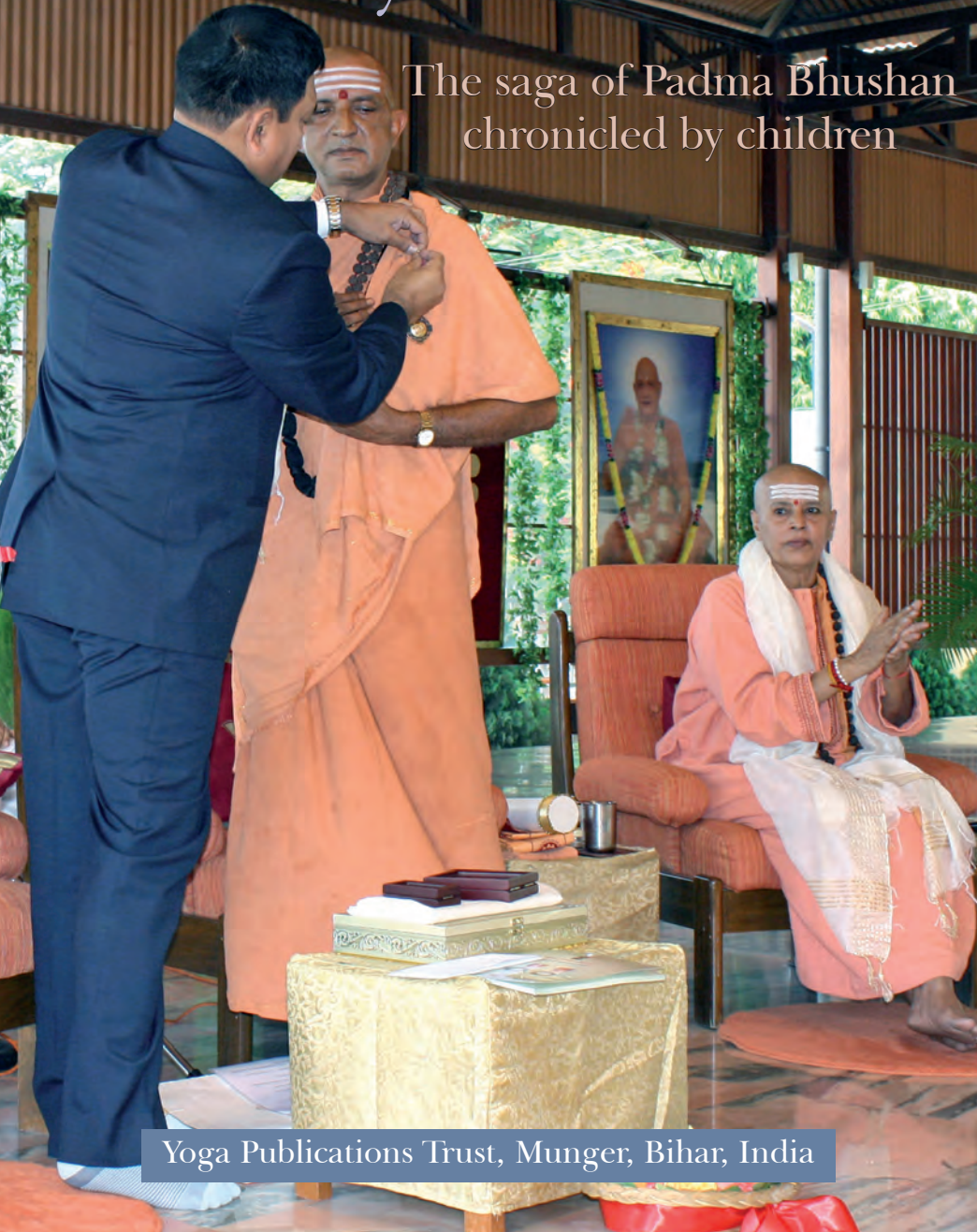


SATYAM TALES

Glory to a Rishi

The saga of Padma Bhushan
chronicled by children



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Satyam Tales

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

Glory to a Rishi is the twenty-fourth 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.

In 2017 the Padma Bhushan award was bestowed upon Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati for his outstanding contributions in the field of yoga. During the award ceremony held in Munger, the children of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal offered glowing tributes to their patron and inspirer. A confluence of these children's experiences highlights one of Swamiji's monumental accomplishments – inspiring and instilling positive samskaras in thousands upon thousands of children.

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. Perhaps you can also inspire children in your vicinity . . .

—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:

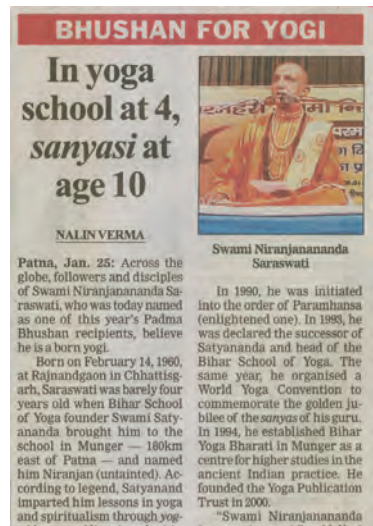
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Glory to a Rishi

Dear Readers! Didn't I say I would return to Munger sooner or later (see Satyam Tale 21, *The City of Yoga* – Ed)? Well, that is exactly what happened. I would have returned even earlier but the time was not right. On 25th of January 2017, when the Government of India announced the recipients of the Padma Awards, there were two names from the state of Bihar – Padma Bhushan to Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati of Munger for his outstanding contribution in the field of yoga and Padma Shri to Shrimati Bauwa Devi, an eminent painter of the Madhubani style. A wave of joy rippled through the entire state. Congratulations and best wishes for both these personages poured into our media offices. And in the midst of all this was hidden a hint of my next assignment.

Late at night there was a call from the Boss. “Ravi, you are already acquainted with Munger and the yoga school there,” he broached the subject in a sweet voice, “and all our



readers loved your story about it. I want to entrust another important assignment to you. Leave for Munger at once, reach the ashram and make sure you get an interview with Swami Niranjan. Get a few comments from local citizens as well, write up a riveting story and send it to me. We'll run it in our Republic Day special evening edition and create a sensation!"

This time I had done my homework thoroughly. The manager of my favourite hotel in Munger, the hotel cook, the rickshawallah who took me around Munger, even Vidya, the wonder kid teacher from Bal Yog Mitra Mandal (BYMM) – I had already spoken to them and received the inside information. Everyone was overjoyed at the news of the Padma honour, but regarding Swamiji's interview, there was a big question mark. Vidya was upfront and clear, "Ravi uncle, forget about the interview, even a glimpse of Swamiji is impossible this year. I have heard from our BYMM seniors that this is Swamiji's fifth and most arduous year of the panchagni sadhana. Swamiji has to adhere to many tough rules and disciplines, one of which is total isolation. Please don't take it amiss, but when he is not even meeting



his favourite children, the question of an interview with a journalist like yourself doesn't even arise."

I apprised the Boss about the situation and this time it was not too difficult to explain things to him. "Nevertheless, Ravi, keep trying. Don't let a single opportunity for an interview slip by. All our hopes rest on you!"

To tell the truth, I did try my best. I even thought of combining some asana-pranayama along with my work. The desire to learn yoga had taken root during last year's International Day of Yoga itself. After looking up the BSY calendar of events, I had drawn up a list for myself in which the first program was the 7-day Digestive Training Capsule. If nothing else I might shed some of those extra kilos, and if I got a glimpse of Swamiji, that would be the icing on the cake! After all, the voice recorder is my constant companion.

Since last year, I have been dipping into the vast ocean of Swamiji's writings in which one line from the *Ramacharitamanas* features several times – *Mohi kapat chhal chhidra na bhaavaa* – I do not like deceit and cunning. Perhaps it was the cunning, deceitful trait spawned by my journalistic trade that kept me away from the ashram . . .

Glittering programs were organized in March and April in New Delhi during which the President of India presented the Padma awards. Bihar's eyes were rivetted on these occasions, but Swamiji was nowhere to be seen. People began floating all kinds of theories and stories, but I had realized that Swamiji was steadfast in his resolve. No temptation or obstruction would ever make him waver from the guru-directed path that he was committed to following, with every cell of his being.

And then the month of May was upon us. On the night of the 13th, I learnt from some 'reliable sources' that the Padma Bhushan award was going to be presented to Swamiji during a grand public program in Munger. I called the Boss immediately, "I am leaving right away."

"Where to?"

"Munger."

“Oh, are you getting a new yoga capsule there?” My growing interest in yoga had become a source of much amusement for my boss.

“No, but Swami Niranjan is definitely getting the Padma Bhushan award!”

That’s all it took! A plush air-conditioned taxi was organized for me in a flash – the Boss had little faith in Bihar train timetables. Perhaps the disaster of the first International Yoga Day was still fresh in his mind . . .

I left Patna late at night and pulled up outside my favourite Munger hotel just as dawn was breaking. The manager was at the entrance, radiant with joy. After checking into my room I asked about Vidya. “It’s summer vacation time and she has just left for a trip to Darjeeling with her mother and brother. She is terribly disappointed to miss out on Swamiji’s felicitation ceremony. Never mind, I’ll call her.”

Despite the early hour, Vidya answered the phone at once. “Sorry, Ravi uncle! I will not be able to see you this time but I will tell Rahul bhaiyya, the BYMM coordinator to get the children to help you in every possible way!”

The program was to commence at eight o’clock. I got ready and after a quick breakfast, the manager and I set off



towards Paduka Darshan. There was already a huge crowd at the gates and it was growing every minute. All they had was a day's notice! If the news had spread earlier perhaps the entire City of Yoga would have been knocking at the ashram gates.

I was seated in the press enclosure. I saw some known faces there. The people of Munger were awaiting their beloved Swamiji's arrival with bated breath. The sound of melodious mantras resonating in the venue and the enchanting sight of Mother Ganga flowing right in front of us was creating an amazing atmosphere!

Soon the waiting was over! Swamiji came down the stairs, accompanied by the peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, Swami Satyasangananda, and the District Magistrate of Munger, Sri Uday Kumar Singh. Swamiji greeted everyone and the audience reciprocated with a thundering applause.

The proceedings began exactly at eight o'clock with Guru Pooja and bhajans. Such a punctual and inspirational start for an official function was a novelty for me. In his welcome address, the master of ceremonies told us that this year's Padma awards were the people's choice. From the over 18,000 names nominated by the public, 89 had been finally selected for these prestigious awards. The selection



of a modern-day rishi for this award was indicative of a new awakening among the masses. Contemporary India was reconnecting with its ancient rishi-culture.

A fellow journalist made an offhand remark about the use of the word ‘rishi’ and it set me off on a train of thought. I mused to myself, “Swamiji is the living embodiment of everything that a rishi is meant to be. His vision transcends the barriers of space and time. He has perfect insight into both worlds, the inner and outer.” I recalled some of Swamiji’s words from a recent issue of the ashram magazine. “Though many of you claim descent from the lineage of rishis, how many of you have been able to manifest even a tiny bit of the vast legacy of the rishis in your lives? To ensure that their body of great and valuable teachings doesn’t get lost in the sands of time and that all mankind may benefit from these precious gifts, we have conducted painstaking and meticulous research in order to revive ancient vidyas and yajnas like Pashupata Astra.” Only a rishi can take the work of rishis forward and that is why I did not find any exaggeration in Swamiji being referring to as a modern rishi.

So lost was I in my thoughts that I did not realize that the District Magistrate had begun his address. “*Vrittha na jaaye*



deva rishi vaani” – this sentence brought me back into the present. I was struck by the word ‘Rishi’. It seemed like divine approval for my line of thought and I paid close attention to the words that followed. He reiterated the fact that this award was not a favour bestowed by the Indian government on Swamiji, rather it was the collective choice of people across the nation. The DM went on to say that it is due to Swamiji that Munger can boast of an international identity. Thereafter, when the chief guest, Swami Satsangi said in her speech that it was not only the vote of the people but also of all the gurus and divine beings, I felt that Swamiji’s honour certainly had the dual seals of earthly as well as heavenly approval!

And then the moment we were all waiting for was upon us! As the DM pinned the medal on Swamiji, the words of a beautiful Devi hymn, ‘Sarvamangal maangalye’ floated over us. It was as if Devi Ma had come herself in many forms like Mother Ganga, Mother India and the beautifully dressed mothers of Munger seated in the audience, to bless their prodigal son. Everyone seemed to be imprinting this special moment deep into the inner recesses of their heart. Perhaps the many pairs of eyes glistening with unshed tears and the thrill coursing through their bodies were external indicators of this internal experience of thousands.

On behalf of his tradition of gurus, Swamiji accepted the award with deep humility and dedicated it to the people of Munger and Bihar.



Expressing his gratitude to the honourable President, the Prime Minister, other representatives of the government and to the entire audience, he hoped that their love and support would always be with him on the path to fulfil the divine mission entrusted to him.

Senior members of the ashram family like Sri Krishna Kumar Goenka and Swami Shankarananda also delivered inspiring speeches. The program seemed to be drawing to a close, but then the master of ceremonies announced that after the seniormost members it was time for the juniormost members to take their turn. He began calling the children of BYMM to the podium. I had already witnessed the confidence and ability of these children during last year's International Yoga Day but today there was a special magic in the air. Whether it was the importance of the occasion or the electric atmosphere, it was hard to tell, but everyone was spellbound by their soul-stirring speeches and heart-warming poems.

Khushipriya spoke first and the joy with which she began was a true embodiment of her name! "Today is a joyous day indeed because our beloved Swamiji has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan award. This is a very prestigious award given by the Government of India to people who have



made laudable contributions to the nation through their extraordinary courage, tremendous will-power, untiring efforts and astute awareness. And we see all these qualities manifest perfectly in Swamiji's life. He has never been daunted by obstacles, rather he faces them fearlessly and remains dedicated to the service of humanity. The most undeniable proof of his efforts is here for all of us to see.

A proof of success is this very Padma Bhushan award.

A denouncement of deceit is this Padma Bhushan award.

None but the great ones can receive this Padma Bhushan award.

Adopting the path of goodness and righteousness,
those who make the nation's dreams come alive,
deserve this Padma Bhushan award.

Swami Niranjana is truly worthy of this Padma Bhushan award!

These skilfully woven words by a little girl were really astounding. Girija was the next speaker, who began with, "Today we are all feeling so proud. It is a day of great joy not just for us, but for all the people of Munger. Our very own Swamiji has given his guru's mission of spreading yoga from door to door and shore to shore, the form of a huge tree under whose shade thousands receive shelter. Along with the propagation of yoga, his concern and efforts for the benefit of all humankind have brought honour and glory not just to Swamiji but to all of Munger.



Your effulgent form, a veritable treasure trove of joy and elation,
The nation offers you this Padma Bhushan with faith and devotion!

"Swamiji! We children salute you, for you have instilled in us good values, self-reliance and admiration for our country's

culture. These three goals have inspired us to tread the path of truth and preserve the glorious heritage of India. In gratitude we offer every moment of our lives at your lotus feet.

Walking along the path of life, determined to reach his goal.
With a firm resolve in mind and the vision of a new life.
With this body and this blood, a righteous resolve made great.
With a heart vast as a mountain; with eyes that look like pools.
With heart strings aquiver, spreading as far as the sky.
Witnessed by the ancient past, he is the harbinger of a revolution!
Bathing in perspiration, without any pride in his tireless labour.
Undaunted by trials and embracing thorny obstacles.
O glory of this earth, Niranjan! A thousand salutations to you!

It was Sangam's turn next and she said, "Today is a very special day for us children. We feel that this award has become even more glorious after being awarded to Swamiji. I remember reading these words of Swami Sivananda, "A king is not one who rules over a country, but he who reigns over people's hearts!" and such a king is present among us. Whoever meets Swamiji is bound by ties of love. He is playful with children and serious with adults. And most special of all is the way in which Swamiji tells us exactly what we are



looking for without us having to ask him anything. We are all so very fortunate to have the privilege of growing up under his loving care and shelter and to be a witness to this beautiful moment.”

Muskan was the last one to speak and she spoke with extraordinary composure and confidence, “Today we are filled with so much joy and pride that our beloved Swamiji has been honoured with one of India’s foremost awards, the Padma Bhushan. This joy is not only because he has received this honour, but also because through this bestowal the honour itself has been honoured. This is why our parents and the citizens of Munger are also feeling so proud along with us children. Otherwise what honour can this award bring to a great being who is totally unattached and firmly established in the exalted state of a Paramahansa?

“Nevertheless, the day this award was announced on television I was beside myself with joy. The award was given in recognition of his outstanding contributions in the field of yoga and we know that yoga as the Satyananda Yoga tradition. The vision of Swami Sivananda which found expression through the medium of Swami Satyananda is now being taken forward by Swamiji. And this award is given



in recognition of this work for which we congratulate the Government of India.

“What is this Satyananda Yoga tradition? We children wish to express this through our poetic feelings –

Recognized the world over for its unique, distinct identity
To uplift all humanity, the Satyam Yoga Tradition forges firmly ahead.
Not a trace of any differences or barriers, it strives for the welfare of all,
Heralding the path to a Divine Life, it forges firmly ahead.
Expanding the intellect and refining emotional expression,
Its image reinforced every day through tireless exertion.
Once you find it, you are won over forever – that’s its special identity.
Never ever faltering nor wavering, it forges firmly ahead.
Under the baton of its patron, the mind-born child of Satyam,
Ever merciful and upholding Dharma, it forges firmly ahead.
For the good of many, may this banner of yoga always fly high!
Under Niranjan’s able guidance, may millions find peace and joy!

And in the end this is all we can say –

O Pure and Perfect Niranjan!
The embodiment of love and mercy, nurturer and support of us all.
You who fearlessly face the five fires, and are feared by Death himself.
You who shower love all around, with your pure dazzling smile!
A million prostrations to you!

Such outpourings of love and faith from little children touched everyone to the core of their being. Swamiji then said, “This program is drawing to its end and my time with you is also coming to a close for now. As you all know, my panchagni sadhana is still carrying on. Today is the 14th of May. There is another month left to go, the sadhana finishes on 14th June. Many rules and disciplines have to be followed, temperatures exceeding 70 to 75 degrees have to be endured. I will be unable to meet each one of you individually and I sincerely apologize for this. As soon as the panchagni sadhana is complete, I will spend time with you again and we shall have an opportunity to talk and laugh together. So please do not take it amiss if today I have not



been able to greet you all personally. On the next occasion I shall certainly do so.”

With these words any remaining hopes I might have entertained for an interview were extinguished. Despite the setback, there was no sense of dejection in my heart, rather a strange wave of joy and enthusiasm had engulfed me. Soon parikrama started and people got an opportunity to walk past Swamiji and convey their greetings. I also joined the long, serpentine line. I don't know if Swamiji recognized me, but he had the same lively smile on his face and the same affection in his heart that I had experienced on a Sunday morning over a year ago. Shortly thereafter Swamiji left the venue.

I slowly started to make my way to the exit. The thought of my Boss intruded into this blissful moment. He was more interested in my report than my heart which was brimming over with happiness and hope. I thought to myself, “If nothing else, I could talk to these children and present the Padma Bhushan story from their perspective. But in this big crowd, who do I approach? I don't know anyone.”

While I was grappling with these thoughts, I felt someone tap my back and ask, “Are you Ravi uncle?” I turned around to see a chubby young lad smiling at me.

“Yes, I am Ravi. And you are?”

“I am Rahul. Vidya told me all about you. If you wish, I can arrange for you to meet with some BYMM children.”

This seemed like a godsend. I promptly accepted the offer and before I knew it, a group of 7 or 8 children had gathered around me. Some of them were familiar since they had spoken during the program. ‘Uncleji, here are Muskan, Girija, Garima, Sangam, Sonu, Ankit and Hari Om. I need to attend to the other children now, so please excuse me. Muskan! You and the rest of the children give Uncleji whatever help he needs.”

“Children! I’d like to ask you some questions for my report. When did you join BYMM, what have you learnt and experienced, your thoughts and feelings about Swamiji – that kind of thing. Do you have an hour or so to spare?”

“Why not, Uncle!’ Muskan smiled and replied. ‘But it is really crowded here. Let’s go to the nearby Shivalaya temple, We will offer our prayers and thanks to Lord Shiva for Swamiji’s award and then sit in the garden and talk to you.”



I agreed immediately. The children went out of the gate and got onto their bicycles. Looking about for a rickshaw, I heard a loud revving behind me and when I turned around, it was Rahul on his shiny white motorbike. I hopped onto the pillion seat and in a few minutes, he dropped me off at the Shivalaya temple.

After paying our respects to the diety enshrined there and perambulating the



temple, the children and I found ourselves a shady spot under a wide tree in the beautiful garden. We sat down in a circle and I asked the girl seated next to me, “Were you not playing the harmonium for this morning’s bhajans and kirtans? What’s your name? Where did you learn to play so well?”

“You guessed correctly, Uncleji! My name is Garima and I learnt all this while being part of BYMM.”

“Anything else you’d like to add?”

“No, that’s all.”

I sensed that the children were not feeling comfortable and open with me. Their reticence and one-word replies would put paid to my report! But then I knew how to draw water from a stone. After a moment’s thought I said, “Children, how about we play this as a question–answer game? I will ask questions and your answers will go directly into my recorder. The longest reply will get a surprise prize!”

But the children stayed mum. They didn’t even bother to ask about the prize. “They are as steadfast as their guru,” I mused, ‘no temptation is going to work here.’ I decided to switch tactics. “Okay, let’s drop this prize business. Our media group’s newspapers and magazines are read by millions. Wouldn’t you like to share your guru’s glories with them?”



This time the arrow found its mark. Garima began her story – “I became a member of BYMM in 2008 at the age of seven. I got to know somehow that the date had been finalized for enrolment of children at the ashram. Greenery and nature have always been a great love of mine. I had heard that the ashram had really beautiful gardens so I began pestering my mother until she agreed to take me to the Polo

Ground on the designated date. There I attended yoga classes for four days and I was totally attentive to everything so that I would be selected. And I was! Soon it was time to visit the ashram and that was when I learnt my first lesson.

“The ID card issued to me got lost on my way there. Reaching the gate, I saw a queue of children waiting to go in and quickly joined them. When it was my turn and I



was asked for my ID card, I began to cry. I was really frightened and all kinds of scary thoughts crowded my head. Eventually I was allowed to enter, and upon entering, I immediately felt that I belonged here. But that day I also learnt a lesson – big or small, it is important to keep everything carefully!”

“I started coming to the ashram every Sunday and then I was chosen to join the havan group. When I



was sent to the garden store to receive havan training along with other children, I knew nothing about it, but Swami Satyamurti was so happy to see all of us and started telling us all about havan and pooja preparations. I was in the havan group from 2008 to 2012 and I learnt a lot. In 2013 I was chosen for the chanting group. When the other children in the group played the harmonium, I watched the movement of their fingers very carefully and then at home would practise on the electrical switchboard exactly like that! In this way I learnt to play this instrument and during the World Yoga Convention, it was such a thrill to play the harmonium at the Satyam Vatika akhanda kirtan in front of so many delegates from around the world!”

‘Wow, that’s an incredible talent you have, Garima! Would you like to share some of your experiences with Swamiji?’

After a moment’s silence she said, “When I recall the moments spent with Swamiji, I get so lost in delight that I am reluctant to come out of it. I keep hoping that those moments come back! Sometimes Swamiji’s words would fill me with such joy and inspiration that my eyes would well up with tears of gratitude. When I was in the havan group, we children would help prepare for the Rudrabhishek and



Sri Yantra abhishek conducted on the 5th and 6th of every month. One day, we had completed the preparations for Sri Yantra abhishek and got ready to go for dinner. I stayed back to look after all the pooja items. A little later I saw Swamiji with some guests there and greeted him with a 'Hari Om.' Swamiji called me and asked whether I had finished my dinner. I stood stock still and didn't say a word. Swamiji told me to sit down and so I did. Then he gave me a few bananas and lots of chocolate. I was so thrilled to receive this prasad from his hands! I ate some of it and saved the rest for my friends. When I told them that these were given by Swamiji and I had saved some for them, their faces lit up with a most delightful expression! It was that day I realized that we should always do things that bring joy to others.

"Another very special memory comes to mind. I had come to the ashram to receive Swamiji's blessings on my birthday, but he was away in Rikhia. Upon his return to Munger he sent for me. When I reached akhara, the sight I saw left me stunned. Swamiji had filled the place with so many balloons! He tied a balloon to each of my plaits and blessed me heartily.

I was speechless with joy. It felt like a dream. I will never forget the love and affection showered by Swamiji upon me. He is even more special to me than my own parents. From a very young age he has instilled such qualities in me that I have achieved a lot.

“On the International Day of Yoga, I had been sent to teach yoga to juvenile delinquents in a remand home. When I reached the place, I found many grown up boys who were very naughty. Not only did they ignore what I was telling them, they were doing the exact opposite. I was too scared to even shut my eyes because some of them had pebbles and other projectiles in their hands. I feared that they would soon land on me! Someone was trying to put a straw into another’s ear, another one was pinching the boy next to him, someone else was up to some other mischief. I kept trying, but in vain, the class was just not going anywhere. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. In sheer desperation I closed my eyes and I had a flash. I felt that Swamiji was telling me, ‘Do the task you have been sent for diligently. It does not matter whether you fail or succeed.’ This filled me with fresh energy and enthusiasm. After that,



everything just happened by itself. At the end of the class, I felt that it certainly had some effect on the boys . . .”

Garima’s story was truly heartwarming. I pointed to the girl sitting beside Garima and switched on my recorder again. She was a little shy and I had to give her a boost. “You spoke with such confidence from the stage in front of so many people! Just imagine that you are addressing a huge crowd of thousands now.”



A bright smile lit up her face and she began, “My name is Khushipriya. I enrolled in BYMM in 2008 when I was just five years old. My older sister had been coming to the ashram since 2007 and when I would see her setting off for the ashram in her bright red uniform, I so wanted to go too! In 2008 when the yoga camp was held at the Polo Ground,





my sister took me along. And soon after that, I too joined BYMM. When I first came to the ashram, I had never seen such a pure, divine environment anywhere. And when we did kirtan during class, I would feel so happy! Gradually I learnt many new things and my self-confidence began to grow.

“My most memorable moments have been the ones spent here at the ashram – playing with Swamiji, eating with





him, sometimes going on a ride with him in the car and at other times performing havan soberly in front of him. We even got to stay in the ashram during our summer vacations and come to play Holi with Swamiji. With his guidance and inspiration, I have also had the opportunity to participate in many important functions of the ashram like the World Yoga Convention and the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana Mahayajna. These



are such memorable moments that they can't be expressed in mere words, they can only be experienced within."

When I noticed a roly-poly kid nodding in agreement to Khushipriya's words, I turned the recorder towards him. I had seen him as well on the stage singing kirtan. He began speaking with great aplomb, "My name is Ankit Raj and it was from a neighbour that I first heard about the ashram. In 2012 I joined BYMM and I saw Swamiji on the very first day. Once the enrolment was done, the next question was which group should I join – asana, dance, karate, painting, havan, chanting or spoken English? I chose the chanting group. In every program that year there was always a mention of the Golden Jubilee of BSY and the grand World Yoga Convention which would be held that very year. I was all fired up to participate in these programs, but the year 2013 proved a very dark one for me. I fell prey to a terrible illness in the month of June. Many doctors were consulted but to no avail. I was very frightened. During that difficult time, I would always remember Swamiji. On Guru Poornima, I received mantra initiation from Swamiji. After that my health began to improve rapidly.

"As time passed, I participated in many ashram events and they turned out to be memorable occasions. As Khushipriya just said, it is not possible to convey the depth of those experiences but let me try. The Children's Yoga Day is a very special one for us children because it is celebrated on Swamiji's birthday. One year I played the part of Swamiji in a play. Later the same year during the Sri Lakshmi-Narayana





Mahayajna, I was Swamiji's runner during the program. I was right next to him all the time! And during the Bhagawat Katha by Swami Girishanandaji, I got dressed up as Vamanavatar and also as Shreenathji. It was an exceptional moment because an ordinary little boy was worshipped as



a symbol of divinity. Then in 2015 a new program was added to BSY events – IDY, the International Day of Yoga. I still remember the day Ashutosh bhaiyya and I went to teach yoga at Bhagat Chowki in Munger. We taught yoga to over 100 children, and that too in a field! Someone was beside a ditch, someone else had a goat next to him. All said and done, it was a lot of fun!

“When we heard about the Padma Bhushan award being conferred upon Swamiji, not just us children



but all of Munger was delighted. We felt as if we were being honoured. There is so much more to tell, but I just can't figure out how to say it all. No matter what I say about Swamiji's influence on my life, it will never be enough. All I can say is that the guru-disciple relationship is a divine one indeed.”

Hearing profound things spoken with such ease and deep conviction by a little boy made me go quiet and introspective. Would I ever be able to experience the depth of such a relationship in my own rushed and busy life?

“A penny for your thoughts, Uncleji!” one girl quipped.

“Oh, never mind, how about recording your story next?”

“I am Sangam. As a little girl, I would often go to the Polo Ground with my father. He used to jog and practise some asanas, and so would I. On the way home one day I saw a girl in a red uniform. Few days later, my brother also started going to the ashram wearing a similar uniform. During Navaratri, Swamiji came to Chandisthan. I had gone there with my mother. The first time I saw Swamiji, I felt so happy and I wanted to see him again and again. When I got



home, I said that I also wanted to wear the red uniform and go to the ashram, but my mother said I was still too little.

“Once in 2007 I had the opportunity to go to the ashram during a Bhagawat Katha. As soon as I entered the ashram gates, I was in a totally different environment. The BYMM children were there greeting everyone with a cheerful ‘Hari



Om’ and guiding them to the pandal. Other children were busy seating people, some were singing kirtan, others were welcoming people with tika. Everyone was doing their duty with diligence and good cheer. Then I noticed Swamiji sitting on the dais and listening to the katha. Prasad was also being distributed. I was totally enthralled and made up my mind that I would also join BYMM.

“In 2008, I took part in the yoga program at the Polo Ground and joined BYMM at last! That year a research was conducted on over 800 children and I was a part of that. Six months later I joined the kirtan group and learnt many bhajans and kirtans. I also joined the Rudri, Durga and Narayana chanting groups. We learnt to chant many stotras and had a lot of fun.

“Our chanting class was conducted by Swami Prembhava and Swami Shivadhyanam in Jyoti Mandir. One day, our teachers were late for the class and we started chanting by ourselves. We had no idea that Swamiji was hiding behind the door and listening to us. Suddenly one of us noticed him and we all went quiet. Then Swamiji came out and asked, ‘Why have you all gone silent? Okay, how about I teach you something today?’ That day he taught us *Bhagavati Stuti*. Then he said, ‘I felt very happy today. Your teachers were nowhere to be seen and yet you were practising the chants on your own.’ Beaming with happiness, we all requested Swamiji to come the next day and our happiness knew no bounds when he took time off from his busy schedule and came to our class again!

“In 2011, a few of us were given the duty for doing pooja and blowing the conch during Guru Poornima. Swamiji came to inspect the seva and when he saw us he said, ‘All five of you must blow the conch together like the Pandavas.’ To which I said, ‘But Swamiji, the Pandavas were boys and here we have only four boys. How can I, a girl, be a Pandava?’ Swamiji





replied, ‘So what if you are a girl! Whoever is victorious in war is a Pandava!’ His words completely overwhelmed me.

“Every year we see, learn and get to know something new in the ashram, be it dancing or drawing. On 15th



February 2013, I received mantra diksha from Swamiji during Saraswati Pooja. On the poornima of the month of Saawan, I got my spiritual name from Swamiji – Shivakanya. That day I tied rakhi to Swamiji. Though we celebrate Raksha Bandhan at home, the thrill of tying the rakhi to Swamiji was really special. On the first IDY I had the opportunity to give a yoga class. I really consider myself very fortunate to have had

Swamiji's inspiring presence in my life."

After thanking Sangam, I looked for my next speaker. Girija was talking to one of the boys next to her. I asked her if she would like to say something.

"I've already expressed my heartfelt emotions on the stage this morning, Uncleji. Me and my younger brother, Hari Om, are very fortunate to have had Swamiji's support right from childhood. It is only through his inspiration and guidance that children from ordinary homes like us go on to perform extraordinary tasks. I can never forget the day I conducted a yoga session at the 'Swami





Dayanand Saraswati Arya Samaj Centre' on IDY. Though I have been attending yoga classes since I joined BYMM in 2008, never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would teach yoga to adults. There were over one hundred people there! Remembering Swamiji, I started the session. Hari Om was demonstrating the asanas beside me. Time simply



sped past and the session was over before I knew it. Many people came up to me afterwards and said how good they felt after practising yoga. They wanted to know where I had learnt all this. I told them, 'Swamiji and the ashram.' Both Hari Om and I thank Swamiji from the bottom of our hearts for this unique opportunity to develop our potential."

I turned to look at Hari Om. He was seated

in a strange asana with his hands folded respectfully and an innocent smile on his face.

“Uncleji! Don’t get taken by his innocent name and face. He is a very naughty kid,” said the boy next to him laughing.

“Really?”

“For sure. Just one incident will prove this beyond a doubt. During the World Yoga

Convention, an evening program was in progress in front of hundreds of guests. This young man quietly pulled a plug out of its rightful socket and that was it! The video projection just wouldn’t work. The entire evening was a disaster and Swamiji was not pleased at all.”

“A royal scolding would have followed?” I asked Hari Om.

“Of course, to the video in-charge! Later when Swamiji came to know about my mischief, he simply laughed it off. We kids can be as naughty as we like in the ashram. After all, even Swamiji was very mischievous as a child.”

“I remember Sri Swami Satyanandaji telling us about how Swamiji had completely dismantled his tape recorder as a child,” said Girija in defense of her brother. “When asked the reason, he simply replied that he wanted to see how it worked. Sri Swamiji went on to say that he never scolded Swamiji because the scolding could not repair the tape recorder, but the recorder within would be harmed for life.”

‘If only the parents of today could learn from this,’ I thought to myself, and then asked the boy who had



revealed Hari Om's antics, "Wasn't it you playing the mridanga during kirtan? You played so well, everyone was up and on their feet dancing. What's your name?"

"Sonu."

"Would you like to say something about Swamiji?"

He was quiet for some time. I took this for shyness, but little did I know that he was diving deep into the depths of his heart to glean glittering gems with which to adorn his guru. When he finally began to speak, his measured words brimming with love and faith were amazing.

"Once in a while the divine cradle of Time swings towards Earth and before you know it, leaves behind a divine being, who, in the fullness of time, dazzles the world with his exceptional qualities. Our guru, Swami Niranjana, is one such majestic figure of India and we are proud to have such a guru's grace and guidance who is recognized the world over as the epitome of simplicity, spontaneity and friendliness.

"His face glows with a divine light and it feels like it is this light which gives us children the inspiration to move ahead with courage and determination. When we look at Swamiji all our worries and cares simply melt away and we experience a



renewed energy and joy within. One glance at Swamiji and we lose ourselves – in love, in bhakti, in yoga.

“I have had the privilege of meeting and even spending some time with many sadhus and saints. But today when I look at Swamiji those memories pale in comparison.

“Since the age of six I have been interested in bhajan-kirtan and attending satsang with holy men. One day my tutor told me about Swamiji. It sparked an interest in me and I bombarded him with innumerable questions about the ashram and Swamiji. On 1st January 2011, I went to the ashram and it was during the *Hanuman Chalisa* anushtana that I first saw Swamiji.

“Just a glimpse gave me such joy! When the head bows down in faith at someone’s mere sight, such a person is called guru. This is exactly what happened to me. I simply forgot everything and surrendered at his feet. After that I started attending all ashram programs and in 2012 I joined BYMM.

“Here in the ashram, along with yoga, we also learn karate, kirtan-bhajan, stotra chanting, painting, havan, pooja, dancing and so many things. It gives us the base upon which we build our lives. Even today, when we children





see Swamiji we don't know what happens to us! Just his presence creates a vibe of happiness all around . . .

“In today's age, it is rare to have the company of such a siddha guru. It is no ordinary achievement to enable us children to excel in varied activities, to awaken the shakti hidden within us and to inspire us towards service of the nation. Only an ideal teacher can create an ideal student. It is essential to become like Ramakrishna

Paramahansa so that Vivekananda can be created. It is only the determination of Samarth Ramdas that can produce a valiant warrior like Shivaji. Everything that Swamiji has done to ensure a bright future for us points to his greatness.

“Only by plumbing the depths of the ocean can one glean the gems hidden within. Skimming the surface, one will only find empty shells. Similarly, gauging the depth



of Swamiji's knowledge is difficult, if not impossible. He plays with us, dances with us, but during his satsangs it is as if Ma Saraswati is speaking through him. In order to comprehend and imbibe Swamiji's teachings we will have to become like divers and plunging into the depths of the vast ocean of his knowledge, find those invaluable jewels.

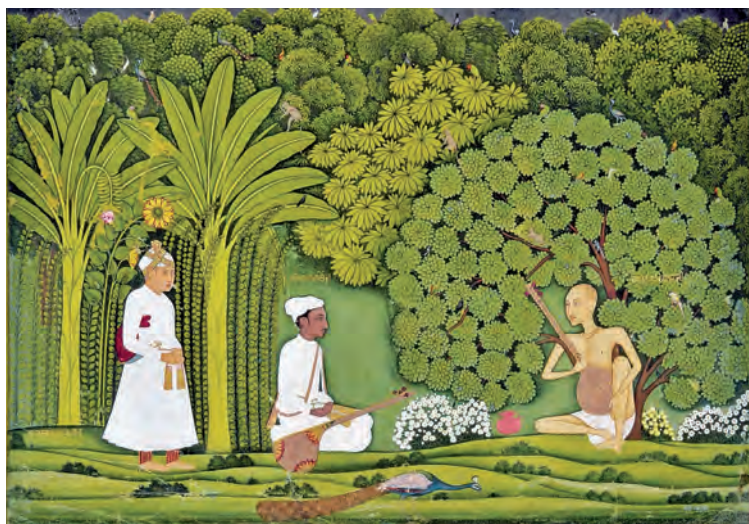
"In one way it is very appropriate that this honour has come to Swamiji's doorstep. In this country, since ancient times kings have bowed down before sages, the military has respected the might of knowledge. If the strength of a government has been its military prowess, the strength of rishis has been the scriptures, and scriptures have always been regarded above the sword! The story of King Vishwamitra and Brahmarishi Vasishtha illustrates this beautifully. Vishwamitra prided himself upon his martial skill and strength, but even he was forced to admit that the strength of a kshatriya king was nothing compared to the power of a Brahmarishi."

"Sure, Sonu has spoken an irrefutable truth!" Muskan interjected, "It is the tradition of this land that kings and emperors have gone to the humble ashrams of rishis and munis, not the other way around. Oh, I remember a nice story on this subject. Would you like to hear it, Ravi uncle?"

"Of course," was my prompt reply. This was yet another surprise for me. These children prefer telling stories than listening to them!

"Once Emperor Akbar said to his renowned court singer, Tansen, 'If you sing so beautifully, I wonder what would be the calibre of your teacher? Call him to the court, we would like





to hear him sing.’ Tansen’s guru was Swami Haridas. He lived in a ramshackle hut close to Vrindavan. Tansen replied, ‘Your Highness, forget about coming to the court, he won’t sing even if you go to him. Some ruse will have to be employed.’ Akbar was puzzled, even a bit annoyed. Such audacity from a penniless minstrel! To have the nerve to turn down a royal summon! With great effort he swallowed his ire and agreed to accompany Tansen to the hut where his guru lived.

“When they reached the place, Tansen asked the emperor to conceal himself behind some bushes and then he went to pay his respects to his guru. After exchange of pleasantries, the talk turned to music. Tansen began to sing a composition and intentionally made a mistake. Swami Haridas could not contain himself and picking up his veena, began to render the same song in his inimitable, brilliant style. Listening from behind the bushes, Akbar was transfixed! On their way back, he asked Tansen the reason for the incredible magic created when his guru sang, which was absent in Tansen’s singing. Tansen answered in a sombre tone, ‘The reason is clear, Your Highness. I sing for an earthly emperor, while my guru sings for the ruler of the entire universe!’

“In a way our guru is like Tansen’s guru. His every deed is dedicated to his guru and the divine. No temptation can sway him from his path,” concluded Muskan with a tinge of pride.

“That was a very nice story, Muskan. How about we continue the interviewing session with you next?”

Glancing at her watch, she said apologetically, “Sorry Uncleji, but I think it is getting late. It is time for lunch at the ashram. We also have to meet Swami Shashwat, the in-charge of BYMM activities, to get permission for your ashram visit.”

“How does it matter if we are a bit late for lunch?” I snapped. I was keen to wrap up all the interviews in one go.

Muskan answered in a very calm and collected manner, “No Uncle, perhaps you are not familiar with the ashram discipline. Everything is done punctually and as per schedule. You can always record my interview later.”

“Well, okay then,” I threw up my hands, “as you see fit.” Perhaps Muskan did not have very much to say, which is why she was stalling the matter.

Sonu must have read my mind for he suddenly piped up, “Uncleji, if Muskan were to start telling her story your recorder would be running non-stop! She also writes beautiful poems. She has written so many poems just about Swamiji that an entire story could be written right there.”

“Really?” I asked looking at Muskan.

She modestly gazed at the ground. “Okay,” I said, “it will be your turn after lunch.”

We set off for the ashram. On our way there, Muskan gave me all the information about BYMM – its history, organization, statistics, how thousands of children from Munger and many more from all over India have become members. The numbers were mind boggling indeed!

Some of the children had already gone ahead and given the ashram a heads-up. The ashram administration had kindly arranged a room for me. We headed towards the dining area and had a simple, satisfying meal. I rested for a little while and in the afternoon loads of children turned up to show me around the ashram campus. Perhaps word



had gotten around that a journalist was recording interviews and all of them were eager to meet me! I was first taken to Jyoti Mandir where I had darshan of the Eternal Flame. The abiding peace and vibrant energy I experienced there is hard to describe. Then we proceeded towards Chhaya Samadhi.

“Swamiji has created this Chhaya Samadhi in memory of his guru, Sri Swami Satyananda. It is in the shape of a dazzling diamond nestling amidst lotus petals. During the dedication ceremony of this memorial, Swamiji shed light on the significance behind these symbols. When he spoke about the lotus as a symbol of softness, non-attachment and the highest consciousness, it struck me that not only Sri Swamiji, but even our Swamiji is the embodiment of these very qualities,” Muskan said with that same trace of quiet pride in her voice!

I was mesmerized by this unique, beautiful creation and gazed at it for a long time. The brilliance of a jewel seamlessly blending with the fragile softness of a lotus – what an amazing memorial created by a dedicated disciple for his beloved guru! Quite spontaneously the Buddhist mantra ‘*Om Mani Padme Hum*’ came to mind . . .

The next place I was taken to visit was Satyam Vatika. As we walked in, Muskan said, “Any questions you might have

about Sri Swamiji's yoga movement and its achievements will be amply answered by reading the panels here." I started reading each panel with great interest and one after another they revealed to me the history of BSY. Glancing at my watch I noticed that time was rushing by. By the time I completed my tour of Satyam Vatika it would be time to leave for Patna.

Turning to Muskan I said, "It looks like there won't be enough time to record your interview today. But I will leave you my address. Could you send your poems and memoirs about Swamiji to this address?"

"Of course, Uncleji!"

Continuing on my walk through Satyam Vatika, I came to the panel about BYMM. Printed below the photograph was a quote by Sri Swami Satyananda – "The destiny of the whole world depends on little children. If you want to see the silver lining on the horizon, it is not you and me, but the children who have to be spiritualized." I recalled the recent conversations with the children at Shivalaya. Each and every child's life had been so deeply touched by Swamiji! What wonderful inspiration, energy and self-confidence he had instilled in all of them! The calculator in my mind was crunching numbers. These children must number in the thousands! How many such children, and through them, how many families must have experienced a positive



Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal (BYMM) is a movement of children and by children inspired by Swami Niranjanananda. Started with just seven children in 1995, today it has grown to include over 1,50,000 children devoted to yoga. The mandate for them are three: *samskara*, appropriate performance in life; *swavalamban*, independent effort; and *samskriti prem*, love for culture. The children, in the age group of ten to fourteen, receive their training through a four-year syllabus. The children come to the ashram regularly and, besides yoga, learn self-defence, chanting, painting, music, literature, languages and scriptures, and are exposed to different levels of yogic culture. Over a period, they develop into children with special qualities. They conduct seminars, programs, conventions and different yoga camps all over India and assist in all ashram activities. As Swami Niranjanananda says, "BYMM is a movement. It is a movement of children and these children are waking up."

"The destiny of the whole world depends on little children. If you want to see the silver lining on the horizon, it is not you and me, but the children who have to be spiritualized."

—Swami Satyananda





transformation in their lives? Looking at this incredible work and its far reaching influence, this invaluable gift to children alone makes Swamiji more than deserving of this Padma Bhushan award. what to speak of his many other contributions . . .

“Uncle, take a look at this panel. It will give you a glimpse into Swamiji’s many accomplishments. Most of his work takes place behind the scenes though!” Muskan

said as she proudly pointed to the panel.

I started to read each line printed on the panel. As the enormity of Swamiji’s efforts and exploits began to sink in, a few lines from a Rudyard Kipling poem came to mind . . .

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With 60 seconds’ worth of distance run,
Then yours is the world and everything that’s in it,
And what’s more – you’ll be a Man, my son!

Contributions of Bihar Yoga under Swami Niranjanananda's Guidance

- ♦ Application of yoga to address the needs of professionals.
- ♦ Yoga training for Indian Railways.
- ♦ Yoga programs for athletes, coaches and physical training teachers, including the Indian national archery and gymnastics team, wrestling, judo, boxing and volleyball teams, Sports Authority of India Unit Heads, coaches and administrative officers.
- ♦ Yoga therapy training in all medical colleges in the state of Bihar, and to registered medical students and doctors.
- ♦ Yoga training in prisons of Bihar.
- ♦ Specialized training programs for army instructors, especially in high altitude and desert areas.
- ♦ Training programs for Indian Police.
- ♦ Research on cancer.
- ♦ Research on effects of yoga on drug addiction.
- ♦ Yoga camps in remote villages of Bihar.
- ♦ Inspiration for introduction of yoga in European schools.
- ♦ Exposition of *dharana*, the sixth stage in raja yoga, through a collection of dharana practices.
- ♦ Revelation of the hitherto unknown practice of *laya yoga*.
- ♦ Detailed descriptive exposition of yogic, tantric, upanishadic, vedantic and lifestyle subjects.
- ♦ Awakening of spiritual, humanistic and creative potential and samskaras in children and youth.



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8. Grandpa's Memories
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11. The Yogi and the Maya
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14. Sodium and Potassium
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15. Spike the Hedgehog
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17. An aim, an ity, a ness
and a ment
Watchwords that spell success



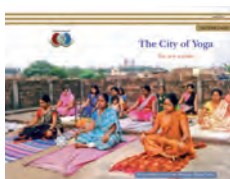
18. Destiny's Child
When guru becomes the guide



19. My Friend Namrata
Not just a blade of grass



20. A Ray of Joy
That lit up the earth and sky



21. The City of Yoga
Not just a name



22. At Satyam's feet
An incomparable offering



23. The Amazing Dog Trick
Living the teachings

SATYAM TALES 24

