

SATYAM TALES

A Village Transformed

A sannyasin's sankalpa
for the welfare and happiness of many



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Satyam Tales

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

A Village Transformed is the twenty-ninth 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.

Swami Sivananda used to say, "A real sannyasin is the only mighty potentate on this earth. He never takes anything, he always gives. It was sannyasins who did glorious work in the past. It is sannyasins who will work wonders in the present and in the future also. One real sannyasin can change the destiny of the whole world." Swami Satyananda made these words of his guru come alive in a forlorn, neglected village of Madhya Pradesh. Read this true story to find out how.

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 may also be inspired to transform a village . . .

—Editor

© Bihar School of Yoga 2020

Published by Yoga Publications Trust

First edition 2020

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd., Faridabad

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:

Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger, Bihar, India 811201

Tel: +91-6344 222430, Fax: +91-6344 220169

A Village Transformed

I have just returned from the annual convention of GDO, ‘Gram Devata Organisation’ – where all the *gram devatas* (village deities), *sthan devatas* (site deities) and *kul devatas* (family deities) of the earth gather to exchange experiences, share views and offer helpful suggestions to each other.

The highlight of this year’s convention was really very special and while it impressed everyone present, it also gave me the opportunity to revisit some precious memories. I am referring to the report presented by the gram devata of Rikhia panchayat in which he spoke about the transformation that has taken place in Rikhia over the last twenty-five years. It was a very detailed and well-designed powerpoint





presentation which evoked strong emotions in all of us. On one hand it depicted the miserable state of the area in the grip of poverty, hunger and helplessness twenty-five years ago and on the other hand we were shown the present condition – a green, happy and prosperous Rikhia, where its residents were full of hope and lived a good life with joy and positivity. This miracle was only made possible by the *sankalpa*, the iron-resolve of a sannyasin: ‘*Bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya*’, for the welfare and happiness of many.

When the presentation ended, there was pindrop silence in the hall and the gram devata of Rikhia remained standing on the stage for some time. There were no questions from the congregation for how could they speak when their throats were choked with emotion and their eyes glistening with unshed tears? Eventually someone spoke up in a soft but sure voice, “Come on, one and all! Let us applaud this incredible feat and express our appreciation to Swamiji!” In an instant, the entire hall resonated with heartfelt applause ‘*Swami Satyanandaji ki Jai! Glory to Sri Swami Satyananda!*’

Such is the magic of that name that it sent waves of joy and enthusiasm rippling through the entire congregation. Where earlier there was complete silence, whispers began and slowly voices were heard all around. Some were saying wistfully, “May such a saint come to our village as well so that

it turns into a place of pilgrimage,” while others expressed their sorrow, “Alas! We are not fortunate enough to receive the blessings of such a mahatma.”

Hearing that name, one which I had lovingly cherished in my heart, spoken out loud and clear after so long triggered a flood of memories within me. Unable to contain myself any longer, I said to the person sitting next to me, “I had the good fortune to have received his grace a long time ago.”

“What do you mean?”

I replied that I had the honour of having darshan and sharing company with this great being over sixty years ago.

“Where was this?”

“In my very own village, Raipur Kalchurian.”

Yes, I am the gram devata of that village. Situated along highway number 6, the Jabalpur-Varanasi road, a few kilometres from the town of Rewa in Madhya Pradesh, Raipur Kalchurian is a historic village and was known as ‘the land of the brave’ in the past. Many warriors were born here and stories of their bravery, sacrifice, generosity and fierce fidelity to justice were told in every house – once upon a time. With the passage of time, the glory of the village faded away and it had declined into a pitiable state until the time Swami Satyananda arrived to uplift it.

With that introduction, I began to narrate the tale of this transformation to my neighbour and he listened with rapt attention. Coincidentally, he happened to be the editor of GDP, the Gram Devata Patrika, the organization’s magazine, and he immediately requested me to write my memoirs so that this inspirational story could reach all the gram devatas. So, my dear readers, this is the background to my humble attempt in bringing this tale to you.

When I returned to my village and began thinking about the best way in which to tell this story, I felt that it was not appropriate for me to praise Swamiji myself. Instead of relating everything in my own words, I thought it would be better told by persons who had been active participants in that story and had also been the recipients of Swamiji’s

blessings. Rummaging through the archive of old letters and files in my cabinet, I have prepared this compilation.

First of all, let me introduce you to the main characters, beginning with Major Narendra Singh who was instrumental in bringing Swamiji to Raipur Kalchurian. Then comes his elder brother, Thakur Ravinandan Singh, the landlord of the village, followed by Dr Dharmadas Mishra, a retired police officer and a very close friend of Ravinandan Singh. Next comes Triyugi Narayana, a sensitive and dedicated social worker and last but not the least at all, Swami Dharmashakti, the first disciple to be initiated by Sri Swamiji, whom we all fondly call *Ammaji*. It will be most appropriate and auspicious to begin this story with her words:

Swami Satyananda's disciples and devotees can be found everywhere. His character is such that whoever meets him or attends his satsang even once is unable to forget him for the rest of his life. Even if one is an atheist or a staunch opponent of Swamiji's views, after meeting him one is transformed into an ardent devotee. Let me narrate an incident that highlights this aspect of Swamiji's personality . . .

There is a small village by the name of Raipur in Rewa district. The entire village lived in awe of the landlord, Thakur Ravinandan Singh. His younger brother, Narendra Singh, was a major in the army who was posted in Delhi during Swamiji's Rishikesh days. He would regularly go to Rishikesh and meet Swami Satyam, whom he respected very much. He did a lot of personal sadhana and often wrote letters to Swami Satyam for guidance. He had one persistent request for Swamiji, "If you ever happen to visit Rewa, please go to my ancestral village also. It is a very backward and old-fashioned area; your presence will definitely bring about a positive change in my family and the entire village."

Thus the foundation was laid for Swami Satyananda's visit to Raipur. The intimate relationship between Swami Satyananda and Major Narendra was evident upon reading the letters exchanged between the two. Here is the letter written to Major Narendra by Swami Satyam just before honouring my village with his first visit.

Munger

7-3-57

This world is the battlefield of Kurukshetra and we live amongst Kauravas like Arjun did. We have to live in harmony with all. We cannot avoid living in evil company but despite the adverse circumstances, we should maintain a positive and congenial attitude, keeping our souls detached.

It is true one cannot please everyone, however, saying a few good words which will make even our adversaries happy is a good thing and is not against dharma to do so. Even while one is aware of the injustice being perpetrated by them, one must behave in a manner that does not evoke violent reactions from people. It is perfectly within the bounds of righteousness to interact with them pleasantly, praising them a little and even agreeing with them at times. Conduct which ensures one's own safety and wins over others is a hundred percent in keeping with dharma.

In my opinion, randomly losing one's temper demonstrates lack of common sense. In hostile situations, easing up on one's principles while acquiescing to those of the opposition is not a decimation of one's own soul. One should not do any such thing which creates differences among people or goes against the good values of life.

In Kali Yuga, common sense is the ultimate dharma. Within this canvas one finds attributes like politeness, humility, skill and appreciation. Giving in at times, laughing at times, keeping silent at other times, being firm sometimes, agreeing at other times are different ways to handle situations with common sense.

Malice and hatred are fatal to peace of mind. Such negativity corrupts a healthy mind and proves to be a menace for society. For a society to co-exist with all in harmony, we have to do away with all possible negativity. This is the main element of internal sadhana.

Not much is gained by worship and prayer, nor by the ringing of bells in temples. Temples have no purpose unless it is to awaken spiritual life within oneself. It is necessary to remove mental disorders. Lust, anger and greed are sinful because they corrupt healthy minds. Brahmacharya is like one's greatest friend. Forgiveness is like the nectar of immortality. Contentment is eternal life. Spirituality does not come with ritualistic worship of any kind,

whether they are the rituals conducted at the time of birth or death, nor by going on pilgrimage, not by study of scriptures nor by difficult penances or other such practices which religion prescribes. Oh God! The path to peace is not so lengthy, complicated or difficult. With desires under control, without a trace of laziness, with the dread of grief and agony wiped away, only then will the feebleness of the mind vanish and make way for peace.



But how is this to be achieved? Leave aside the complications of life, stop mulling over problems, let life proceed on its own. Don't let the question of struggle arise within you. If there is time after work, commit your thoughts and feelings to writing. This is the path of meditation. As you go on writing, you will gain knowledge about your path, and one day Narendra! you will surely find your own path.

Transform yourself into a temple. Make your being into a holy place. Make yourself an ashram. This is the path to end sorrow. Make yourself into a lamp to illuminate your own path.

Where should I alight for your village? I am an ordinary sadhu. I am neither a saint, nor a famous personality. I do not perform miracles. My speech is ordinary and my intelligence is commonplace. If there is anything in me, it is bhavana, emotion. That is all.

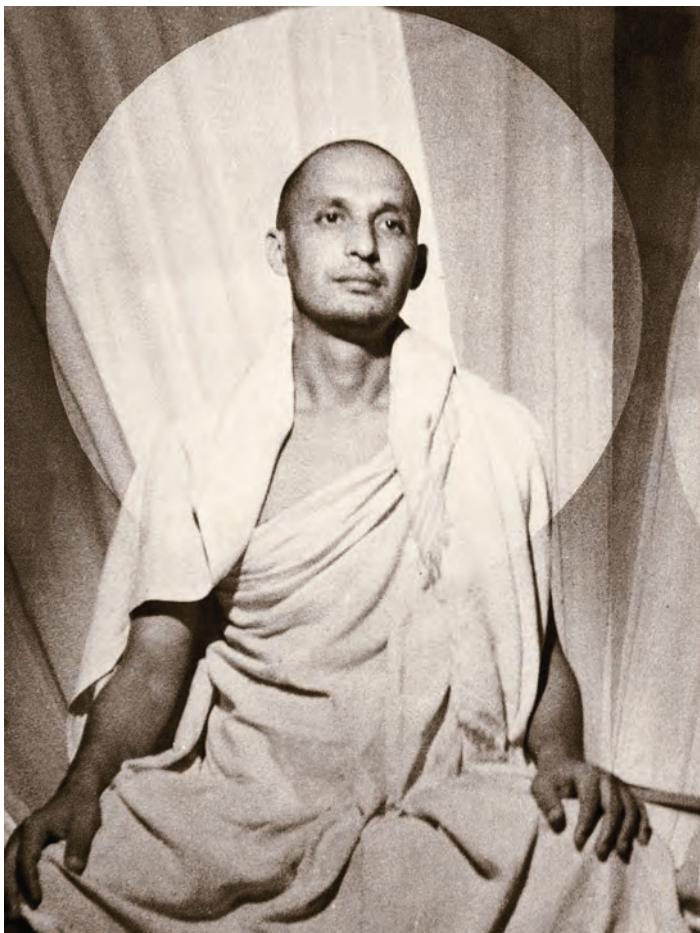
Iwani Subyand

Outwardly Swami Satyam and Major Narendra were *guru-bhais*, disciples of the same guru, but Swamiji guided him like a guru. His guidance was inspiring and precise. He was a guru of such stature that the pompous and pretentious gurus of today would appear shallow before him. He was a sadhu who never took credit for performing miracles, but innumerable miracles kept on happening around him in mysterious ways. Such a unique saint was Swami Satyam. Let us take a glimpse of Satyam's magic through the words of Dr Dharmadas Mishra:

In this transient world, how unlucky is the person who has never received love. Even more unfortunate is the person who reaches the shore of the river of love but goes back thirsty. Where brothers fight with each other due to selfishness, where hatred holds sway over hearts, where there is no faith in each other but loud showy talks of false love are made, where there is no humility and the prestige of the clan is arrogantly displayed, where social life is totally chaotic – what else can one expect in such a dark, desolate place except the shrill cries of owls? It was in such circumstances that I had the good fortune to have darshan of my gurudev, Swami Satyananda Maharaj, whom we believe to be the very embodiment of *satyam*, truth. His arrival in our village was pure divine intervention, illuminating our village Raipur Kalchuriyan with wisdom. This took place in 1957.

Lust, anger and greed are the main cause of social disaster. Amongst them, greed is the most peculiar. A greedy person is not scared of anything in this world. If there is one thing he is scared of, it is death. This is the reason why is really a coward, he always panics. In a life full of fear, these questions always arise: 'What happens after death? Is there rebirth or not? What is God and where is he?' I was surrounded by such questions when I first came face to face with my guru. Ignorance does not like to hide behind knowledge, its very existence fades away in the light of knowledge. To come to terms with such a situation is very difficult and painful.

One fine day, we witnessed the cosmic form of gurudev. Our eyes were blinded by his radiance. A brilliant aura was emanating from him and it spread into the crowd of people in a very natural



manner. Without any effort, the entire village got illuminated and the light entered each and every home. Business and trade which had remained at a standstill for years was reactivated. A desultory existence was infused with new hope. People who were previously neglected received attention. The untouchables received protection. Schools and clinics were opened. Knowledge and wisdom sprouted. Mother Earth was proud to see her hardworking sons. Seeing this self-generated strength, the government also came forward to welcome the effort. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that the spinning wheel is

akin to the sun, the other businesses are like lesser stars. We had the good fortune to see that sun and other stars light up our lives by the grace of gurudev.

So, what happened next? Another light met Satyam's light. The distinguished saint, Vinoba Bhave, set foot in this village. With the support of gurudev, it was decided that the Spinning-wheel Cooperative should be inaugurated by Bhave. But he was not the least bit interested in inaugurating anything and it was not easy to convince him. All efforts had failed so far and we had lost hope. Gurudev too was silent as if he were the non-doer despite doing everything. This was the epitome of true non-attachment.

Moved by my earnest request and persuasion, Gurudev suggested that a personal request be written and given to Bhave. Gurudev was aware of my troubles. With a gentle smile, he wrote out a beautiful letter and handed it to me. I added a sentence at the end of that letter stating that 'whatever positive changes and revival had taken place in this village were due to the effort and inspiration



of Swami Satyananda.' Gurudev was upset when he came to know about this but I took a little advantage of his affection. This personal request was given to Vinobaji, which he accepted very happily and said, "I will certainly perform the auspicious opening ceremony. This is what I want." The cooperative was inaugurated with a lot of fanfare but in keeping with his earlier plans, Gurudev left the village before the inauguration, leaving everyone astounded.

Sometime later I asked him the reason for his leaving in that manner and he simply replied, "Look I don't do all this because of any great ambition or desire. I am only trying to follow my guru Swami Sivananda's mandate of going from door to door and shore to shore, kindling reawakening wherever I go."

Many years later, in 1984, when he established the Sivananda Math for the upliftment of the needy and downtrodden, I was reminded of what he did in my village. Perhaps the seed of this institution was planted in my village back then! Swamiji's selfless service to humanity has set a great example. It was this very aspect of Swamiji's personality which highly impressed Triyugi Narayan and he writes:

This incident is of 1957 when my uncle told me that a learned saint had come to the village of Raipur Kalchurian. People thronged to see him and listen to him throughout the day. I too decided to have darshan of the saint and set off for Raipur with a couple of friends. Those days, Sri Swamiji was living in the house of Narendra Singh who also happened to be a disciple of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. He had brotherly affection for Narendra and therefore, during his parivrajak days of wandering as a mendicant throughout India, Sri Swamiji chose to live with him during chaturmas, the two months of monsoon.

When Sri Swamiji first came here, the condition of this village was very deplorable. There was extreme poverty and unemployment. Theft and robbery were regular occurrences. Immoral practices, superstition, injustice and unethical acts were rampant. Even after independence, the village continued to remain completely neglected. There was no presence of any political party or social organization

in those days. In fact the entire area was under the control of three *thakurs*, landlords: Ravinandan Singh, Shatrusudan Singh and Mohan Singh, who ceaselessly oppressed the poor villagers. There was constant enmity and infighting amongst the three. There was shortage of necessary supplies but liquor was always available in plenty. Spoilt brats of the landowning Rajput clans were always under the influence of alcohol and would constantly quarrel and abuse, fight and be at each other's throat, due to which an atmosphere of terror and hopelessness prevailed.

The advent of Sri Swamiji into such a dreadful situation for the reawakening and deliverance of this village was pure divine intervention. We were indeed fortunate! The day we reached there, Swamiji was to address the villagers who had gathered in large numbers. The meeting was held in an open space between the house of Narendra Singh and an old temple. We saw Swamiji seated on a raised dais. His personality was magnetic. Young and fearless, he radiated a luminous aura. Since I was a good friend of Narendra, he introduced me to Swamiji and after respectfully greeting him, we took our place in the assembly.



First of all, Swamiji created a wonderfully conducive atmosphere with his devotional bhajans and then began his satsang. He reminded the people of their glorious past and drew their attention to its current miserable condition. He was vocal about the different problems and offered his suggestions and solutions. Without any hesitation, he proclaimed that the village was heading towards sure ruin because of the animosity and ill-will among its own people.

Swamiji commented, “Ravinandan Singh says that Shatrusudan Singh is evil, Shatrusudan Singh states that Mohan Singh is notorious and Mohan Singh says that Ravinandan Singh is very wicked. The end result is that all three are immoral and corrupt. Instead of fighting amongst themselves, it would prove beneficial if the three strong men of the village put their animosity aside and use their capabilities for constructive work so that the village prospers”. He called upon people to work together for the reconstruction of the village and expressed his hope that this village would become another Vrindavan whose lanes would be cleaned by sadhus like himself every morning!

The villagers were spellbound by Swamiji’s powerful speech. Never before had they heard anything like this! Each word of his had the impact of a bullet in the heart. The locals, hitherto terrified of the three landlords, were greatly inspired upon hearing Swamiji’s fearless clarion call.

Swamiji’s personality and his beliefs made an impact on me too. Gradually, the need to meet Swamiji every day became an addiction. In Raipur, the market place, school, post office and the fields were in close proximity. So for some reason or another, I managed to meet Swamiji every day. I always felt close to him and he was someone with whom I could open up my heart. I was twenty-four years old at the time, full of enthusiasm and burning zeal to do something. Swamiji often said that it is not universities but failures and hardships which really make and educate a man!

His doors were open to all, whether rich or poor, high or low. He treated everyone equally, showering his love and affection on all in equal measure. He was always surrounded by people from different walks of life and we all listened to him attentively, sometimes completely losing track of time.



Whenever he was alone, he would gather small children around him and playing the harmonium sing for them, and also teach them to sing. Beautiful, poignant songs such as ‘How can I touch the feet of the Lord, I am just a poor tribal woman’ made everyone emotional. He sang very well and his voice was extremely melodious and sweet. Whenever he sang, ‘Manjhi O Manjhi, Kitani door kinara’ in his special high notes, we would lose our physical awareness and be transported to a different realm. Some of his favourite songs were ‘Shivoham, Shivoham’, ‘Namamishamishan nirvaanroopam’, ‘Darshan do ghanshyam nath, ye ankhiyan pyasee re’. And the Guru strotam would constantly be on his lips.

Slowly, the magic of Swamiji began to manifest in the village. Ravinandan Singh, the uncrowned king of the region, who had never bowed down before anyone became his sincere devotee. Swamiji shifted base from the house of Narendra Singh, whom he called Premshakti, to that of Ravinandan Singh. The house where once drunkards and scoundrels flocked now was abuzz with Swamiji’s bhajans, kirtans and inspirational satsangs. The adage ‘Even the wicked improve if they are in good company’ proved true and the atmosphere of the village began turning from negativity towards



positivity. The arrogant Ravinandan Singh transformed into a humble child before Swamiji. He discontinued his pushups and other vigorous exercises and began practising yogasanas instead. Under Swamiji's guidance, he would regularly practise shirshasana at 4 am every morning. He definitely was a changed person. Swamiji's satsangs also brought about a change in many others and several people became his disciples, eventually going to Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, for training as well. Prominent among them was Dharmadas Mishra who was later initiated into sannyasa as well by Swamiji.

The change of heart of the arrogant landlord was nothing short of a miracle. Triyugi narrated the incident in a few words, but I want to elaborate on it. Let me tell you what Ammaji has written about this incident:

When Swamiji visited Rewa in 1959, he decided to go to the village of Raipur as well. As soon as he entered the village, the villagers warned him, "Mahatmaji, please return the way you came. Our despotic thakur doesn't mind snatching even the meagre belongings of sadhus and sannyasins."

"I have come here to pay a visit to that very thakur's home," replied Swamiji. "Please show me the way."

The villagers pleaded with him. "Please don't go, otherwise you'll surely be insulted and humiliated. Once a sadhu approached the thakur with his cow in tow. The thakur snatched the cow, gave the sadhu a sound thrashing and sent him packing. He always carries a rifle with him. Even the beggars are afraid of approaching him. So Maharaj, please drop the idea of meeting this brute."

"In that case," said Swami Satyananda with a smile, "I definitely have to meet him." So saying, he made his way to his doorstep.

At their first meeting, the thakur's behaviour towards Swami Satyananda was callous to say the least. In the end, he said, "Since my younger brother has sent you, I'll ask you to stay for a day in my house." Thakur Ravinandan Singh had a friend, Dharmadas Mishra, who was a retired superintendent of police. Both friends had satsang with Swamiji that day. When he was preparing to leave the next day, the thakur said, "Maharaj, stay on for another day or two."

"My guru has commanded me to have satsang with everyone, high or low, rich or poor," said Swamiji, "so I will stay in the temple nearby and have satsang with the villagers there."

"Well, in that case, I'll invite the villagers here. But you have to stay in my house," said the thakur emphatically.

A few villagers came, trembling with fear, when invited for Swamiji's satsang. As far as Swamiji's departure was concerned, it kept being postponed and he ended up staying at the thakur's residence for almost a month. Slowly the villagers also started attending Swamiji's satsangs in large numbers.

The thakur loved bhang, which was prepared for him daily. The practice of purdah was very strict for the womenfolk of the household. The gun culture was so ingrained in the region that even the ladies carried revolvers and little boys carried guns when they went to school. The thakur's family was extremely rich, but they were so money-minded that after each monsoon season they would bring out all the 'gold, silver and cash' and dry it in the sun for fear of it rotting!

Swami Satyananda's satsangs brought about a sea-change in the thakur's household. The womenfolk began attending the satsangs, the girls began attending school, the poor villagers also began to be invited for the satsangs. The thakur would now and then extend a helping hand to a poor, needy person. The day Swami Satyananda was finally leaving, the thakur handed him five hundred rupees.

"I cannot accept this," said Swamiji. "As a sannyasin, all I want is that others understand my teachings and try to live in accordance with them, in peace, brotherhood and harmony. You have given me food and clothing, and I'm sure you will arrange a ticket for my onward journey as well. Then what need do I have for this money?"

The thakur took out his revolver and aimed it straight at Swamiji. "Maharaj," he said, "I've looted many at gunpoint. What to speak of

sadhus, I haven't spared even beggars. And now with this very gun, I'll force you to accept this. For the first time in my life I'm giving instead of taking. If you don't accept it, I'll shoot you."

Swamiji was laughing, whereas two Ganga-Yamuna-like streams were flowing down the thakur's face . . . Presently Swamiji said, "Fine, I accept your contribution. Please send it to Satyavratji, he alone handles all my work, expenses and publishing of books. Whatever you send there will only help my mission." Such was the change of heart that Swami Satyam brought about in Thakur Ravinandan Singh and his friend, Dharmadas Mishra. He who was once the terror of the village became like a family member to all.

How did Swami Satyam perform this miracle of turning a hardened criminal into a sensitive human? The character of saints is as deep and boundless as the ocean, so I shall not offer any comments of my own. But yes! I have here a letter written by Sri Swamiji to Major Narendra Singh which elucidates his views on rural upliftment and progress.



Mount Abu
9-6-59

I can see the slow but steady progress of your village. It does take time to awaken a community which has been neglected for centuries. Whenever you go to Raipur on leave, do some meaningful constructive work with the support of all. On an individual level people may not appreciate this, but when the welfare of the larger public is at stake, there is no place for differences of any kind. Every person, good or bad should render support to the cause of public welfare. Why should we care about anyone's character or shortcomings? Anyone who comes forward to help is the best person for us, the people's leader.

If the villages develop, the economy of the nation improves. India is an agriculture-based country. Ninety percent of the people live in villages and are dependent on farming. Therefore, highest priority should be given to the social and economic development of villages. If people like Ravinandan, Dalbahadur, Dharmadas, Gusai Singh, Darogaji and Yogendra leave their differences aside and give their wholehearted cooperation, then what cannot this village, only 9 miles from the city of Rewa, achieve? Triyugi is doing his share of the work. Slowly a big change will come about. Even if some personal differences remain, people will not create any mischief in public welfare works. But yes, the leader has to be honest and selfless.

The support and cooperation of Dada Dalbahadur and others is all that is needed. Otherwise the saying '*anek yogi, math ujaad*', too many cooks spoil the broth, will prove true. Dada Dalbahadur should be grateful for the support he is getting from the people. Isn't it enough that there are no protests? The greatest obstacle is now removed. They will have to continue to work hard. There should be no expectation of a political post or economic benefit or the desire to crush people under the burden of obligations. All that we want is that Raipur plays the role of the torch bearer in these times of democracy. And not just Raipur but other villages nearby should also be helped in the path to progress. Everyone should happily support the movement towards rural development. The future of India can be bright only when villages prosper. Triyugi in particular is continuously doing his bit. He should be encouraged. He is a gem in this rural development movement.

Swami Suktanil

With the arrival of Swamiji, the fate of my village had taken a positive turn and signs of improvement were visible everywhere. Let us move ahead with the words of Triyugi, the jewel of the rural development movement, and take this tale forward:

Even though Raipur was quite a big village, it had been deprived of its politic and social rights. Despite being centrally located, it was ignored and state leaders and legislators had selfish interests in creating the district office in their own villages. I remember very clearly the time when the panchayat director of Madhya Pradesh was visiting Raipur. Fortunately, Sri Swamiji was present and he presented the case for Raipur as the best place for the district office so convincingly that the director had to give his approval for this change, despite protests from many politicians with vested interests, and eventually the office was opened there.

Sometime later, when Sri Swamiji came to Raipur, he was accompanied by his disciple, Leela Srivastava, and her son. This time Swamiji stayed at Narendra Singh's house and there were evening discourses by Leelaji and Swamiji every day. Swamiji also taught various asanas from time to time which were demonstrated by Leelaji and her son, while Swamiji explained their benefits.

Once Swamiji happened to visit Raipur in the summer of 1960. Agreeing to a special request from us, Swamiji participated in a five-day camp of one of our social organisations, Utthan Mandal, organized at the government school in Raipur. During this camp, all participants practised yogasanas at 4 am. The asanas were demonstrated by Ravinandan Singh himself under Swamiji's guidance and everyone practised accordingly.

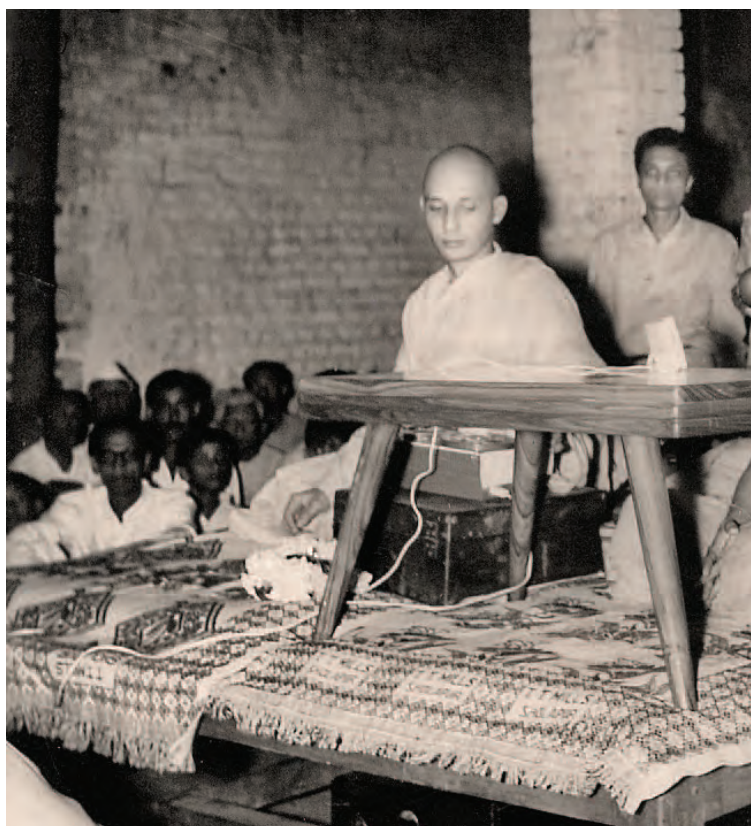
As a part of the same camp, a special meeting was held at the Harijan Colony of Raipur, where people from the harijan community gathered in large numbers. Swamiji's presence during the entire period was very special indeed. All the participants had their meals sitting together. While addressing the assembly, Swamiji shocked everyone by saying that God is the biggest *chamar*, cobbler, a community which is considered untouchable by orthodox people. He explained this point further by saying that people who work with



the skin of animals or leather are known as chamars and God having created the bodies of all creatures with skin has to be the biggest chamar! Such words were historic and revolutionary indeed for the people of Raipur.

A play, *Navprabhat*, a new beginning, was staged by members of the Utthan Mandal. For the first time, Rajput women shed the taboo of staying indoors and came to see the play, thanks to the encouragement and influence of Swamiji. During the show, the entire hall was filled to capacity. The play emphasized spiritual values as the solution to the social, political and religious evils of the times. Swamiji was so joyously overwhelmed after seeing this play that he felicitated the performers by placing his own geru upper cloth around their shoulders!

In 1961, the summer camp of the Utthan Mandal was held at Govindgarh. Swamiji accepted our invitation and graced the occasion, staying with us for five days. This time Swamiji came by bus via Allahabad carrying two large trunks with equipment such as projectors, screen and tape recorders. In this camp, besides the Utthan Mandal, workers of the Bharat Sevak Samaj and Harijan Sevak Sangh also participated. The Govindgarh municipality extended their full support to the organizers. Swamiji took charge of conducting the



program and also used the projector to demonstrate yogasanas so that thousands of people could watch and benefit from this. Narendra Singh, Ravinandan Singh, Leelaji, Satyavratji and Dharmashaktiji from Rajnandgaon had also come to participate in this program. It was here that the first blueprint of the International Yoga Fellowship Movement was prepared.

After the camp concluded, Swamiji stayed on in Raipur at Narendra Singh's house. His inspiring presence infused new vigour and vitality in the villagers. Swamiji's contribution towards the upliftment of this village can never be forgotten.

Thereafter Swamiji continued to expand his arena of work through the length and breadth of the nation and even beyond. He

travelled to Europe, America and Australia to spread the message and benefits of yoga. He was also involved with the construction of the ashram in Munger. As Swamiji became increasingly busy, he was unable to visit Raipur like he used to in the past. Once when he was in Rewa for a program, I went there to meet him.

Even though Swamiji's visits to our region were no longer possible, he remained in contact with the people, his affectionate blessings continued to be with them. I am personally indebted for his attention and affection. During his earlier visits, he graced my humble abode thrice and even had his meals with us. The training he imparted to the villagers in yogasana and pranayama practices had far-reaching benefits. Almost all the young men of our village began practising yogasanas regularly, which led to improvement in their health. In those days, I used to suffer from an allergy, constantly sneezing and coughing. Swamiji taught me the practice of neti and advised me to practise it in the early hours of the day which I continued to do for a long time.

I maintained my connection with Swamiji through letters. Whenever I needed advice I would write to him and he was always kind enough to reply. He wrote in red ink and his handwriting was like beautiful pearls spread over the page. His words were so inspiring that it is difficult to describe them. On the occasion of Guru Poornima, Swamiji would himself write encouraging and inspiring letters to many of us.

For several years, I played the role of Sri Swamiji's postman. From time to time, copies of *Yoga Sadhana Volumes I and II*, and other publications relating to yoga nidra, yogasanas and pranayama would come to me. I would load them onto my bicycle and distribute them amongst many people from the villages of Raipur, Mahsooba and Barehi who loved and respected Swamiji.

In 1976, Swamiji was passing by highway number 6 which was close to our village. This time he was not alone but along with him there was a convoy of 5 or 6 cars full of disciples, many of them foreign ones. During this trip, Swamiji and his group spent the night at the bungalow of a devotee near the highway. The devotee was none other than Ravinandan! He had moved out of Raipur and taken up residence in a house there. The news of Swamiji's arrival spread

like wild fire. I too picked up my bicycle and along with some friends went to pay my respects.

When I got there, I saw that Swamiji was surrounded by devotees who had come from Australia, New Zealand, England and many other foreign countries. All these white people had shaven heads, tilaks on their forehead and rudraksha malas round their neck. Seeing this, the pandit from our village could not resist himself. He had a very jovial nature and was a good friend of Ravinandan Singh. He made a witty remark in jest, "How amazing are these white-skinned people! They have already looted our gold and silver, diamonds and gems. Now all we are left with are these simple malas and they are taking away even this from us!" None of the foreigners understood what the pandit had said, so Swamiji translated it and everyone burst out laughing!

The next morning at 9 am, Swamiji came to my village. The Devi temple which had been under construction was now complete and Swamiji went straight there. In the temple premises, he met all local devotees with great love and affection and thereafter had tea and snacks with his disciples. Swamiji donated a complete set of his books in Hindi and English to the temple library and then he left for his next destination. As it happened, this was to be our last meeting with beloved Swamiji.

In the end, I would like to tell you about an episode which took place about nine or ten years ago. I had been living at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi while Sri Swamiji had left Munger and moved on to Rikhia to perfect higher sadhanas. A friend of mine had gone to Rikhia to have darshan of Sri Swamiji. On his return to Delhi, he told me that during his meeting, Sri Swamiji had enquired about my welfare. Upon hearing this, my happiness knew no bounds. I salute Swamiji's fantastic memory and cannot thank him enough for his blessings and affection . . .

Similar feelings of gratitude, love and respect for Swamiji course through me. Not just me, but the residents of my entire village as well. Not just them, but residents of all the surrounding villages too, for Swami Satyam had not restricted his work to a single village but had taken up the

task of improving the lives of people in the entire region. He left no stone unturned in this mammoth undertaking, about which Ammajji has this to say:

When Swami Satyam was in Raipur Kalchurian, the office-bearers of Bharat Sevak Samaj had requested him to visit some of the backward rural areas of that region and teach them some useful things. Swamiji had readily accepted their proposal. He stayed in Raipur Kalchuriyan from where he would visit the nearby villages. Every day he would cover many miles. During rains he had to walk through mud and slush. He would tell the villagers about health and hygiene, teach them how to make simple medicines using common herbs, and discuss the *Gita* and *Ramayana*. He had immense enthusiasm and zeal for this kind of work. In two months he covered sixty villages in one of the most backward regions of the state!

Swami Satyam's efforts brought about a mass awakening in the rural populace, but it also had an adverse impact on his health. Whenever he got drenched in a downpour, he would remain in those wet clothes and go on with his work. After a while he



contracted a bad cough and cold. His throat was giving him trouble and he had fever too, but still he didn't pay much attention. When his condition worsened he went to Delhi. He began making his own Ayurvedic medicine to treat himself. His throat wasn't improving, yet he hardly rested. His meetings and programs continued unabated, *bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya*, for the welfare of many, for the happiness of many . . .



Available *Satyam Tales* Titles

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

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

24. Glory to a Rishi
The saga of Padma Bhushan



25. Diggaja Returns
To relearn the a-b-c of discipleship

26. Yoga Everywhere
World culture indeed

27. Ma Ganga
And her beloved sons

28. Holidays in Munger
A true homecoming

SATYAM TALES 29

