamasic, and the spirit of service, love and charity has all but disappeared from the land . . ."

Seva's tale of woe further saddened my distraught heart. I was determined to bring a ray of joy into the lives of the people around. I said as much to Seva, "Don't you worry, Seva! I'll bring about a sea-change here. Just wait and watch!"

She gave me a wan smile, "Good luck, my friend! I don't want to dishearten you, but I know from experience that it needs something more than just joy."

The warning served more as an inspiration than an impediment to my zeal and enthusiasm. Bidding goodbye to Seva, I spent the rest of the night finalizing my plan of action. The very next morning I began implementing it, thinking it would take just a few weeks for my efforts to start bearing fruit.

I couldn't have been more wrong. I huffed and puffed my heart out over the next few months, but the ground reality didn't change at all. I worked with my celestial contacts, trying to arrange the perfect weather conditions for the land. I worked through humans of all hues, from politicians and bureaucrats to industrialists and philanthropists, hoping to bring in help and succour in whichever way possible. I worked right down to the plant and mineral kingdoms, trying to rouse them from the stupor of tamas. But no matter how hard I tried, my luminous rays of joy failed to penetrate the thick tamas that hung like an ominous pall of gloom over the land.

With all my efforts thwarted, I decided to cut my losses and leave the land to its fate. Out of courtesy, I decided to visit Seva and let her know I was leaving. She seemed weaker and leaner than before, and her sons, Prem and Daan, more obese and slothful. We just exchanged glances, words weren't necessary. The melancholy expression in her eyes conveyed everything, and it continued to haunt me for many months thereafter.

Smarting from this setback, I returned to my desk job at the Department of Joy and left most of the fieldwork to my subordinates. Somewhat later I began observing glimmers and flashes from that region on my High-Resolution Inter-Galactic Joy-scope™, but ignored them as instrument noise. How could there be even the slightest flicker of joy in that godforsaken land that had resisted all my Herculean efforts?

Years passed. The signals on my Joy-scope™ were becoming too strong and persistent to be dismissed as noise. The field operative I dispatched to that area sent me a rather strange report about an ongoing silver jubilee celebration. A celebration, that too a silver jubilee, in that impoverished region was something unthinkable for me. I decided to go and investigate myself.

I landed in Rikhia, the main panchayat of that region, one crisp December morning. As I cast a surveying glance in all directions, it was obvious that a sea-change had come about at all levels. Adopting the guise of a press reporter, I began to ferret out details of this magical transformation.

I could glean only bits and fragments from most of the people I encountered, until someone suggested I speak to





Tetu Ramani, the *pradhan* of a nearby village. As I made my way to the house of the village chief, I couldn't help noticing the obvious physical changes. In place of dusty dirt-tracks, there were metalled roads. Dilapidated thatched huts had been replaced by sturdy, pucca houses. Instead of scores of hungry, naked little ones loitering about, I could see smiling, smartly-dressed children on their way to school. It was a pleasant surprise to see that joy permeated the whole place.



My Joy-scope™ had not erred. A ray of joy had indeed overtaken its self-styled custodian . . .

I knocked on Tetu's door and an elderly man emerged to greet me. A smile broke across his gaunt, weather-beaten face when I sought his help for a newspaper story on this place and its transformation. "Sure," he replied, "Right now I'm about to visit some villages to deliver prasad coupons for the upcoming yajna. You can come along and I can share what little I know."

The 'little' turned out to be quite a lot. Being the pradhan, he knew exactly the kind of life his fellow villagers had led many years

ago and what miraculous change had eventually come about. As we started walking towards the Rikhia market, he started telling the tale I was dying to hear:



"It all began twenty-five years ago, on the day of the autumnal equinox, when a sage arrived here. He put up a little tent in a small property that his disciples had acquired for him and began arduous sadhanas and tapasyas. In the month of January, he would begin *panchagni*, the austerity of the five fires, which would last till the end of the scorching Indian summer. Yet he would persevere with the sadhana, bearing the searing heat with great fortitude and faith.

"All the acts of this exalted sage were divinely ordained. His arrival in this little-known place, his sadhana, everything was done in accordance with God's will. Even though the abject poverty of the people around was not lost on him, he was waiting for a clear mandate from God.

"That mandate came in the third year of his stay, when he had added the sadhana of *ashtottarshata laksha purashcharana*, the repetition of his mantra 108 lakh times. Upon completion of the sadhana, on the day of Kartika Poornima, when the moon is brightest, he heard a divine voice within: 'Take care of your neighbours as I have taken care of you.' That moment was the beginning of the transformation of Rikhia.

"Seeing the Rikhia of today, you cannot imagine what the conditions were back then. There wasn't enough to eat. Children couldn't get one square meal a day. Many times

they would go without food for days at a stretch. A grain of sugar picked off the floor was like a grand dessert. Forget fancy games, toys or sports, crude dolls made of mud were their only source of entertainment. Even if there was some food there would be no firewood to cook with. The womenfolk would set out early in the morning to collect whatever dry leaves and twigs they could find so dinner could be cooked.



"The adults weren't better off either. Most of the menfolk tried to make ends meet by doing odd menial jobs in Deoghar, the nearest town. A slavish mentality had gripped their psyche. They could not even think of, let alone work towards improving their own and their children's lot. The fields were barren for lack of irrigation, good seeds and fertilizers. The farmers had no choice but to work as petty labourers or servants.



"People did not even have clothes to cover themselves decently. In the early days when we started distributing much-needed grains, clothes and utensils to the villagers, a strange ritual would be enacted at many homes. Since it was the sage's clear instruction to deliver the items to the lady of the

house only, we would call her out. Many houses had joint families and we would call out the head lady of each family. But they would never come out together. After the first one had received her prasad, she would go inside and a little while later, the next one would come out, wearing exactly the same saree! Such was the dismal deprivation that pervaded the whole area."

I knew he wasn't exaggerating. I had witnessed those times and seen with my own eyes the dearth and destitution.

"After receiving God's mandate, the sage began to implement it systematically and meticulously. He was a seer who did not think of the immediate impact only, but the long-term effects as well. He was clear from the outset that indiscriminate charity was not the solution. *'There are rules about how charitable work should be undertaken,'* he would often say to his disciples and well-wishers, *'It has to be done in a very organized manner. If things are simply distributed in the villages, what difference will it make to anyone in the long run? Real help means enabling the villagers to generate their own strength and ability. Thoughtless charity or too much charity brings about more poverty, although it may be necessary in a time of calamity.'*





"Those were indeed calamitous times for Rikhia and its surrounding villages, and the sage instructed his chief disciples, Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi, to think, plan and work towards providing basic amenities to 'his neighbours'. Through God's grace necessary items began arriving from all directions. Being the pradhan, my help was enlisted to draw up lists of families in the different villages. Everything was done in great detail. Not only the names but even the ages of the family members, what they did and whether they went to school or not were noted.



"Bundles would be packed for each family as per their needs. They would contain clothes for each family member, utensils and grains for the kitchen, and blankets, rajais, lanterns and other essential items for the household. This was not considered a mere donation, as the sage was strictly against donations, charity or



alms. He would offer everything first of all to God, just like flowers or sweets, and then we would go out and distribute it to the villagers as prasad. *'Prasad means that which is offered to God,'* he would say, *'Prasad is from the hands of the Almighty Lord. Prasad means happiness, delight and joy. It is the reverse of pain and sorrow.'* What a wonderful way to spiritualize the act of giving!

"Once the emergency needs of food and clothing were taken care of, the sage turned his attention to the problem of shelter. The story of how Sivananda Math, the charitable organization set up to implement the vision of the sage, built its first house is quite inspiring in itself."



I was all ears. The more I heard about this sage, the more I began to like and respect him.

"One evening when the sage emerged from his gruelling panchagni sadhana, he called Swami



Satsangi and simply said, *'There has been a fire in a nearby village, which has burnt down one of the houses. The breadwinner of the house has died in the tragedy and his wife is sitting helpless and penniless under a tree with their children. Go, find them and help them.'*

"It took Swami Satsangi many days to locate the family in question, and after taking care of their immediate needs, it was decided to construct a low-cost house for the family. That house soon became a model for the many other people in the area who did not have a proper roof over their heads.



By now Sivananda Math had received a tractor and a truck with which the ashram sannyasins would collect sand from the riverbed for the construction work. In the initial days, they would even fire the bricks in a kiln."

"The sannyasins did all this?" I asked somewhat incredulously. The image I had built up from my travels



was a serious-looking ochre-robed figure reading a thick vedantic text or busily turning the beads of a rosary.

"Indeed, not to mention feats like ploughing more than a hundred acres of village land with the tractor in one season. The sage once prophesied, *'I can clearly see a new type of sannyasin, who will be free from selfishness and personal ambitions, whose main thought will be how to help others. In the course of time I can see very clearly that thousands of young, brilliant, fresh, enthusiastic, energetic boys and girls will take up this work throughout the rural sectors of India. They will go to each village and live and work with the village people for their upliftment. If each saint or sannyasin takes moral responsibility for the development of one panchayat in India, there will be no need for a five-year plan any more. Helping others is praying to God; living amongst the poor and needy is living with God.'* Such sannyasins who





regularly 'prayed' and 'lived' with God became the medium to manifest the divine mandate the sage had received."

Just then a group of giggling, garrulous village women passed us by. They stopped for a second to greet Tetu. Recognizing one of them, he exclaimed, "Ah, what a coincidence! This young lady is Chameli. She's from the family that got the first house."

Tetu introduced me to her and I asked her a few questions for my 'story'. What followed was a profuse outpouring of sincere sentiments. In between sobs, she said, "Swamiji was like a father, a guru, verily God for us. What would have become of us after the fire had it not been for him? Not only did he get a house built for us and took care of our basic needs, he also made sure that each of us got properly habilitated in life. I was inducted as one of the first ashram kanyas. I





would spend all my spare time at the ashram, participating in its multifarious activities, helping out wherever I could, picking up useful skills along the way. I was treated like a daughter of the ashram, and when I got married, I was given such a wonderful send-off. I can never forget the day I sat at Swamiji's feet after my wedding."

Chameli's poignant memories moved me very much. When we resumed our journey, both of us were lost in



thought. After a while I had to prod Tetu to continue where he had left off.

"The next thing the sage looked into was the health of his neighbours. A small clinic was opened that provided medicines and basic health-care free of cost to the villagers. The clinic proved to be a boon. Tuberculosis was quite prevalent in those days but thanks to the clinic it is totally eradicated today. Devotees from around the globe sent nutritional supplements and tonics, which helped the malnourished children and women of the region. Eye camps, dental camps and other medical camps would be organized periodically, and those needing surgery or specialized care would be sent to nearby cities for treatment.

"The sage's guiding spiritual principle was what he called *atmabhava*. That is what he lived, and that is what he inspired in others. In his opinion, *Atmabhava means feeling for others like you do for yourself. When your son falls sick, what happens to you? Yet, when someone else's son falls sick in your neighbourhood, you just say, "Give him cortisone." That's all. You do not think beyond that. Nothing happens in the heart. Nothing happens in the head either. You go to sleep peacefully although his son is still sick. You have done*



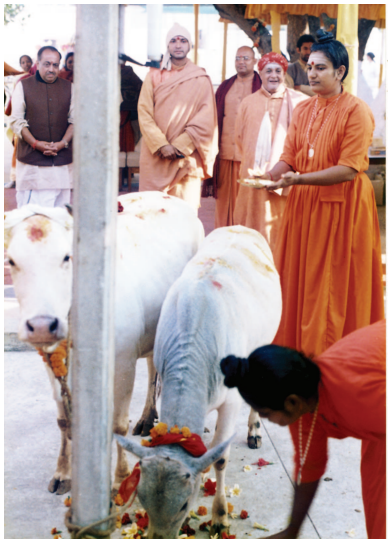
your work, applied this medicine and called that doctor. You can make the phone calls, you may even take him to the doctor by ambulance, but the feeling that you have when your child is sick doesn't come for someone else's son, because there is no atmabhava there.'

'If we do not expand the atmabhava, the sense of selfhood, then all sadhana is useless. Do not live only for those who belong to you. Live a little for others also. You cannot totally share the happiness and sorrows of the world, as that is only possible for God, but in some little way share the sorrows of others. You have to find a place in your heart for people who are not known to you. You have to act out your compassion and feelings on behalf of these people. Consolation with words only is not enough. To think on behalf of others in the same way that we think about ourselves is the true test of Vedanta.'





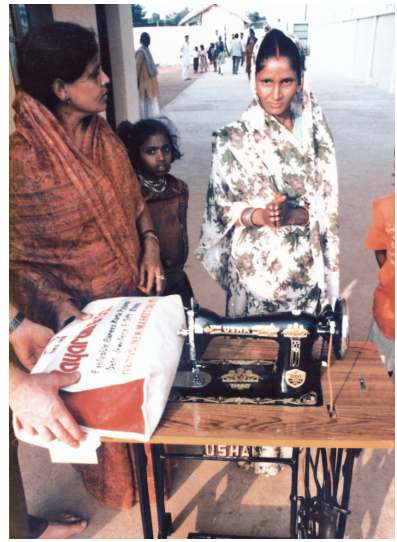
"With the basic needs of his neigbours met, the sage turned his attention to the farmers, the backbone of rural society. He started a campaign called 'Green Rikhia, Prosperous Rikhia' in which he mobilized agricultural resources on a large scale. The farmers were given high-quality seeds, agricultural implements, fertilizers, bulls for ploughing and access to irrigation. A big reservoir called Sivananda Sarovar was dug and its water was used to irrigate neighbouring fields. More than five thousand poplar and sheesham trees were planted in the panchayat. Many more saplings were given to the villagers who were asked to plant and nurture them.



"Deserving families were also given cows, but only after a member of the family had been properly trained in tending a cow. I still remember what the sage would tell his disciples and devotees: *'I think the best*



daan is that of a cow. Go on donating cows. It is very necessary that every village household has a cow. Cows give milk and compost. Even if the farmer does not have vegetables, his family can have rotis with milk. Furthermore, of all the waste products in the world, only cow's dung is sacred and useful. It can be used as a fuel for cooking when dry and when applied fresh as a daily floor wash, it becomes an antiseptic. Just as I spread yoga throughout the world, I will donate cows throughout this region. This is my promise and my pledge to you.' And he kept his promise.



"Sivananda Math worked hard to create many jobs and employment opportunities for the working class people. Whatever construction you see here, including the electrical and plumbing work, has all been done by the local villagers. Self-employment opportunities were also created. Men could earn a living by pedalling a rickshaw or pushing a handcart. There was sewing



for women. And the sage would also help villagers open little shops or start small businesses.

"Let me quote the sage's own words so you can get an idea of the bhava behind these acts of seva: *'Every year on 8th September, the birthday of my guru Swami Sivananda, I pick somebody out from Rikhia panchayat and open a shop or initiate a small enterprise. It does not take much, only four, five or six thousand rupees to start a small village shop and stock it with things people use: detergent, pens, pencils, biscuits, clips, notebooks, and other supplies. The shopkeeper makes a commission and those things become more easily available in the villages.*

'The first shop which Sivananda Math opened for a family has a story. On 7th September, in the evening, I was inside the Akhara when a boy came to the door and said to Swami Satsangi that he had not eaten for three days. She informed me. I was surprised because his father is close to me. He is a very modest, honest and humble man; he always hesitates to ask for anything. I often send ten or twenty kilos of rice and other grains to him. So I said to the boy's father, "Okay, use part of the verandah in the house Sivananda Math has constructed for your family and open a shop there for the village. I will provide the initial investment. I cannot give charity, I do not believe in it. You can help me and I can help you; that is all right, but no charity." So he opened a shop which sells foodstuff and items that villagers use and we too buy our necessities from his shop.



'Last year I opened a shop for Lakshman Mody, who is an invalid. When I met him with his daughters and enquired, "How are you doing?", he said, "Swamiji, I am doing very well." I said, "I am very happy." That night I had a very good sleep. I always have a good sleep, but that sleep was special because that man's agonies were released from my thoughts.

'Now, you may say that this way of thinking is worldly, but I feel that it is spiritual because mankind is one of God's manifest forms. When you are serving, helping, feeding, assisting, supporting, sympathizing and expressing compassion for others, you are actually doing something for God. There is no question of social service; this is spiritual service. God is in all the faces of those who are suffering, hungry, sick and ignored by destiny and fortune. I will be happy if you can feel love and compassion for these faces, if you can think about anyone who is less fortunate than yourself.'

"Among the 'less fortunate' were local widows who next came into his focus. There were innumerable poor widows in our villages, who had no future, no life of their own. They were made to feel useless. Their existence was meaningless. Banned from auspicious ceremonies and weddings, they were forced to shave their heads, discard their ornaments and wear white clothes only. The sage gradually changed all that. He ensured that all the widows of this panchayat were offered coloured saris and clothes



similar to those of married women, and then he came up with a brilliant plan that had provision for all classes of widows: illiterate, literate and educated.

"He built a building for the widows and called it Tapovan, because widows are also a kind of *tapasvini* or ascetic. Here, they were given wages for their daily labour of repeating God's name. The illiterate women were asked to chant the Maha Mantra for eight hours and then given wages at the end of the day for their day's work of chanting. Those who were literate were given a notebook in which to write the name of Rama until the end of the day, and those widows who were educated were given the *Ramacharitamanas* to read. And he gave them all the title of Devya or goddess. Recently the villagers of Rikhia reached a consensus that widows should be permitted to remarry, something which would have been unthinkable before the sage's arrival!

"He had a similar program for the old men of the area who were totally neglected by their families. His disciples called it the 'old-age pension scheme', but he preferred to call them co-travellers rather than pensioners. Every month all these co-travellers of Sri Swamiji received a stipend and

clothes, umbrellas, blankets, sweaters, or whatever was required, depending upon the season.



"About this scheme he would often say, *'When old people start doing japa here, they will also receive a spiritual advantage. The biggest benefit will be purification of the atmosphere. Just as a house is constructed with bricks and cement, the atmosphere is created by Rama's name. The atmosphere has two aspects: physical and spiritual. The physical ecosystem depends on the spiritual ecosystem. If the spiritual ecosystem of a place gets spoilt then the physical ecosystem cannot improve either. However, when there is chanting of the Lord's name by hundreds of thousands of people every day, there will be peace in all four directions.'*





"The sage began conducting many kinds of programs in his ashram to improve the spiritual vibrations of this place and to reconnect the villagers to their glorious cultural and spiritual heritage. These included recitation of *Ramcharitamanas* during Navaratri, recitation and discourses on the *Srimad Bhagavat Purana* on his guru's birthday, joyous and uplifting kirtans during the monsoon swing festival of Radha-Krishna jhoolan, enactment of the Raas Leela on Sharad Poornima, carols during Christmas, and much more.





But the foremost amongst them was the Satchandi Mahayajna, a grand invocation of the Cosmic Mother, which would conclude with Sita Kalyanam, the marriage of Sita and Rama.

"In his inimitable style, he would celebrate the occasion by giving good-luck kits to all the newly-married brides of the region. For him it was perhaps the most important aspect of the event. He told us once, *'I organize Sita's marriage in order to inspire all the visiting parents to give at least a few sets of beautiful items. Whenever Swami Niranjan or Swami Satsangi*





come to me, the first questions I ask are: "Have you put the labels on the suitcases? Have you checked the jewellery? Is it real or artifical? Is the saree of good quality? Have you opened it?" I open and inspect each and every set, and I tell them to add this or change that. I am as concerned about the whole affair as if all these girls were my own daughters.' Again a lesson on atmabhava in a very simple and down-to-earth manner."

We were getting close to Tetu's destination. He suddenly stopped and said, "The story of the sage wouldn't be complete without mentioning his favourite neigbours: the kanyas and batuks of the region."

I smiled. That was the first thing I had noticed. Bright, radiant children in colourful dresses everywhere.

"The plight of distraught children would move the sage deeply. Listen to this incident that he related during one Satchandi Mahayajna and form your own opinion:



'A few days ago, a boy came to see me and said, "Swamiji, you are having a celebration here and I want to sell garlands." I said, "Okay", and asked him how many and at what price. He replied, "Ten or fifteen, only two rupees each." The next day he brought fifteen to twenty garlands, which I



distributed to the guests, and they looked wonderful. In the evening, I paid him fifty rupees and he burst into tears.

'When I asked him why he was crying, he said, "Swamiji, you have given my family fifty rupees." I also dissolved into tears and said, "God, why don't you give me good ideas? Why do you only give me all kinds of funny religious ideas?" So, He gave me this idea to buy all the garlands in this area for two square miles. I have asked Swami Niranjan to tell every boy to pick fifty flowers, thread them all on a string and bring them here by twelve o'clock so that I can give a garland to everyone. That is one thousand garlands for one thousand people. This is not to welcome you, nor is it to give you my good wishes. I am being very frank. I want to give these boys two rupees a garland so that their kitchen smells of food, so that these children can sleep well.'

"The work with the village children was taken up in a very simple and unassuming way. One day, a little girl from the nearby village of Nawadih came and said to the sage, 'Swamiji, I want to learn English.' He turned to Swami Satsangi, *'Look here, this is your breakthrough – English.'*

"Swami Satsangi started with one girl and now you can see for yourself how the number has grown. There is a big demand and their parents press her daily to enrol their children to learn English. When she asked them what they



wanted to learn, they did not opt for Hindi or Sanskrit, their unanimous choice was English.

"Some years later computer lessons were introduced and a few girls who were good in English were inducted for computer training. They learnt to operate computers so fast that some of them were ready to teach the smaller children!"

I was quite impressed by this last fact. I still remember how long it took me to learn and adapt to the digital version of the Joy-scope™.



My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a car behind us. It stopped by our side and a head leaned out the window, "Namo Narayan Tetu! Where are you headed?"

"Namo Narayan Swamiji! Just on my way to the next village to distribute prasad coupons," replied Tetu.

A group of boisterous kanyas had gathered around the car by then and

Swami Satsangi alighted to be in their midst. Seeing her gaze in my direction, Tetu added, "And this is Mr. Ananda Prasad, a press reporter from . . . "



"The *Ananda Bahaar Patrika*," I said hastily, remembering the front page of a newspaper I'd seen in a nearby town. From the piercing look she gave me, I could feel her strong magnetic aura. For a second I thought she might see through the veils I had thrown around myself to hide my celestial identity. Whether she did or not, I'll never know, but her gaze softened and with a smile she said, "I'm going towards Patanjali Ashram myself. Hop on and I'll drop you near your destination."

In the car, the conversation veered to the subject of children. It must have been a subject very close to her heart, for she began recalling the early days: "When I look back to the time when a young village girl knocked on our door





and shyly asked to learn English and we hesitantly started to teach her 'abc', I am amazed to see how the small seed sown on that day has flourished into this giant tree of over 1,500 children that are ever on the increase.

"These children come from impoverished homes. They do not have even the basic amenities that a child needs like a toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, comb and towel or even a toilet or a corner where they can bathe in privacy. This, to my mind, is the main achievement of Rikhia because these children have literally risen out of the doldrums.

"Rikhia is an experiment, based on Swamiji's philosophy that education is a process of unfoldment from within, not something you borrow from outside; it becomes possible when the child is exposed to a positive environment and receives trust, encouragement, recognition, responsibility



and love, as in a gurukul system of education.



"Swamiji always said that when you contribute to the growth of an otherwise useless person and make him or her capable, that is a big achievement and accomplishment. Anyone can get things done by trained professionals, but then what is your contribution in that? Instead, if you make a person who is otherwise a total reject into someone confident and useful, that is a big service you have done for him or her.

"With these words in mind we took up the challenge at Rikhia. We started with the girls because they were the most neglected in the community. The parents did not even consider it necessary to send them to school or educate them. These little girls were doomed to a life of doing odd jobs at homes which perhaps no one else cared to do. In





other words, they were considered good for nothing or a burden on the family.

"With his wonderful ways, Swamiji changed all that. He gave them the name *kanya*, which immediately exalted their position in the minds of everyone, as kanya worship is an integral part of Indian society, so much so that every Indian, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, has utmost faith in the ritual of kanya pooja. The kanyas, who epitomize the beauty of Rikhia and the Satchandi Mahayajna, are chosen as the medium of the formless, Divine Mother during this event. To my mind that worked wonders for them, for some deep-rooted change began to occur just by this recognition given to them.

"Their English lessons started, sometimes they came, sometimes they didn't. But we did not react to that. One fine morning when the kids had not turned up, some of us sannyasins were chanting the morning prayers in Sanskrit, followed by kirtan, when a few of them turned up and asked to join in. They liked it so much that they began to come regularly and soon learnt all the chants and kirtans effortlessly.

"Gradually, we noticed a marked change in their confidence levels. They responded better, they looked brighter, they moved with ease, grace and poise. They



became more and more enthusiastic about all their activities and thus learnt quicker. The chanting of mantras expanded the frontiers of their mind, making them more receptive to the unfoldment of knowledge.

"The chanting of mantras and kirtan are an integral part of nada yoga which utilizes *dhvani*, or sound, to awaken the inner potential. Along with nada yoga, we introduced them to the ritual of yajna, which is a fire ceremony performed with the chanting of mantras. These simple methods have worked a miracle for them.

"Today the attendance of girls in the nearby school is one hundred percent and they carry away all the prizes for distinction in all subjects. With this marked improvement in the kanyas, we then decided to include the little boys as well or else the girls of Rikhia would soon begin to overshadow them. Swamiji named them batuks, as the batuk too plays an important role in the kanya worship and this has created a wonderful competitive spirit between them.

"Now their minds have opened up to a whole new world out there. They can hope, aspire, dream and even become what they dream to be. Previously, they were like the proverbial frog in the well that could not even imagine a world



beyond the walls of the well where he was born, lived and died. How did it all happen? The very same children, who at one time did not have the confidence to look you in the eye and answer a simple question like 'what is your name', today are at the helm of the Rikhia ashram, speaking wonderful English, designing the ashram calendars, conducting all its multifarious programs, singing soul-stirring kirtans, gracefully performing classical dances, conducting yajnas with perfect intonation of Sanskrit mantras which would make even a pandit sit up and listen. All this was possible only because a very special person happened to step into their lives and started a gurukul system of education."



We had reached Patanjali Ashram by now. As we alighted from the car, Swami Satsangi pointed to a big building in the distance and said, "That is what we call the Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen. It was Swamiji's vision to

provide a daily, healthy, wholesome meal to all the children of this region, and this building is the physical realization of that vision."



We thanked Swami Satsangi and proceeded towards our destination. On the way, Tetu commented, "Through these children a wonderful change has taken place in the whole environment. There is no family in this panchayat which goes without food. There is no child in this panchayat who does not get a proper dress every one or two months. On every festival, whether it is Holi, Diwali, Dussehra, Navaratri or Guru Poornima, they are given beautiful dresses. Every year they receive school bags, reading, writing and painting materials, notebooks, coloured pencils, pastels, erasers, pencil sharpeners, instrument boxes, games and toys, everything they will need for one year of study, including school uniforms. Deserving girls get bicycles to continue their higher education in Deoghar.

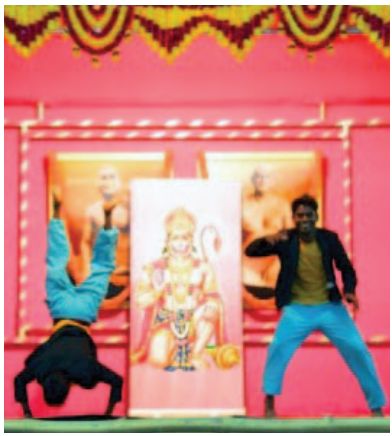


"Once the local education officer was passing by one of his own government schools and he was surprised to find all the boys and girls in uniform. When he enquired from the teachers whether it was a new Christian missionary school, he was flabbergasted to learn that it was one of his own government schools! He came and thanked the sage personally!"

We had reached Tetu's destination by now. He had work to do and I didn't want to distract him any longer. He had already been very gracious with me. With genuine emotion I thanked him and bid him adieu.

I decided to hang around a little longer. The sattwic vibrations emanating from the place were very soothing, even for an angel. Also I hadn't seen Seva this time and was wondering how she was faring. I wandered over to the property that Tetu had mentioned as the venue of the Satchandi Mahayajna. I slipped in unnoticed and watched in amazement as sannyasins, volunteers, workers and kanya-batuks bustled about tirelessly with the preparations. From the direction of the stage came the sound of children practising their theme-song for the coming event. As I tuned in I could hear the words of the catchy song clearly: 'Serve Love Give . . .'

On a sudden hunch I turned on my celestial-vision. There on the stage I could see the shapes of two smart, energetic boys gyrating to the beats of the song. A little distance away from the stage, on the yajna vedi, sat a beautiful, well-dressed lady with a beatific smile. She was thoroughly enjoying the antics of the two boys. She appeared vaguely familiar.



As I approached her, the truth suddenly hit me like a

sledgehammer. 'Oh my God! Seva!!' I exclaimed in surprise. Seva turned and greeted me with a big smile, "Namo Narayan Ananda! Long time no see."

"Yes it's been a while, Seva! Twenty-five earth years perhaps. You look that many years younger!" I blurted out.

She blushed for a second and then burst out laughing, "Oh come on Ananda, don't pull my leg! By the way, have you seen Prem and Daan dance? I'm sure they can give the agile apsaras a run for their money in the Devaloka Dance Dhamaka."

I was in complete agreement. Their slothful indolence had been replaced with vim, vitality and vigour. Something magical indeed had happened to the threesome, like the before-and-after advertisements for soaps, fairness creams and weight-loss programs I'd seen in the local papers and magazines.

"We owe it all to the sage, whose story you've just been hearing. After he came here and began living the mandate of his guru to serve, love and give, our personalities underwent a total transformation. Each year we feel younger and livelier, and we are able to pass on our energy and inspiration to that many more people. This year, in fact has been a bumper year for us. You could almost say we've gained more in this last year than in the past twenty-five."

"How come?"



"This year has witnessed the celebration of the Silver Lining Jubilee of Rikhiapeeth. It was exactly twenty-five years ago that the sage set foot upon this soil and began working his magic. The scale and scope of the activities conducted during the Silver Jubilee celebrations has been unprecedented. These have





included monthly medical camps for different disorders and ailments; arts and crafts, dance and sports workshops for expanding the creativity of kanyas and batuks; vocational training for imparting skills to help them on the road to self-sustainability; various aradhanas and anusthanas to invoke divine grace and blessings upon the area; and an inspiring series of satsangs by Swami Satsangi known as the Atmadrishti series."

As she began reeling off detailed statistics ranging from number of patients seen in every medical camp and details of the surgeries performed to number of batuks trained in sports or carpentry or electronic repairing, I realized that the



sage's style had rubbed off on Seva as well. She had acquired a penchant for meticulous detail and organization, which had made her all the more efficient and benevolent.



She ended with a thought-provoking remark: "By building upon the foundation of seva, prem and daan, the sage raised an imposing edifice of peace, plenty and prosperity for his neighbours. Once you have these three can ananda be far behind?

"The sage used to say, *'When you serve others, you feel satisfaction, you sleep well, and you have good thoughts, good feelings and a good mental state. What more do you want? It is a pleasure which cannot be explained or expressed. When you do good to others, when you work for others and not for yourself, it brings immense joy, bliss, ananda. This is what is happening here.'* Wouldn't you agree?"

I nodded my head in agreement. What an eye-opener this trip to Rikhia had been! All this while I had been placing the cart before the horse, but now I knew better.



There was one last question in my mind. “What was the name of this sage? Everyone refers to him as Swamiji or Sri Swamiji.”

“Swami Satyananda.”

“Satyananda . . . Satya-Ananda . . .” I softly repeated over and over again. “How apt! Where Ananda failed, True Ananda triumphed . . .”

“What are you mumbling?” Seva broke my reverie.

“Oh nothing! I just realized I’ve a lot to learn.”

“And celebrate. You’ll be here for the grand culmination of the Silver Jubilee celebration, won’t you? It will happen on 25th December.”

“You bet, I will. With my entire staff in tow.”

“That it coincides with Christmas and the sage’s own birthday will be the icing on the cake. By the way, you should see Prem and Daan at Christmas time, they literally go into overdrive!” she added with a tinge of maternal pride.

Yes, it would indeed be a celebration to cherish. A grand symphony with the four of us playing in perfect unison.

It was time to return to my loka and my office. A lot of followup work was needed at that end as well. There was a field report to be filed, and all the departmental manuals and handbooks had to be revised. I had to include the Rikhia model as a case-study in all of them.

On my way up I could hear the faint strains of a song coming from a little temple. I looked in that direction. A few happy-go-lucky ‘co-travellers’ of the sage were singing outside:

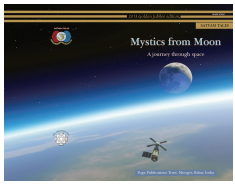
Anandoham Anandoham Anandam Brahmanandam



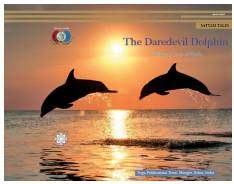
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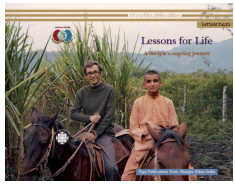
1. Diggaja
From elephant to super-elephant



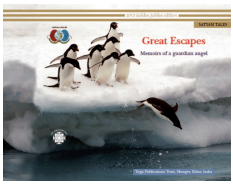
2. Mystics from Moon
A journey through space



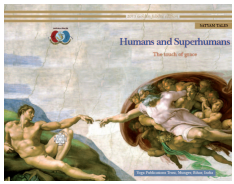
3. The Daredevil Dolphin
Making a leap of faith



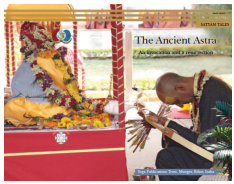
4. Lessons for Life
A disciple's ongoing journey



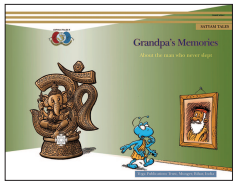
5. Great Escapes
Memoirs of a guardian angel



6. Humans and Superhumans
The touch of grace



7. The Ancient Astra
An invocation and a resurrection



8. Grandpa's Memories
About the man who never slept



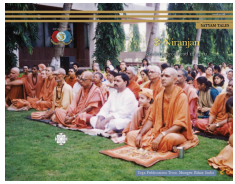
9. Divine Play
A loving connection with the celestials



10. The Gift of Peace
A precious bequest



11. The Yogi and the Maya
Renewing an ancient bond



12. Om Niranjan
Realizing godhead in guru



13. Dhoom-Dhaam
Program, download and print



14. Sodium and Potassium
The play of Kamala and Kali



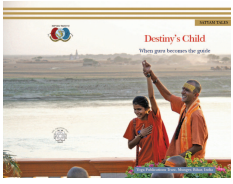
15. Spike the Hedgehog
And his open-heart surgery



16. The Crew
For the welfare and happiness of many



17. An aim, an ity, a ness and a ment
Watchwords that spell success



18. Destiny's Child
When guru becomes the guide



19. My Friend Namrata
Not just a blade of grass


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