

**Sri Ramakrishna
and
his disciples in Orissa**



Preface

Pilgrimage places like Varanasi, Prayag, Haridwar and Vrindavan have always got prominent place in any pilgrimage of the devotees and its importance is well known. Many mythological stories are associated to these places. Though Orissa had many temples, historical places and natural scenic beauty spot, but it did not get so much prominence. This may be due to the lack of connectivity. Buddhism and Jainism flourished there followed by Shaivism and Vainavism.

After reading the lives of Sri Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and direct disciples we come to know the importance and spiritual significance of these places. Holy Mother and many disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had great time in Orissa. Many are blessed here by the vision of Lord Jagannath or the Master. The lives of these great souls had shown us a way to visit these places with spiritual consciousness and devotion.

Unless we read the life of Sri Chaitanya we will not understand the life of Sri Ramakrishna properly. Similarly unless we study the chapter in the lives of these great souls in Orissa we will not be able to understand and appreciate the significance of these places. If we go on pilgrimage to Orissa with same spirit and devotion as shown by these great souls, we are sure to be benefited spiritually.

This collection will put the light on the Orissa chapter in the lives of these great souls and will inspire the devotees to read more about their lives in details. This will also help the devotees to go to pilgrimage in Orissa and strengthen their devotion. This attempt had been made by studying numbers of books as well as reminiscences of many monks and devotees. Many people were involved in this project including monks and devotees of Orissa especially Puri, Bhuvaneshwar, Kothar, Berhampur and Cuttack. They provided us not only references but also the rare and old photographs. The relevant information has also been collected from many websites like Ramakrishna Math Puri.

ORISSA, THE LAND OF TEMPLES

Orissa or **Odhisha**, a state of India, is located on the east coast of India, by the Bay of Bengal. Orissa was earlier known as Utkal or Kalinga, which was invaded by the Maurya Emperor Ashoka in 261 BC. This state has a history spanning a period of over 3,000 years. It has several popular destinations, some of which are Puri, Konark, Bhuvaneshwar, Chilika Lake. The Jagannath Temple of Puri, the Sun Temple of Konark, the Lingaraj Temple of Bhuvaneshwar and the Barabati Fort of Cuttack are important in the archaeological history of India.

BHUVANESHWAR

Bhuvaneshwar is the capital of Orissa. Historically Bhuvaneshwar has been known by different names such as Toshali, Kalinga Nagari, Ekamra Kanan, Ekamra Khetra and Mandira Malinya Nagari. With its large number of Hindu temples, Bhuvaneshwar is often referred to as a Temple City of India. It is also said to be the seat of Tribhuvaneshwar or Lord Lingaraj.

Lingaraj Temple: The 11th century Lingaraj temple of Bhuvaneshwar is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The surface of the 54.86 mt high Lingaraj temple is covered with carvings. According to the tradition the Lingaraj Temple is visited before visiting the Jagannath temple at Puri. The temple is adorned with beautiful images and carvings on its spire. The temple has the Trident of Lord Shiva and the Chakra of Lord Vishnu on either side of its main gate. A pond named **Bindu Sagar** lying just north of the Lingaraj temple, is said to contain water from every holy stream, pool and tank in India. There are a number of temples and shrines around it. In the centre of it is a water pavilion where, once in a year, the Lingaraj temple's deity is brought for ritual bathing. There is also a temple of Divine Mother named Kedar Gauri where there is a well called Gauri Kund.

Another important temple in Bhuvaneshwar is **Mukteshwar** temple. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Its ornamental gateway which is known as torana shows the influence of Buddhism.

Another fascinating temple in Bhuvaneshwar is **Rajarani** Temple. It is wonderfully constructed from red and gold sandstone, which is locally called as Rajarani. Hence, it is called Rajarani Temple. This temple doesn't have a presiding deity.

Other important temples of Bhuvaneshwar are **Vaital Deul** Temple dedicated to Goddess Chamunda, located near the Bindusagar Lake, **Parasurameshwar** Temple, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva, and **Brahmeshwar** Temple is the first temple to portray the musicians and dancers on its external walls.

Ramakrishna Math Bhuvaneshwar: Swami Brahmananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, started a centre at Bhuvaneshwar in 1919 as a retreat centre for monks. This Math was sanctified by the visits of many direct disciples like Swamis Shivananda, Saradananda, Akhandananda, Turiyananda, Subodhananda, Vijnanananda and others.

AROUND BHUVANESHWAR AND PURI

Khandagiri and Udayagiri (Jain Heritage): The twin hills of Khandagiri and Udayagiri, 8 km from Bhuvaneshwar railway station, served as the site of an ancient Jain monastery, which was carved into cave like chambers in the face of the hill. These caves, with artistic carvings date back to the 2nd century BC. Of particular note of their artistic carvings are the Rani Gumpha (Queen's Cave) and the Hati Gumpha (Elephant Cave). In the Hati Gumpha the chronicles of King Kharavela's reign are carved. *Holy Mother visited this place and meditated in one cave.*

Dhuli Giri: Dhuli 9 km away from Bhuvaneshwar Math looking down on the plains that bore witness to the gruesome war waged on Kalinga by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka the Great, stand the rock edicts of Dhuli. It was here that Ashoka, filled with remorse after the Kalinga War in 261 BC, put an end to his bloodthirsty campaign and

turned to Buddhism. Ashoka erected two main edicts in Kalinga, one in Dhauli and the other in Jayagarh. The principles of Ashoka, which reflect his compassion, were inscribed on all the other edicts in his empire except Kalinga. A sculpted elephant, the universal symbol of Lord Buddha, tops the rock edicts. The Shanti Stupa or the peace pagoda, built through the Indo-Japanese collaboration, is located on the opposite hill.

Nandankanan: It is a Biological Park around 20 km away from Bhuvaneshwar where a variety of animals are kept in their natural habitat. A centrally located lake divides the Zoo from the Botanical Gardens. Tigers, Lions, Clouded Leopards, Black Panthers, European Brown Bear, Himalayan Black Bear, Gharials, Rosy Pelican, Grey Pelican, Indian Python, King Cobra, etc. are among the attractions of the zoo, which is famous for its White Tigers. The exotic Botanical Garden on the other side of the zoo preserves varieties of indigenous plants.

Konark: Konark, which is near Puri, is famous for its Sun temple. The Orissan King Narsimhadev built it in mid 13th century. The temple is a great architectural achievement conceived as the chariot for the Sun god with 24 wheels, 7 horses pull the temple and 2 elephant-crushing lions guard the entrance. Today the main sanctum of the temple is in ruins, but the Dance Hall and Audience Hall are intact. The most amazing fact is that the number twelve is closely related to this temple.

Neel Madhav: On the bank of river Mahanadi, 90 km from Bhuvaneshwar is a beautiful temple of Neel Madhav in Khandapara of Puri district. Descendents of the hunter who shoot the arrow in the leg of Sri Krishna worship Neel Madhav. This temple was constructed earlier than the Jagannath temple at Puri. It is believed that the Vighraha of Lord Jagannath was brought from this place.

JAGANNATH PURI

The name Puri perhaps took the shortened form from Purusottama Puri or Jagannath Puri. The holy land of Lord Jagannath, the paramount deity of Puri, is known by several names. It is mentioned in Puranas as Srikshetra, Neelachala, Neeladri, Purusottama Dhama, Purusottama Kshetra, Purusottama Puri, Jagannath Puri and Shankhakshetra. Shankha means conch shell. The geographical shape of Puri resembles a right oriented conch shell, the 'Dakshinavarta Shankha'. It is in this shape of conch that all the sacred centres like temples, mathas, sacred tanks, trees and various other sacred sites are located. Shankha Kshetra is about ten miles in extent, of which a part is submerged in the sea and the remaining rises above. In the centre of the area lies the elevated part known as Nilagiri where Lord Vishnu resides in the famous temple in the form of Jagannath or Lord of the world. Puri is 60 km away from Bhuvaneshwar. The biggest attraction of Puri is the Jagannath temple, where Lord Jagannath is seated with his sister Subhadra and elder brother Balbhadra.

History: The legendary account of Jagannath's creation as mentioned in the 'Skanda Purana', 'Brahma Purana' and other Puranas state that originally Lord Jagannath was worshipped as Neel Madhav by Viswavasudhana, a Savar King (Tribal Chief) secretly in the forest. Having heard about the deity, King Indradyumna of Kalinga, sent a brahmin, Vidyapati, to locate the deity. After much toil and tactics, Vidyapati succeeded in locating Neel Madhav. However the king failed to catch a glimpse of the deity. At last, the king's determination to have a glimpse of the deity was rewarded by the gods. He had an oracular dream in which he was instructed to worship Lord Jagannath- an Incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He was asked to build the idol with a piece of Neem wood that would be found at the seashore. As per the prophecy, the king found the Neem wood at the seashore and requested Lord Vishwakarma, the heavenly mason, to model the idol of Lord Jagannath. Vishwakarma accepted the offer only on one condition that nobody should disturb him or steal a look until he had finished doing his work. The king accepted the condition and Vishwakarma began his work. However, being very curious, the king stole a glance at Vishwakarma's studio. The idol was still incomplete. Vishwakarma

became very angry. He left the place without completing his work. Hence the idols are in the present form.

The **Vimala Devi** temple within the Jagannath temple premises happens to be one of the ancient sites of fifty-one 'pithas' where sacred limbs of Devi Sati are believed to have fallen.

Jagannath Temple: According to recently discovered copper plates from the Ganga dynasty, the construction of the current Jagannath temple was initiated by the ruler of Kalinga, *Anantavarman Chodaganga Dev*. The *Jagamohana* and the *Vimana* portions of the temple were built during his reign (1078 - 1148 CE). However, it was only in the year 1174 CE that the Orissan ruler *Ananga Bhima Deva* rebuilt the temple to give a shape in which it stands today. The temple dominates the landscape for kilometres around being one of the tallest temples in Orissa (about 65 metres).

Buddhist Origins: Some archaeologists theorize that there existed a Buddhist stupa at the site of the present one, which may have housed the tooth relic of the Buddha before it was transported to its present location in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Around that period Buddhism was assimilated within the Vaishnava fold, whence Jagannath worship gained popularity. This was in the 10th century, during the reign of the Somavamshi kings of Orissa. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh emperor, had donated massive amounts of gold to this temple.

Cultural Integrity: Srikshetra of Puri Jagannath, as is commonly known, can verily be said to be a truthful replica of Indian culture. To understand this culture, one has to have some idea of the history of this land, which again is different from that of other countries of the world. Indian history does not contain accounts of imperialistic aggressions or invasions into the territorial integrity of any nation.

Starting from Lord Jagannath himself, history has it that he was a tribal deity, adorned by the Savaras, as a symbol of Narayan. Another legend claims him to be Nila Madhava, an image of Narayana made of blue stone and worshipped by the aboriginals. He was brought to Nilagiri (blue mountain) or Nilachala and installed there as Jagannath in company with Balaram (Balabhadra) and Subhadra. The images made of wood are also claimed to have their distant linkage with the aboriginal system of worshipping wooden poles. To cap it all the Daitapatis, who have a fair share of responsibilities to perform rituals of the Temple, are claimed to be descendants of the aboriginals or hill tribes of Orissa. So we may safely claim that the beginning of the cultural history of Srikshetra is found in the fusion of Hindu and Tribal Cultures. This has been accepted as a facet of our proud heritage. The three deities came to be claimed as the symbols of Samyak Darshan, Samyak Jnana and Samyak Charita usually regarded as Triratha (of the Jaina cult), an assimilation of which leads to Moksha (salvation) or the ultimate bliss.

Lord Jagannath is worshipped as Vishnu or Narayan or Krishna and simultaneously regarded as the Vairava (Shiva the formidable) with Vimala (the Vairavi or the consort of Shiva) installed in the campus of the temple. So ultimately we find a fusion of Saivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism of the Hindu religion with Jainism and Buddhism in the culture of Jagannath and the cultural tradition so reverently held together in Srikshetra.

Structure: The huge temple complex covers an area of over 4,00,000 square feet (37,000 m²), and is surrounded by a high fortified wall. It contains at least 120 temples and shrines. With its sculptural richness and fluidity of the Orissan style of temple architecture, it is one of the most magnificent monuments of India.

The main temple is a curvilinear temple and crowning the top is the 'Srichakra' (a eight spoked wheel) of Vishnu. Also known as the "Nilachakra", it is made out of Ashtadhatu and is considered sacrosanct. The temple tower was built on a raised platform of stone and, rising to 214 feet (65 m) above the inner sanctum where the deities reside, dominates the surrounding landscape. The pyramidal roofs of the surrounding temples and adjoining halls, or mandapas, rise in steps toward the tower like a ridge of mountain peaks. The main shrine is enclosed by a 20 feet (6.1 m) high wall. Another wall

surrounds the main temple. This temple is one of the tallest monuments in the country, its height is about 214 feet from the ground level. It stands on an elevated platform of stone measuring about 10 acres, which is located in the heart of the down town and presents an imposing sight. The temple is bounded by two enclosures. The inner enclosure is 400' x 278' and is known as kurma bedha. The outer enclosure is of 665' x 644' with the height varying from 20'to 24' is popularly known as Meghanad Prachir.

The Singhadwara: The **Singahdwara**, which in Sanskrit means the Lion Gate, is one of the four gates to the temple and forms the Main entrance. The Singhadwara is so named because two huge statues of crouching lions exist on either side of the entrance. The gate faces east opening on to the **Bada Danda** or the Grand Road. The **Baisi Pahacha** or the flight of twenty two steps leads into the temple complex. An idol of Jagannath known as **Patita Pavana**, which in Sanskrit, means the "Saviour of the downtrodden and the fallen" is painted on the right side of the entrance. The statues of the two guards to the temple Jaya and Vijaya stand on either side of the doorway. Just before the commencement of the Ratha Yatra the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are taken out of the temple through this gate. On their return from the Gundicha Temple they have to ceremonially placate Goddess Mahalakshmi, whose statue is carved atop the door, for neglecting to take her with them on the Yatra. Only then the Goddess allows them permission to enter the temple. A magnificent sixteen-sided monolithic pillar known as the Arun stambha stands in front of the main gate. This pillar has an idol of Arun, the charioteer of the Sun God Surya, on its top. The pillar originally installed in the Sun temple of Konarak was shifted to Puri by the Raja of Khurda.

Other Entrances: Apart from the Singhadwara, which is the main entrance to the temple, there are three other entrances facing north, south and west. They are named after the sculptures of animals guarding them. The other entrances are the **Hathidwara** or the Elephant Gate, the **Vyaghradwara** or the Tiger Gate and the **Ashwadwara** or the Horse Gate.

Deities: The central forms of Jagannath, Balabhadra and the goddess Subhadra constitute the trinity of deities sitting on the bejewelled platform or the **Ratnavedi** in the inner sanctum. The Sudarshan Chakra, idols of Madanmohan and Bishwadhatri are also placed on the Ratnavedi. The deities of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan Chakra are made from sacred Neem logs known as Daru Bramha. Depending on the season the deities are adorned in different garbs. Worship of the deities pre-date the temple structure and may have originated in an ancient tribal shrine.

Minor Temples: There are numerous smaller temples and shrines within the Temple complex where active worship is regularly conducted. The temple of **Mahalakshmi** has an important role in rituals of the main temple. It is said that preparation of food as offering for Jagannath is supervised by Goddess Mahalakshmi.

The temple kitchen: The temple's kitchen is considered as the largest kitchen in India. Tradition maintains that all food cooked in the temple kitchens are supervised by the Goddess Mahalakshmi herself. It is said that if the food prepared has any fault in it a dog appears near the temple kitchen. The temple cooks or Mahasuaras take this as a sign of displeasure of Mahalakshmi. All food is cooked following the rules as prescribed by Hindu religious texts. Cooking is done only in earthen pots with water drawn from two special wells near the kitchen called Ganga and Jamuna. The food after being offered to Jagannath is distributed as Mahaprasad to devotees in the Ananda Bazar located to the North of the Singhadwara inside the temple complex.

Festivals: There are elaborate daily worship services. Many festivals are held each year attended by thousands of people. The most important festival is the Ratha Yatra or the Chariot or Car festival. In a year that has two months of Ashadh which is usually once in twelve years the wooden idols of the deities are replaced during the Nabakalevara ceremony. On Akshaya Tritiya day every year, the Chandan Yatra festival marks the commencement of the construction of the Chariots of the Ratha Yatra. On the Purnima of the month of Jyestha the gods are ceremonially bathed and decorated every year on the

occasion of Snana Yatra. Many other festivals like Dol Yatra and Jhula Yatra are celebrated every year.

Ratha Yatra: The famous Ratha Yatra festival is held at Puri every year in the month of Ashad (June-July). It is held to commemorate the journey of Sri Krishna from Gokul to Mathura. In this festival, the idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra are brought out of the temple, and placed in three chariots in procession upto the Gundicha Temple at the end of the main road Badadanda Sahi. The return journey takes place after seven days.

Gundicha Temple: It is located some 3 km northeast of the Jagannath temple at the other end of Grand Road. It is the birthplace of Lord Jagannath, where the Brahma Daru or Sacred Log was carved into three deities- Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Also known as Masi Ma's (aunt's) house, this architecturally prosaic temple is cleaned on the day before the Ratha Yatra. During the Car festival, the deities remain in Gundicha temple for seven days, where the Lord is offered a delicacy known as Podapitha (fire baked cake). *Holy Mother visited this place with others.*

Gambhira: Near the main temple there is a place where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stayed for 13 years and spent the final years of His manifested pastimes on this earthly planet. Kasi Mishra's house, also known as Gambhira, and the Radha Kanta Math. Gambhira is located close to Siddha Bakula. It is about half a km from the Lion Gate going toward Swarga Dwara or the sea. One can look through a small barred window into the room called "Sri Gambhira". This is the room where Sri Chaitanya lived. There is a lamp here that remains always lit and never goes out. One can see Sri Chaitanya's original wooden sandals, His quilt, water pot, and bed. Sri Chaitanya lived for 13 years in this room. *Holy Mother visited this place with others.*

Govardhan Pitha of Shankaracharya: Puri is among the four sacred Dhams (Puri, Dwarka, Rameswaram and Badrinath) of the Hindus founded by Shankaracharya. Adi Shankaracharya established the eastern monastery of Puri in 486 B.C. On the auspicious day of Vaishakha Shukla Dashami 483 B.C. the Holy Lotus Hands of Adi Shankaracharya restored and reinstalled the holy idol of Lord Jagannath and on the same day he ordained his first disciple "Padmapadacharya" as the first "Jagadguru Shankaracharya" of Puri Peetham. *Holy Mother visited this place with others.*

Tota Gopinath Temple: Located by the beach in the Swargadwar area, this temple is 5 minutes walk from the Chatak Parvat Purushottam Gaudiya Math. On the far left altar is Lord Balaram with His two wives, Revati and Varuni. On the middle altar is Tota Gopinath in sitting posture, accompanied by black deities of Radha and Lalita. On the right altar are the deities of Radha-Madana Mohan and Gaura Gadadhar. *Holy Mother visited this place with others.*

Indradyumna Sarvora: It is one of the five sacred tanks of Puri and is located northwest of Gundicha temple. It has a small shrine of the famous King Indryadyumna believed to be the one who made this grand Jagannath temple originally. The complex also houses a Bal Gopal Temple. *Holy Mother visited this place with others and took bath in it.*

Narendra Sarovara: The Narendra Sarovar covering an enormous area of 3.24 hectares is located northeast of the Jagannath Temple. A small temple on an island within the tank is dedicated to Lord Jagannath, Balarama and Subhadra. It is here that the acclaimed Chandana Yatra or the boat festival is held. Lord Madan Mohan supposed to be the representative of Lord Jagannath is taken for a boat ride that is fully decorated with a flower known as Chapa. *Holy Mother visited this place with others.*

Atharanala: The Atharanala Bridge, believed to have been built towards the end of the 13th century A.D., crosses the Madhupur stream. It is 290 feet in length. It is composed of eighteen spans, ranging from seven to sixteen feet across. This bridge is at the entrance of Puri. It has 18 arches. "Athara" means 18. This bridge is symbolic of the emotion of arriving or departing from Jagannath Puri. The present bridge is an addition,

constructed directly on top of the original brick bridge. One can see the temple 'Chakra' from it. *Holy Mother visited this place and told everybody the story of King Indryadyumna and his sacrifice.*

Sakshi Gopal Temple: It is 23 km from Puri. Sakshi Gopal is also known as Satyabadis. The temple of the Sakshi Gopal is said to have been built in the 19th century. There is a legend about Sakshi Gopal. It is believed that Lord Krishna arrived at Sakshi Gopal to end a dispute between two Brahmins. It is also believed that King Prataprudra Deva brought the image of Lord Krishna, after he was victorious in Kanchi. Sakshi Gopal houses a temple that contains the life size image of Lord Krishna. The idol of Lord Krishna at Sakshi Gopal depicts Lord Krishna with a flute and with Radha standing on his left. The temple of Sakshi Gopal is said to be a miniature of the Jagannath Temple of Puri. **Story:** This is an important Temple that is dedicated to Sakshi Gopal. Sakshi Gopal means "*The Witness Gopal*". This Deity was originally in Vrindavan. Once two Vidyanagara Brahmins, one elderly and the other young, after touring many places of pilgrimage finally reached Vrindavan. While in Vrindavan, to reciprocate with the younger Brahmin the service he had rendered him, the older Brahmin promised his daughter in marriage. He made this promise before the Gopal deity in Vrindavan. Some time later, after having returned to Vidyanagara, the young Brahmin reminded the older Brahmin of his promise. Due to pressure from his family members, the elderly Brahmin said he could not remember having made any such promise. The young Brahmin then returned to the Vrindavan and told the whole story to Gopalji. Being obliged by the young man's devotional attitude Sri Gopal followed him to South India, where he bore witness to the elderly Brahmin's promise. Hence by the Lords grace the marriage was performed. The deity was later moved to Cuttack, then to the Jagannath temple and finally to its present location, 23 km from Puri. *Holy Mother visited this place.*

Chilika Lake: (Chilika Lake) It is a brackish water lagoon, spread over Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Orissa on the east coast of India, at the mouth of the Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal. It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest lagoon in the World. It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent. According to a survey, 45 percent of the birds are terrestrial in nature, 32 percent are waterfowl, and 23 percent are waders. The Lagoon is also home to 14 types of raptors. Around 135 rare and endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins have also been reported. In the heart of Chilika the famous Temple of Goddess Kalijai is situated in a small island. The island has connection through motorboat from Balugaon (90 Km from Bhuvaneshwar on National High Way-5 towards Madras). *Holy Mother saw Chilika Lake from the train on her way to the South. She saw cranes moving in groups and many kinds of birds were flying in the blue sky. Holy Mother showed it to everybody and offered pranams to the bird Nilkanth.*

Kshira Chora Gopinath Temple: It is located in Remuna, a small town 9 kms east of Balasore, about halfway between Calcutta and Puri. It is said that Sri Rama carved 'Gopinath' with His arrow and that Sita worshiped this deity in Chitrakut. King Langula Narasingha Dev, the king of Orissa, brought this deity to Remuna in the 13th century from Chitrakut. One can get delicious 'Kshira' here call 'Amrita-Keli'. Sri Gopinatha is known as "Kshira Chora Gopinatha" because he stole and hid a pot of 'Kshira' out of love for Madhavendra Puri.

Alalanatha: It is also known as Brahmagiri. It is about 25 kms from Jagannath Puri. There is a temple of Lord Jagannath here, and a large stone slab marked with the impression of Sri Chaitanya's transcendental body. The stone melted while he lay there in ecstasy. Sri Chaitanya would often come here during the two weeks when Lord Jagannath remains in seclusion before the Ratha Yatra festival.

Ramakrishna Math Puri: It is located at the seashore at Chakratirtha where the first holy wooden log (Daru) was embarked for the deity of Lord Jagannath (Daru Brahma) and wherefrom the eye-catching radiant beauty of the rising sun arising from the Bay of Bengal is visible.

Sri Ramakrishna Basu, the only son of Sri Balaram Basu, a noted devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, also happened to be a very large hearted person like his father. He donated this property to Ramakrishna Math in 1916. The Math at Chakratirtha was started subsequently in 1932. The land and the buildings were said to have been sanctified by the presence of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swamis Brahmananda, Saradananada, Vijnanananda and some other direct disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Mahendranath Gupta ("M") stayed here and is said to have worked on the Gospel of the Master (Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita) in one of the two rooms in the front.

Guru Nanak in Puri: Guru Nanak went to Puri to have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. But the pandas did not allow him to enter the temple thinking that he was a muslim. It was the time for evening prayer. Sitting out side the temple, Guru Nanak composed a song in praise of God. He sang with such devotion that people gathered around him even the people inside the temple came near him. This song has become very famous and is sung in Gurudwaras.

References:

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CHAITANYA IN NILACHAL

Nimai was born on Dol Purnima day, on 4th February 1486 in the evening at Mayapur in the township of Navadweep. Coincidentally the lunar eclipse had also just started when he was born. His father Jagannath Mishra was a learned Pandit and his mother Sachidevi was very pious woman. His life as an infant and as a child was very much reminiscent of that of Sri Krishna himself. At nine he was invested with the sacred thread and admitted to the performance of Vedic duties. However, his father died soon leaving mother Sachidevi as his sole guardian. She took care to see that Nimai got the best education possible and put him under the tutelage of Pandit Gangadas, a person of impeccable character and unrivalled scholarship. Soon Nimai distinguished himself as the best pupil under the pandit and proved himself quite adapt in debate. Having mastered literature and grammar, he now turned to the study of logic. At sixteen Nimai started a Sanskrit School (tol) of his own and married Laxmi, the daughter of a noted Nyaya Pandit. She died after a year by snakebite. His mother got him married again to Vishnupriya.

He undertook a pilgrimage to Gaya to perform the Pinda-Dana or obsequies for the salvation of his ancestors. This was the turning point in his life. After the Pinda rites when he worshiped at Vishnupada, a shrine of the deity Gadadhar, a strange mood came over him and he fell into a trance. Like Radha, he also felt a pang of separation from Sri Krishna. Longing for Sri Krishna tossed his soul from sorrow to ecstasy and vice a versa. After returning to his place he could not continue the tol. He took Sannyas from Keshav Bharati who gave him the name Srikrishnachaitanya Bharati. (Chaitanyadev) Then he wanted to go to Vrindavan but his mother persuaded him to go to Nilachal (Jagannath Puri).

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu started walking rapidly to Nilachal accompanied by his close friend Nityananda and some of his intimate devotees. He crossed the border between Bengal and Orissa by boat. He landed on the holy land of Orissa at Prayag Ghat near Baleshwar. Then he started walking along with devotees. They came to Remuna village and had a darshan of Kshirachora Gopinath about whose Khir Prasad he had heard much. Next he halted at Jajpur where they took darshan of Virajadevi. Then they arrived at Cuttack where there was a temple of Sakshi Gopal. That time this temple was at Cuttack. Later it was shifted to the present location near Puri. Then they arrived at Bhuvaneshwar, the abode of Lord Shiva. After taking bath in Bindu Sarovar, they had the darshan of Lingaraj and Gauri, where they offered the puja. He danced and sang in in praise of Lord Lingaraj. (*Four famous Sarovars of India are- Kailas Man Sarovar, in Gujrat Kutch Narayan Sarovar, in Kishkindha Pampa Sarovar and in Bhuvaneshwar Bindu Sarovar.*) He was so much overwhelmed with Bhakti that he started reciting hymns in praise of the Lord. Then they had prasad. Later they came to Kamalpur, took bath in Bhargi River and had the darshan of Kapoteswar Mahadev. When he saw the flag of Jagannath temple from Kamalpur, he felt as if Sri Krishna was calling him. His joy knew no bounds and he fell into ecstasy.

He started moving towards Puri slowly and reached the entry point of city called Atharanala, a bridge with 18 arches. He rushed to the temple, entered the sanctum sanatorium to embrace Lord Jagannath. In the process he fell down and lost his outer consciousness. On his touching the feet of the idols, there was commotion and guards came running. Fortunately the Court Pandit of the King, Vasudev Sarvabhauma was present there. Recognising the divinity of the person he took him to his house. Later Sarvabhauma accepted him as his guru. Sarvabhauma's conversion meant the conversion of the whole scholarly world including King of Puri to Chaitanya's devotional cult.

His daily routine was to go for darshan of Lord Jagannath in the morning after bathing in the sea and then receiving Mahaprasad as alms. Later he used to sing Bhajan-Kirtan and then he would discourse on spiritual subjects and after that meditation and contemplation. He used to look with a great devotion at Lord Jagannath reclining on

Garuda Stambha, located inside the portico of the temple. He was afraid to go near the deities lest spiritual emotion overpowered him leading to his unconsciousness and falling down. He used to see Jagannath in the form of Sri Krishna.

After having a stay at Puri, he went on a pilgrimage towards southern and western parts of India. He visited various places of pilgrimage, such as Tirupati, Srirangam, Srishailam, Rameshwaram, Shringeri, Kanyakumari, Pandharpur, Pune, Dwarka, Somnath, Ahmedabad, Kandoba temple near Bhusaval, Pampa Sarovar in Kishkindha and at last Vidyanagar. After two years of pilgrimage and preaching of devotion for Krishna, he returned to Puri and stayed at the house of Kashi Mishra. The remote garden with all its natural beauty delighted him beyond measure and he lived there for the rest of his life. Before the Ratha Yatra he engaged himself and all his followers in cleaning the entire Gundicha temple. He took part in the festival along with his devotees, local as well as those who came from Bengal. Chaitanya and his party accompanied the Cars singing and dancing. When the Cars reached Balagandi which is between the main temple and Gundicha where all people, irrespective of caste and sex, are eligible to offer food to the deity. Sri Chaitanya entered the nearby flower garden for a little rest. It was here where Sri Chaitanya blessed the King Pratap Rudra of Puri. In the evening the procession reached the garden of Gundicha. Jagannath was to stay in that garden for nine days. The idea behind the procession is that every year Jagannath, who is none other than Krishna, wants to go from Dwaraka to Vrindavan where he sported with gopas and gopis. The garden of Gundicha was supposed to be that Vrindavan. He stayed this time in Puri for about three years spending much of his time in dancing and singing before Jagannath and attending the annual Ratha Yatra festival with devotees.

He left for Navadweep and took permission from his mother for going to Vrindavan. He returned to Puri and after a short stay started for Vrindavan. This time he visited Mathura, Vrindavan, Prayag and Varanasi. After his pilgrimage he finally settled down at Puri at the age of 30 in the year 1455 spending his time in constant adoration of Jagannath. He stayed in the house of Kashi Mishra except for occasional short stays at Alalanath, a small village about 16 miles south of Puri; it used to remind him of memories of Vrindavan. One day he ran in a frenzied mood to the Chatak hillock, a sand hill on the seashore taking it to be the Gowardhan hill and fell in ecstasy. Disciples Raghunath Das and Swarupa Damodar chanted the name of Krishna and then he came to normal consciousness.

Another day he went to the sea-side alone. Seeing the blue ocean he took it as a Yamuna river and rushed into the sea and was carried away by the waves. Fortunately he was caught in fishing net.

One full moon night Sri Chaitanya went to the Jagannath-Vallabha Park. The trees and creepers were in full bloom. The sight threw him into rapture; he started dancing to the singing of Geet-Govindam. When he came near the Ashok tree he beheld Sri Krishna standing there, he rushed to embrace him in the process he lost his consciousness and fell down.

Haridas was one of the most ardent and sincere companions of Sri Chaitanya. He was born in a Muslim family at Budan in Jessore district of the then Bengal and after his initiation into Vaishnavism he was given the name Haridas. His whole time was spent in meditation and reciting the name of God. He followed Sri Chaitanya to Puri. He stayed in a small cottage outside the Jagannath temple jurisdiction. Chaitanya visited him almost everyday. He admired him for his purity and devotion. When his last moment came Chaitanya and his companions chanted the holy name of the Lord. And after his death, his body was carried to the seacoast, where Chaitanya himself dug up the sand with his hands and made a burial place for him.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stayed for the last 13 years of his life at Kasi Mishra's house, also known as Gambhira. It is located close to Siddha Bakula, about half a km from the Lion Gate going towards Swarga Dwara or the sea. He did intense sadhana and namsankirtan there. Sri Chaitanya spent last few years of his life in interpreting of the

Madhur Bhava of Vraja Gopies to his close devotes. The Lilas carried out by him inside the cottage away from prying eyes is known as Gambhira Lila. He left his mortal coil at the age of 48 in the year 1533.

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND LORD JAGANNATH

Sri Ramakrishna never visited Lord Jagannath at Puri but he had an intense love and reverence for Lord Jagannath. He inspired many of his disciples to visit Puri and embrace the Lord. He had a deep reverence for Ganges Water, Vrindavan Raj (dust) and the Prasad of Lord Jagannath thinking all these as Brahman. Glory of Lord Jagannath and the fact that his prasad removes all distinctions of high and low as well as of caste fascinated him greatly. If we analyse his life and teachings, we can find many incidents which will show us his intimate relationship with Lord Jagannath. Let us discuss here a few of them.

Why he did not go to Puri: Sri Ramakrishna went on a pilgrimage to Varanasi with Mathurbabu. Mathur wanted to leave Varanasi and visit Gaya, but he had to give up that plan because the Master refused to go there. Master told us that while his father was in Gaya, he had a dream in which he was told that the Master would be born as his son. That is why the Master was named Gadadhar (Lord Vishnu in the temple at Gaya). The Master sometimes told us that he refused to go to Gaya with Mathur because he believed that if he saw the lotus feet of Gadadhar there, he would be overwhelmed with devotion, forget that he existed independently from Gadadhar, and become united with Him forever. The Master was firmly convinced that He who was born in previous ages as Ramachandra, Krishna, Gauranga, and others had descended to the world in his own body. We observed that an indescribable feeling would come upon him whenever there was a talk about a possible visit to Gaya, which he knew from his father's dream as the place of his origin, or whenever he heard about other sites where avatars had ended their divine play. The Master declared that if he were to go to any of those places, his body would not last; he would become absorbed in such deep samadhi that his mind would never come back to this world. At another time he expressed a similar notion at the proposal of visiting Puri where the divine play of Gauranga ended. In addition to this caution regarding himself, if his yogic vision revealed that any of his devotees was a part of or had risen from a particular deity, he would express a similar concern to the devotee and forbid him to visit the holy place that was associated with that deity."¹

Ramakrishna as Jagannath: On 15th July 1885, Ramakrishna said to M.: "I want to tell you something very secret. Once, in a spiritual mood, I felt intense love for Jagannath, love such as a woman feels for her sweetheart. In that mood I was about to embrace Him, when I broke my arm. It was then revealed to me: 'You have assumed this human body. Therefore establish with human beings the relationship of friend, father, mother, and son.'"

M. said that the Master told his devotees many times: "I am Lord Jagannath of Puri." M. continued: Once he sent me to Puri and instructed me as to what was to be done there. He told me that I should embrace Jagannath. I was anxious because it was almost impossible to do that. At last the Master created an idea in my mind. I carried quite a number of coins and bills in my pocket when I entered the inner sanctuary of the temple. The place was a little dark. I purposely scattered the coins and bills on the floor. When they heard the jingle of the coins, the priests began to collect that money. In the meantime, I climbed onto the altar and embraced Lord Jagannath. Someone saw me and raised a hue and cry. I got down immediately and began to circumambulate the deity. In the darkness, none could recognize the person who did it.

It was the Master who instructed me; it was he who gave me the idea; and it was also he who diverted the attention of the priests by creating greed in their minds. Now I wonder how I did such a heroic deed!

During his lifetime, the Master sent me to Puri a few times. He did not go to Puri. He said: "If I go to Puri, my body will not last." So he did not go. When I returned from Puri, the Master embraced me and said, "Here I embrace Lord Jagannath."²

Master's revelation about deities of Jagannath Puri: In regard to Buddha the Master shared the same belief as all Hindus: he always offered loving worship and reverence to Buddha as a divine incarnation, and he believed that the Buddha still

manifests in the holy triad in the temple at Puri-- Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram. When the Master heard about the glory of the holy shrine of Jagannath and that His prasada removes all distinctions of high and low status, as well as of caste, he was eager to visit Puri. But he gave up the idea when he learned that if he went there he might die; he realised through his yogic insight that the Divine Mother had different plans for him. Master firmly believed that the water of the Ganges is supremely purifying and that he considered it to be Brahma-vari, a liquid form of Brahman. Similarly, he strongly believed that partaking of the rice prasada (Atke) of Jagannath caused the impure minds of worldly people instantly to become pure and capable of grasping spiritual ideas. If he had to spend some time with worldly people, he would immediately afterwards take a little Ganges water and some dry rice prasada (Atke) of Jagannath, and he would ask his disciples to do the same.³

The Master had full reverence and love for Lord Jagannath. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in which his life events and teachings are recorded, we find many references regarding Lord Jagannath and Puri. It will be appropriate here to mention some of them.

It was Thursday, 29th March 1883. The Master had taken a little rest after his noon meal, when a few devotees arrived from Calcutta, among them were Amrita and the well-known singer of the Brahmo Samaj, Trailokya. Rakhala was not feeling well. The Master was greatly worried about him and said to the devotees: "You see, Rakhala is not well. Will soda water help him? What am I to do now? Rakhala, please take the prasada from the Jagannath temple." Even as he spoke these words the Master underwent a strange transformation.

Swami Adbhutananda narrated same incident in his words, "Once while staying at Dakshineswar, Rakhala [Swami Brahmananda] became sick. The Master told him: "Take this prasada of Lord Jagannath. Then you will be all right." Such is the effect of the prasada of Jagannath! You people don't believe that. The Master used to say, "Before you take your food, eat one or two particles of Jagannath prasada.""⁴

One day Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram Basu's house along with Rakhala Maharaj. Balaram took Sri Ramakrishna inside the house for refreshment. When he came back, he saw Rakhala eating Khaja Mahaprasada of Lord Jagannath. Like a child he snatched the Khaja from Rakhala and started eating it. Rakhala objected to it as he already had a bite of it. Sri Ramakrishna had one more bite of Khaja and returned the remaining portion to Rakhala saying, "Sharing of Lord Jagannath's Mahaprasada is allowed even if it is leftover by someone."

It was Friday, 26th September 1884. Suppose a man has set out with a sincere desire to visit Jagannath at Puri and by mistake has gone north instead of south; then certainly someone meeting him on the way will tell him: 'My good fellow, don't go that way. Go to the south.' And the man will reach Jagannath sooner or later. If there are errors in other religions, that is none of our business. God, to whom the world belongs, takes care of that. Our duty is somehow to visit Jagannath.⁵

It was Monday, 13th July 1885. One had to keep a good desire so that one may give up the body meditating on it. There are four holy places for the sadhus to visit. They visit three and leave out one. Many of them leave out Puri, the place of Jagannath, so that they can give up their bodies meditating on Jagannath.⁶

It was Tuesday, 14th July 1885, the day of the Car Festival. Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the house of Balaram Basu. Many devotees came there to meet him. Balaram had arranged for kirtan. When Sri Ramakrishna had heard a line or two of the song he went into samadhi. In the afternoon the small car of Jagannath, decorated with flowers, flags, and bunting, had been brought to the inner veranda. The images of Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram, were adorned with sandal-paste, flower garlands, robes, and jewellery. Sri Ramakrishna left the room where the professional musicians were singing and came to the veranda accompanied by the devotees. He stood in front of the car and pulled it by the rope. He began to sing and dance with the devotees in front of the car.

The music and dancing went on in the veranda as the car was pulled to and fro. A large crowd entered the house on hearing the loud music and the beating of the drums. Sri Ramakrishna was completely intoxicated with divine love. The devotees felt its contagion and danced with the Master in an ecstasy of love. It was a divine sight! Afterwards the Master sat in the big hall and told Pandit Shashadhar: "This is called *bhajananda*, or the bliss derived from the worship of God. Worldly people enjoy pleasure derived from lust and gold, and devotees attain the bliss of Brahman through the worship of God."⁷

It was Wednesday, 15th July 1885. Day was gradually breaking. Sri Ramakrishna had washed his mouth and was chanting the names of God in his sweet voice. ... He prayed to Jagannath in a very touching voice: "O Jagannath, Lord of Universe! O Friend of the World! O Friend of the poor! I am not, O Lord, outside Thy universe. Be gracious to me! While he sang in praise of Jagannath he was beside himself with divine love. ... Afterwards the Master sat in the small room with the devotees. He said, "I want to tell you something very secret. Why do I love boys like Purna and Narendra so much? Once, in a spiritual mood, I felt intense love for Jagannath, love such as a woman feels for her sweetheart. In that mood I was about to embrace Him; when I broke my arm. It was then revealed to me: 'You have assumed this human body. Therefore establish with human beings the relationship of friend, father, mother, or son.'"⁸

It was Monday, 10th August 1885. It was eight o'clock in the morning. The Master was talking to a devotee in Panchavati. The latter had dreamt of Chaitanyadeva. ... M. bathed in the Ganges and came to Sri Ramakrishna. The brahmani who was grief-stricken on account of her daughter's death also entered the room. The Master asked the brahmani to give M. some prasad to eat. BRAHMANI: "Please eat something yourself first; then he will eat." MASTER (*to M.*): "Take some prasad of Jagannath first and then eat." After eating the prasad, M. went to the Siva temples and saluted the deity.⁹

It was Friday, 28th August 1885. M. finished his bath in the Ganges and went to the Master's room. It was eight o'clock in the morning. He asked Latu to give him the rice prasad of Jagannath. The Master stood near him and said: "Take this prasad regularly. Those who are devotees of God do not eat anything before taking the prasad." M: "Yesterday I got some prasad of Jagannath from Balaram Babu's house. I take one or two grains daily."¹⁰

A few reminiscences of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna will be worth mentioning here which will shed more light on the association of the Master and his disciples with Lord Jagannath and Puri.

Manomohan Mitra: Once Manomohan and a friend decided to attend the Car Festival of Jagannath at Mahesh, which is a few miles north of Dakshineswar and across the Ganga. Since they had a great desire to take Sri Ramakrishna with them, they rented a boat that morning in Calcutta and stopped first at Dakshineswar. When the Master saw them he asked them where they were going. 'Sir, we are going to see Lord Jagannath at Mahesh', replied Manomohan. To Manomohan's surprise and joy, the Master said, 'Then I shall go with you'. The Master immediately began to get ready and asked his nephew Ramlal to accompany them. At Mahesh, seeing Lord Jagannath on the chariot, Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi. Manomohan and the others brought him to a safe place away from the crowd. Afterwards they visited the twelve Krishna temples at Ballabhpur and the Annapurna temple at Barrackpore. Adharmohini went with her husband on a pilgrimage to Puri and died there on March 23, 1900, while Manomohan repeated the name of the Lord at her side. In the Jagannath temple at Puri, Manomohan had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna on the altar in place of Lord Jagannath. When he repeatedly saw the Master, he shouted: "Victory to Lord Jagannath in the form of Ramakrishna! This experience uplifted his soul and kept him above earthly grief and pain at the death of his wife."¹¹

Lakshmi Didi: Lakshmi visited many holy places of India, such as Gaya, Varanasi, Prayag, Vrindaban, Navadwip, and Gangasagar, but she was particularly fascinated by Puri. Knowing this, some devotees built a house for her near the seashore

there and named it 'Lakshmi Niketan' (the abode of Lakshmi). In February 1924 she moved to Puri. Lakshmi's daily routine was very simple. She got up at three o'clock in the morning and after washing sat for meditation and japam. Afterwards she ate a little prasada, and at ten o'clock went for her bath. Then she again repeated her mantram until noon, when she took her lunch. At three o'clock, after taking some rest, she either talked to the devotees about the Master or practised japam. From six to eight in the evening she repeated her mantram, and then the devotees sang kirtan and read a chapter from the Srimad Bhagavatam. After taking some prasada and milk for supper she went to bed at ten o'clock. Lakshmi frequently experienced bhava samadhi and had visions of different gods and goddesses. Once she had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna on the altar of the Jagannath temple. She was convinced after that that the Master and Jagannath were one and the same. One day she went alone to bathe in the ocean, near Swargadwara, but was suddenly carried away by the strong undertow. About a mile away, near Chakratirtha, a cowherd boy rescued her and then disappeared. After returning home, Lakshmi went to see Lord Jagannath in the temple. She was amazed when she saw on the image of Balaram, the smiling face of that cowherd boy. She realized then that it was Lord Balaram who had saved her life. The Master had once told Lakshmi: 'If you cannot remember God, think of me. That will do'. This great assurance remained in Lakshmi's mind the rest of her life. Her love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna was deep and unfathomable, and she was never tired of telling others about the divine play which she had witnessed. In her own unique way she spread the Master's message and inspired many souls. The other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna greatly loved and respected Lakshmi, but Holy Mother especially had much affection for her. In Puri, even though Lakshmi's health began failing day by day, she continued to go into ecstasy. But despite the excellent care given by her disciples, she passed away on February 24, 1926, at the age of sixty two. Once, before she passed away, she described to Swami Saradananda a vision she had had: 'I saw a mountain of dazzling mica. On one side of that mountain were Lakshmi and Narayana, and on the other side was Sri Ramakrishna. I saw that the Master was surrounded by Holy Mother, Swamiji, Rakhai Maharaj, and others. I saw Yogin-didi and Golap-didi, and they told me: "O Lakshmi, here there is no problem of food and sleep or disease and grief. Living with the Master gives us uninterrupted bliss"¹²

The Master's niece Lakshmi recalled: "Once Balaram brought some prasada of Jagannath and gave it to the Master. The Master touched the prasada with his head and then went into ecstasy. He said: 'It is as if I am in Puri. There everything is large-- vast ocean, wide roads, and infinite Lord Jagannath! If I go there, this body will not last (meaning that he would merge into Jagannath).'"

In the spring of 1925 Lakshmi went to visit Lord Jagannath with her devotee Bipin. She was deeply immersed in the thoughts of the Master. Entering the temple, she saw the Master seated on a bench on the right side of the shrine. Lakshmi was delighted to see the Master and thought: "I am happy that the Master is able to see Lord Jagannath." The Master then said to Lakshmi: "I am close to Jagannath. Why are you so anxious? You were thinking of me, so here I am." On another occasion Lakshmi was a little sad because she could not see the Master in the temple. Then Jagannath appeared before her and said: "Don't be sad. I and your Ramakrishna are the same."¹³

Rani Rasmani: In 1850 Rasmani went on a pilgrimage to Puri to visit Lord Jagannath. In those days there was no train or good road to Puri from Calcutta. If pilgrims could afford it, they would travel by boat down the Ganga and then cross the Bay of Bengal. Rasmani started her journey with a large convoy of relatives, friends, guards, servants, food, and other necessities, requiring many boats. It was a long journey. As they reached the Bay of Bengal they were suddenly hit by a cyclone that scattered the boats in different directions. Night came and the ocean was still very dangerous. Rasmani ordered her sailors to anchor their boat near the shore, and then she disembarked with a woman attendant and started looking for some shelter. Seeing a light at a distance, they went towards it and found a tiny cottage belonging to a poor brahmin family. Rasmani did not

tell them who she was, but they graciously allowed the two women to pass the stormy night with them. The next morning she gave the family one hundred rupees. In the meantime the convoy had been reunited and Rasmani resumed her journey. On their way Rani Rasmani noticed that the road to Puri, beyond the Subarnarekha River, was in very bad condition. She later paid for its repair for the convenience of the pilgrims. At Puri she offered three diamond-studded crowns, costing 60,000 rupees to Lord Jagannath, Balaram, and Subhadra, the deities of the main temple. She also gave food and money to the temple priests and the poor.¹⁴

Balaram Basu: Balaram suffered very much from digestive troubles, and for twelve years he had to live on milk and gruel. In order to regain his health, he lived most of this period in Puri, the holy place of Jagannath on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. There he became acquainted with many Vaishnava monks, and this stirred his interest in spiritual life even more. His father and cousins began to worry lest Balaram renounce his family and become a mendicant. When Balaram came to Calcutta to attend his elder daughter's marriage, his cousins urged him to stay. In order to further persuade him, Harivallabh even bought a house at 57 Ramkanta Basu Street, which he offered to Balaram. But Balaram did not want to accept it. He feared that if he lived in Calcutta, he would not be able to make his daily visit to Lord Jagannath and have the company of holy people. But to satisfy his cousins, he decided to remain in Calcutta for a while and then return to Puri. While he was still living in Puri, Balaram had read about the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in the *Sulabh Samachar*, a journal edited by Keshab Chandra Sen. He had also received a letter from one of his family's priests, Ramdayal, giving a detailed account of Sri Ramakrishna's holy life. Ramdayal had met the Master personally and wrote to Balaram to come immediately to see him. What happened after Balaram met Sri Ramakrishna is history. He became the staunch devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master visited his home a hundred times. Whenever necessary the Master would stay overnight at Balaram's and there partake of the food offered to Lord Jagannath, their family deity, who was worshipped everyday in their home. The Master used to say: "Balaram's food is very pure. I can eat the food Balaram gives me with pleasure; it goes down my throat of its own accord, as it were. The members of his family have for generations been devotees and have been hospitable to monks and beggars..."

Swami Adbhutananda narrated in his reminiscences, "Balaram Babu arranged for the daily worship of Lord Jagannath in his home. The Master said that the food there was very pure. I have heard that the Master visited his home a hundred times and that Balaram Babu maintained a record of these visits. Balaram Babu also visited Dakshineswar very often. The Master once saw him in a vision as a member of a kirtan party led by Sri Chaitanya."¹⁵

Yogin-Ma: Although Yogin-Ma apparently was a householder, actually she was a nun. On November 20, 1900, she was initiated along with Swami Saradananda into *purna-abhisheka*, a special Tantric rite, by Ishwar Chandra Chakrabarty. She learned from him the secrets of Tantric sadhana. Later, at Puri, she was initiated into Vedic sannyasa by Swami Saradananda in the presence of Swami Premananda. She was too modest to make a show of her renunciation, however, and 'wore the ochre cloth only at the time of worship. At other times she wore the usual white cloth. Yogin-Ma had a deep respect for the monastic ideal. One day Swami Saradananda was dictating some letters to a young monk in his room when Yogin-Ma entered. Her foot accidentally touched the monk's cloth, and she immediately put her hands together and saluted him. The monk said: 'The touch of your foot is a blessing, Yogin-Ma. Please don't feel embarrassed'. Yogin-Ma replied: 'You are a monk. Your ochre robe is a symbol of renunciation. It is this renunciation that made Sri Ramakrishna great, and you are following in his footsteps. A little cobra is as poisonous as a big cobra'. Her words made the monk realize what a great responsibility lies in the wearing of the monk's robe.¹⁶

Gauri-Ma: It is hard for a person to live in one place who has gotten the taste of freedom in a wandering life. Moreover, comforts and an easygoing life are impediments

to monastic life. One day Gauri-Ma told her mother that she was going to Puri to visit Lord Jagannath and that she would return soon. Thus, Gauri-Ma left home again. From Puri she went to Sakshi Gopal, Alalanath, and Bhuvaneshwar, and she also visited some monasteries at this time. In 1880 Gauri-Ma became acquainted with Radhamohan Basu, a wealthy landlord of northern Calcutta. He had a large estate in Orissa and also a retreat in Vrindaban. Radhamohan, a devotee of Krishna, was greatly impressed with Gauri-Ma's renunciation and devotion. In 1882 Gauri-Ma accepted an invitation to visit his Calcutta home, and it was there that she met his son, Balaram Basu, who was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Balaram also was a friend of Gauri-Ma's elder brother.¹⁷

M. (Mahendranath Gupta): Sometimes M. would go to the railway station to watch the stream of pilgrims returning from Jagannath at Puri. He liked to see their bright, serene faces, and occasionally he would ask for a little prasada from them. He had heard from the Master that one who eats prasada attains devotion. If anyone brought him prasada, he would even save the containers in which it was carried, thinking that they would remind him of God.

'Listen, one day in Dakshineswar the Master said to me, "The Chariot Festival is over. The pilgrims are now returning from Puri. You go to Howrah Station and beg for some prasada for me. One attains devotion if one takes this prasada." I went to Howrah Station. When I saw pilgrims getting off the train, I pleaded like a beggar, "Will you give me a little prasada?" Some were amazed by the sight of a well-dressed gentleman begging for prasada; some walked away quickly without paying any attention; and some devotees realized my sincerity and gave me some grains of dry rice from their bundle. When I carried that prasada to the Master, he was very happy. "When God is pleased, the whole world becomes pleased." I was truly blessed. The Master used to eat one or two grains of that dry rice every day and asked me also to do so. Have faith in his words. There is no other way.'

The Master used to say, "In this kali yoga, the prasada of Jagannath, Ganga water, and the dust of Vrindaban are veritable manifestations of Brahman." It is not possible for us to understand his divine outlook. Every morning the Master would eat a particle of Jagannath prasada [dry rice] before eating anything else. He kept this prasada in a small cloth bag near the western wall of his room, and he used to share it with us. One day he gave a particle to Narendra, who refused to eat it, saying, "It is unclean dry rice." The Master then asked him: "Do you believe in the effect of food on the human body? For example, opium causes constipation, whereas triphala [myrobalan, amlaki, and baira - three kinds of tropical fruits] has a laxative effect." Narendra replied, "Yes, I believe that." Then the Master said, "In the same way, anybody who eats this prasada of Jagannath will attain knowledge, devotion, and faith." Narendra did not argue any further and ate it. He trusted every word of the Master's. He knew that the Master was truthful and an expert in metaphysical science.

Many times the Master told us, "I am Lord Jagannath of Puri." He sent me to Puri a few times and advised me about what to do in a holy place. Once he said, "Embrace Lord Jagannath." I was in a dilemma, because pilgrims are not supposed to embrace the Lord on the altar. But when I was inside the temple, the Master inspired me with an idea. I had some coins and other money in my pocket, which I intentionally dropped on the floor of the dark inner sanctuary of the temple. The priests rushed to pick up that money, and in the meantime I jumped onto the altar and embraced Lord Jagannath. Someone saw me and shouted, but I immediately got down and began to circumambulate the Lord. In the dark nobody could recognize me.

It was the Master who asked me to embrace Lord Jagannath and gave me the idea of how to do it, and then he made it easy for me by arousing greed in the minds of the priests. Now I wonder how I did that heroic deed! The Master never went to Puri. He said, "My body will not last if I visit Puri." When I returned from Puri the Master embraced me and said, "Now I have satisfied my desire to embrace Jagannath."¹⁸

Nag Mahashay (Durga Charan Nag): During the last few days of his life, Nag Mahashay was in samadhi off and on. As Sri Ramakrishna had asked him to stay at home and live the life of a householder, he had never gone on a pilgrimage to the holy places although he had once gone to Gaya to perform the last rites for his father. Two days before he passed away, at 2 o'clock in the morning, he said to Sharat Babu: 'Sri Ramakrishna has come here to show the holy places. Please tell me the names of holy places you have seen, and I will visit them one after another'. As Sharat Babu mentioned the name of each place - Haridwar, Prayag, Varanasi, and Puri- Nag Mahashay immediately had a vision of it and vividly described what he was seeing. Sharat Babu knew he was witnessing the blessing of Sri Ramakrishna upon his disciple...¹⁹

Gopaler-Ma (Aghoremani Devi): During the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath in 1885, Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram Basu's house in Calcutta. Balaram had invited devotees for the celebration. While he was there the Master spoke highly of the God-intoxicated state and visions of Gopaler-Ma, and at his behest, Balaram sent a man to bring her. Just before her arrival Master was talking to the devotees when suddenly he went into ecstasy. His body assumed the pose of Gopala, crawling on knees, one hand resting on the ground, the other raised, and the face turned up as if he were expecting someone. Gopaler-Ma arrived and found Sri Ramakrishna in the posture of her Chosen Deity.' The devotees were amazed, seeing that divine sight. ... After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Gopaler-Ma was grief-stricken and for a long time lived in seclusion. After a while, however, repeated visions of the Master consoled her bereaved heart. Once she went to attend the Car Festival of Jagannath in Mahesh, on the other side of the Ganga. There she had the cosmic vision of the Lord. She saw her beloved Gopala not only in the image of Jagannath in the chariot, but also in the pilgrims who were pulling the chariot. 'I was then not myself', she said. 'I danced and laughed and created a commotion there.'²⁰

One day Sri Ramakrishna gave Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath to Swami Vivekananda with the blessing, "May this prasada give you Para-Bhakti."²¹

One day there was a discussion about Chaitanya's religion in Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master quoted Chaitanya's teaching: "To take delight in chanting the name of God, to have compassion for all beings, and to serve the devotees of God- when these conditions are fulfilled one realises Sri Krishna." Uttering these words the Master went into ecstasy and exclaimed: "Compassion for beings? Compassion? Nonsense! Who are you to have compassion? Service to Narayan (the Lord) in the form of creatures." Swamiji heard this, came out of Sri Ramakrishna's room and said, "Today the Master has revealed a new truth to us. If ever I am given the opportunity, I will proclaim this truth to the world."

There was a picture in Sri Ramakrishna's room in which Sri Chaitanya and his devotees were shown absorbed in singing the praises of God. One day Sri Ramakrishna pointed it out and said, "Do you see how absorbed they are in singing the praises of the Lord?"²²

On 21st September 1884, Sri Ramakrishna went to Star Theatre to see the play Chaitanya Lila (the Divine Play of Sri Chaitanya). Baburam recalled: "Before we left Dakshineswar, he said to me: "Look, if I go into a samadhi there, people will turn towards me and there will be a commotion. If you see me on the verge of samadhi, talk to me about various other things." But when he went to the theatre he could not stop going into samadhi, even thought he tried. I began to repeat the name of God, and slowly he came round. Such experiences of bhava (ecstasy), mahabhava (great ecstasy), and samadhi were natural with him. He had to struggle hard in order to hold his mind down to the normal plane. Compared to him we are very small receptacles, so we work hard, practising various kinds of spiritual disciplines, to try to attain a little ecstasy. For us it is so difficult."²³

Sri Ram Chandra Datta narrated in his reminiscences, "Soon after I met Sri Ramakrishna I began reading *Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* [a biography of Chaitanya].

The more I read that book, the more I could visualize the Master. It seemed to me that Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were the same person. I was curious. Then one day the Master asked me to stay that night at Dakshineswar and I agreed. In the evening I was alone with him. Suddenly he asked me, "What are you looking at?" "I am looking at you." He again asked, "What do you think of me?" I replied, "I consider you to be Chaitanya." The Master was silent for a moment and then said, "Well, Bhairavi Brahmani used to say the same thing." The Master's words were significant."²⁴

It was Thursday evening, 22nd October 1885, a few days after the Durga Puja. Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed in his room with Dr. Sarkar and others. Talk was going on....

MASTER: "A man may not know the right path, but if he has bhakti and the desire to know God, then he attains Him through the force of sheer bhakti. Once a sincere devotee set out on a pilgrimage to the temple of Jagannath in Puri. He did not know the way; he went west instead of south. He no doubt strayed from the right path, but he always eagerly asked people the way, and they gave him the right directions, saying, 'This is not the path; follow that one.' At last the devotee was able to get to Puri and worship the Deity. So you see, even if you are ignorant, someone will tell you the way if you are earnest."

DOCTOR: "But the devotee in his ignorance did lose his way."

MASTER: "Yes, such a thing happens, no doubt. But a man reaches the goal in the end."

A DEVOTEE: "Has God a form or is He formless?"

MASTER: "God has form and, again, He is formless. Once upon a time a sannyasi entered the temple of Jagannath. As he looked at the holy image he debated within himself whether God had a form or was formless. He passed his staff from left to right to feel whether it touched the image. The staff touched nothing. He understood that there was no image before him; he concluded that God was formless. Next he passed the staff from right to left. It touched the image. The sannyasi understood that God had form. Thus he realized that God has form and, again, is formless."

"But it is extremely difficult to understand this. Naturally the doubt arises in the mind: if God is formless, how then can He have form? Further, if He has a form, why does He have so many forms?"

DOCTOR: "God has created all these forms in the world; therefore He Himself has a form. Again, He has created the mind; therefore He is formless. It is possible for God to be everything."

MASTER: "These things do not become clear until one has realized God, He assumes different forms and reveals Himself in different ways for the sake of His devotees. ..."²⁵

After analysing the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples, our faith in Lord Jagannath and the holy city of Puri gets intensified. We are tempted to go to Puri, visit the temples, prostrate before Lord Jagannath and even embrace him like Mahendranath Gupta did at the behest of Sri Ramakrishna.

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HOLY MOTHER VISITS ORISSA-1

Orissa, earlier known as Utkal and also known as Kalinga in ancient days, is a state which covers two temple cities, Bhuvaneshwar and Puri. This holy land having a religious culture is blessed by many saints like Sri Shankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Towards the close of his life, the Master had one day said to the Holy Mother, 'You visit all those places which it was not possible for this (meaning himself) to visit.' Whatever be the significance of these words, it is a remarkable coincidence that two weeks after the Master's demise, the Holy Mother started on a pilgrimage of Upper India.¹

During her lifetime the Holy Mother visited this holy land of Orissa on four different occasions. Her first visit was in 1888, second was in 1904, the third and the fourth were while on her Pilgrimage towards South India and while returning from there in the year 1910 and 1911.

(First Visit) The proposal for Pilgrimage to Puri attracted quite a number of devotees, and thus Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda, Saradananda^{*F1} as also Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma's mother and Laxmidevi started with her. The coastal railroad had not yet been constructed; hence they went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandbali on 7th November 1888 from where they proceeded by a launch to Cuttack^{*F2}, and by cart to Puri. Immediately on arriving at Puri, they visited Lord Jagannath as an inauspicious period would commence from the next day. Then the Holy Mother and the women went to live in a house of Balaram Basu, called the Kshetra-basir Math or a resort for the dwellers in the holy place. The monks had their own separate place. The Mother stayed here for a little more than two months, returning to Calcutta in the middle of January next year. (1889)

As the Master had never been to Puri, the Mother carried his picture under her cloth so as to show him Jagannath by showing the deity to his picture; for she believed that 'the picture and its prototype were the same.' About Jagannath she said, 'I saw Jagannath as the best of all persons sitting on an altar of gems with myself serving him as a handmaid.' At another time she said that she saw the god as Shiva. On her visit to the temple she was delighted to see the great concourse of pilgrims; and with tears of joy she thought within herself, 'Hey-day! Good luck! So many people will be freed (through this vision of the Lord)!' But the next moment it occurred to her, 'No, only those rare few who have no worldly desire will be freed.' When she shared her thought with Yogin-Ma, the latter, too, concurred.

At Puri the Mother's characteristic humility was revealed in bold relief. Govinda Shingari, the Panda of Balaram Basu's family thought that in keeping with honour of that family a palanquin should be arranged for carrying their guru's wife to the temple. When he placed this proposal before the Mother, she said, 'No, Govinda, you will walk in front as a guide and I shall follow you as a poor humble woman to visit Jagannath.' It was thus that she visited the temple. She also visited all the noted places at Puri, and she spent long hours regularly in meditation at the temple of Mahalaxmi.

From Puri she returned to Calcutta on the 12th January 1889; and next day, she bathed in the Ganges at Nimtola.²

(Second Visit) At the end of November 1904 the proposal for her going to Puri took shape. The Bengal Nagpur railway had by this time been completed. The Mother travelled in a reserved second-class compartment with Nilmadhav, the mad aunt, Golap-Ma, Sister Laxmi, Radhu, Master Mahashaya's wife, Chunilalbabu's wife and Kusumkumari. Swami Premananda and two devotees got into an inter class compartment. The train reached Puri in the morning and the Mother with her relatives and women companions took up residence in Kshetra-basir Math of the Basus, while Swami Premananda and others went to their second house near the sea called Shashi Niketan. The Mother's first duty at Puri was to go to the Jagannath temple to have a look at the

Lord. On subsequent days it was her daily task to visit the temple with others early morning and evening. One day a Katha by a temple priest was arranged at her residence, which consisted in relating the story and glory of Jagannath from the ancient books. On this occasion about fifty temple priests were sumptuously fed. The Holy Mother and others used to obtain on payment the consecrated food from the temple for their daily meals; the feast for the priests was also arranged similarly.

At Puri, the Mother had a boil on her foot, which gave her intense pain, and yet she did not allow it to be operated on. One day in the temple somebody's foot touched the boil thereby causing excruciating pain to her. When Swami Premananda heard this, he came on the next day with a young doctor ostensibly to pay their obeisance to the Mother. She, as was her habit on such occasions, sat covering herself completely with a cotton sheet. The doctor now brought out his knife and in the act of saluting by touching the feet opened the boil and then begged her pardon saying, 'Mother, please don't be offended.' This unexpected move irritated the Mother a little at first. But when through proper dressings the pain subsided and the wound healed up in a trice, she heartily blessed her sons despite their dare devilry.

A few days after this, the Mother wanted to bring her mother and a brother to Puri to give them an opportunity to see the Lord. A devotee was accordingly sent to Jayrambati. This had to be done without the mad aunt's knowledge, for she was too envious to brook anybody else sharing the Mother's affection or money which were to be monopolized by or kept in reserve for herself and her daughter. The devotee went via Vishnupur by train, the railway line on that side having been constructed a little earlier and communicated the Mother's invitation to Grand Mother and uncle Kali who alone were expected to come. But at news of the pilgrimage the number swelled till a big party consisting of Grand Mother, Uncle Kali with his father-in-law, wife, and two sons, and a villager named Sitaram started by way of Garbeta. No sooner did they step into the Kshetra-basir Math than Surabala got into frenzy, and went on castigating the Mother by all kinds of gestures and postures and doggerel verses.

It is an immemorial tradition at Puri that no caste distinction is observed so far as the prasad of Jagannath is concerned, so much so, that prasad put into one's mouth by even a man of the lowest caste, at the Anandbazar within temple precincts, may not be refused. The Mother showed her respect for this hoary custom by putting the prasad into the mouth of the devotees and asking them to put into hers. While this merry ceremony was going on, Master Mahashay and uncle Varada came there by coincidence from Calcutta, and they too joined in it.

All those who came from Jayrambati except grandmother, left again in December 1904. The Mother continued there for some time more. Her foot was now cured of the boil, the rheumatism too, was not acute, and the body was healthy. Therefore she moved about happily visiting the sacred places such as kitchen of Jagannath, Gundicha Bari, Laxmi-Jala, Narendra Sarovar, Govardhan Math, etc. She also circumambulated the Jagannath temple and bathed twice in the sea. As her mind was cheerful at this time, she spoke of many anecdotes of the Master's life and of the Dakshineshwar days.³

One day Holy Mother wished to attend the Sandhyarti, Shringar and other ceremonies in the late night. Harivallabha Basu, elder cousin of Balaram Basu, was respected by the pandas of Jagannath Temple, was informed about it. He made the arrangements accordingly. They all went to temple. It was very calm and serene environment. Holy Mother instructed everyone to do Japam of Ishta Mantra. After sometime Panda Govinda Shringari announced that the temple would open soon. The moment the temple was opened, everybody present there entered the temple sanatorium. Then by applying chandan paste to all the three deities and decorating them with clothes and ornaments started the Shringar ceremony. Holy Mother joyfully observed everything and told that this sight of Sringara will calm down one's mind. The arrangement was made for the Shayana of the three deities. Accordingly three cots were decorated and made ready. Here the Holy Mother was so much engrossed in the darshan

that others had to remind her that the temple was being closed. Hearing this, Holy Mother returned to her residence.

Holy Mother and her party again came to the temple in the early morning for Mangalarti. With the chanting of Suprabhatam, the deities were requested to get up and take their seat on the altar. Pandas sought the deities' forgiveness for waking them up. Then door was opened and party entered the temple sanctum sanatorium. By seeing local people praying in Oriya Language Holy Mother was very much touched. Then Mangaarti was started. After Mangalarti was over the ornaments of deities were removed and teeth were washed. At this Holy Mother commented that this simple and sweet vigraha of Prabhu is very good to meditate upon.

There is a beautiful garden in the temple premises. Holy Mother used to visit the flower garden like a small child. One day she stopped at the flower plant and uttered that these bunches of flowers in the garden are blessed ones, which are used for the worship of God and used for Shayana of deities' day after day.

One day, the party visited Gundicha Temple where Lord Jagannath stays for a week at the time of Ratha Yatra. All took bath in Indradyumna Sarovar. Another day they bathed in Chandanpukur and also visited Atharanala. It is here that Mother told the story of Atharanala and said about how many sacrifices the King had to make at this place for the welfare of his subjects.

One day, they visited Haridas Thakur's Samadhi place where the Holy Mother went in Bhavsamadhi. Sitting near Haridas Thakur's samadhi, the Mother narrated his story, his love and devotion to God with choked voice. Thinking of separation from Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Haridas Thakur left his mortal body before Chaitanya. Singing Sankirtan and Bhajans the devotees carried his mortal body. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu gave him the samadhi. Saying this Holy Mother became quiet and still. Seeing this Master Mahashaya said that Holy Mother was in Gauranga Bhava and wished to sing Gaura-Hari-Kirtan. So he started the kirtan accompanied by Ramlaldada. Slowly Holy Mother returned to normal plain.

Yet on another day, returning from Mahaprabhu's Lilasthan Gambhira, seeing Bakul Tree Holy Mother said, " This tree is a witness to Prabhu's Lila. How many times Prabhu might have gone this way. All of you take the dust of this place." Everybody present there did the same.

While in Puri, Holy Mother used to go to the sea beach. The companions used to sit around her along with a few strangers. These people around her used to listen to her sermon with rapt attention. Mother was usually seen on the beach in two moods, either cheerful like a small child or in a serene mood. One day, Holy Mother went to the beach in Basu's carriage. The children made a seat of sand for her and requested her to sit on it. She happily consented. The children started playing on the beach asking the Mother to play with them. The Mother preferred to watch the play as 'Bala Lila'. Seeing the children playing joyfully, Holy Mother said that the joy of children is like the joy of God. That is why Thakur used to say that if one has child-like simplicity then one might realise God. Every one present there was enjoying the noise of the playing children and that of the waves of the sea. The wife of Ramlaldada became irritated and said how much noise the sea is making. Holy Mother compassionately glanced at her once and then to the sea. Then Mother became quiet for sometime. Breaking the silence Mother explained why the sea is making the noise. "Once gods and demons for their selfish motive churned the sea to get nectar. They took away anything and everything from the sea and even his daughter. That is why the sea is crying. Can't you see the heartfelt pain of a father for the daughter?" Listening to this novel explanation people present there were dumfounded. Then Holy Mother said, " In the turmoil of the world, one has to repeat the name of God regularly. By the power of Japam the bad effect of Indriayas gets subsided."

One day Holy Mother expressed her desire to go to Tota Gopinath by walk. She said, " One has to go for darshan of Devata, Guru, Ganga and Sadhu by walk without showing any mark of Aishwarya." But the temple was far away and Mother's legs were

aching. So the devotees requested her to go by cart for which she consented. On her way to the temple there was one Stupa called 'Chataka Parvata'. Somebody informed her about that Stupa. Immediately Mother got down from the cart and started walking fast towards it in divine mood. After some distance she stopped and kept gazing towards the 'Chataka Parvata'. Women devotees present there brought her back to the bullock cart without disturbing her divine mood. That day they could not go to Tota Gopinath temple.

Next day they visited the Tota Gopinath and took darshan. It was a beautiful image of Sri Krishna. There was immense joy on Holy Mother's face. How many things God has to do for the sake of devotee. Previously the image was in a standing position. The priest became old and could not stand long for performing the worship. He thought of his inability to worship and in anguish prayed to the god. Considering his intense prayer, the god sat down to fulfil the wish of the priest. From the next day people flocked to see this miracle. The companions of Holy Mother offered Pranams to her by touching her feet. Holy Mother blessed them putting her hand on their head and granted them a boon of devotion.

The temple priest requested the Holy Mother to take the prasada, which she happily agreed. The food was simple but Mother became very happy to get such nectar like prasada. It is needless to say that the family of Balaram Basu managed the temple affairs. One day Holy Mother asked the wife of Balaram Basu to offer the Bhoga to the deities, which she gladly did.

One day it was decided to visit the Sakshi Gopal Temple by train. Holy Mother was taken to railway station by palanquin and others by bullock cart. When local people came to know about her arrival, they came for her darshan and whispered amongst them, '*Bhagavati of Bengal has come.*' Local people started offering pranams to Holy Mother and started taking the dust of her feet to which she objected saying, 'You people belong to the holy land of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.'

The temple is situated in a village with very good surrounding where deity has a very pleasant appearance. They all entered the shrine and offered pranams to the deities. Holy Mother on looking at the deity was totally engrossed in the bhava and she felt as if she was in Vrindavan. The attendant reminded her that she was in Sakshi Gopal Temple and not in Vrindavan. After a while she looked around and asked the attendant to offer garland and prasada to Sakshi Gopal. Attendant brought a garland, which was not liked by Holy Mother. Another attendant went and brought two beautiful garlands made of fragrant flowers which the Holy Mother liked very much and asked him to offer it to Sakshi Gopal. Golap-Ma asked the attendant to offer one garland to the deity and the other to the Holy Mother. Others present agreed to this idea. But Holy Mother disapproved this and asked him to offer one garland to Radharani instead. All of them came out and circumambulated the temple. There the Holy Mother saw the 'Tamal Vriksha' which reminded her of Vrindavan. She offered her Pranams to the 'Tamal Vriksha'. After every one present there offered pranams to her they all entered the temple again. In the meantime, garlands were offered and food offering was in progress. Then the priest brought Gopal's garland and offered it to Holy Mother, which everybody appreciated. Like a child Holy Mother became joyous. All took prasada and went to the railway station with a heavy heart and found that the train had already left. However, the stationmaster sympathetically arranged for their departure by a goods train. They all reached Puri safely.⁴

Visit to Bhuvaneshwar: From Puri they went to Bhuvaneshwar by the 'Sikshala' train. When they arrived at Bhuvaneshwar, it was nearly evening. A Brahmin Panda of the Lingaraj Temple, Ishwar Bhattu Shringari, met them at the station. Sarada Devi's disciples did not want to accept his offer of a place to stay, fearing he may be taking advantage of charging a lot of money to accommodate such a large party but Pandaji humbly declared, 'Mother, I am not asking for any fee. Please give me opportunity to facilitate your darshan of Lingaraj.' Because of his earnestness, his desire was fulfilled

and he took them by bullock cart to his home. In his house there was a big hall formed by two connected rooms. It had a large courtyard and was near the temple.

After taking dip into Bindusagar they all went to Lingaraj Temple. Holy Mother meditated after performing the puja. She touched the Linga and sat for Meditation in a corner of inner Shrine. She told her mother and others to do Japa. She told them, 'Bhuvaneshwar is Harihara,' that is half Hari (Vishnu) and half Hara (Shiva), Jagannath and Maheshwar. On their pushpapatra (the tray of offerings), they had akshat (rice grains) and sandal paste among other items. They performed worship and arati. Again the party went to Gauri Kund and took bath. Then they went to the Panda's house for a meal, which he unstintingly lavished on them. Next day all went to Khandagiri and Udyagiri. Holy Mother sat for meditation in one of the caves. She later said: "This place is very congenial for Tapas." Then they all returned to Puri.⁵

Time was running fast in the company of Holy Mother. It was time to return to Calcutta. Holy Mother was unwilling to return for, she was expecting some devotees to come to meet her. Her inner urge was waiting for someone. After a few days, eager aspirants came to her for initiation. She came out of the room and told them affectionately, 'Come, for you people only I was unable to go to Calcutta.' She talked with them as if she knew them all since long. The fact was that nothing was arranged before hand. They all came from different parts of Orissa and also on pilgrimage to Orissa. Holy Mother arranged for their lodging and boarding. The next day early morning in Kshetra-basir Math, Holy Mother initiated them and took them to Jagannath Temple for darshan. They all prostrated before her and told that they never expected that they would get her darshan and initiation and that too in Puri. Holy Mother blessed them saying that, 'What you got here, you should repeat it regularly. You people are very fortunate.'⁶

After spending sometime thus in the salubrious, joyous, and holy atmosphere of Puri, she returned at the end of January, 1905 to Calcutta where she put up in the old rented house on the Bagbazar street from where grandmother left for home a little later.⁷

(Third Visit) In 1910, Holy Mother was suffering from rheumatic pain on her legs as well as from stomach troubles. It was being planned to take her to Kothar, the estate of Basu's family in Orissa for a change. Krishnabhavinidevi, the wife of Balaram Basu had been cherishing the desire for taking the Holy Mother to Kothar and keeping her there for sometime. It was finally settled that Mother would start for Kothar on the 18th of Agrahayana (4th December 1910), with Golap-Ma, Ramakrishnababu's mother Krishnabhavinidevi and his aunt, the mad aunt Surabala and her daughter Radhu, Brahmacharis Shukul (Swami Atmananda), Krishnalal (Swami Dhirananda), Ramakrishna Basu, and other devotees^{*F3}. The Mother and her women companions travelled by second-class while the men travelled by inter-class. At Bhadrak station Tulasiram, brother of Swami Premananda, was present with men and palanquins and conducted them to Ramakrishna Basu's estate office (Naya-Bungalow or the Cutchery-House at Bhadrak). After some rest, next morning Mother and her women companions set out for Kothar, about eighteen miles away in Palanquins, followed by men. Mother reached Kothar at 12 noon on 5th December 1910. Swami Achalananda joined them there in a few days. Mother and her women devotees were accommodated in the inner apartments of Basu's house while the men devotees were staying in the Cutchery-house. Mother would come to the rear portion of the house twice a day to talk to the attendants or the men devotees, and to have the letters read out to her or to get the replies written by others on her behalf. The men devotees used to go to the inner portion of the house through the main entrance to have their main meal, while they were served with tea and tiffin in the Cutchery-house itself.

The climate of Kothar was quite salubrious. The whole party felt immensely happy at this place. After a few days' rest, Mother's health also improved. The attendants and seniors in the family were all very happy to see Mother back in her elements. She stayed at Kothar for about sixty-six days. But the condition of the mad aunt Surabala

worsened owing to the mental strain consequent on living in a stranger's house. Hence she had to be sent back to Jayrambati.

With Mother's presence the whole village resounded with the uproar of joy. On Paush 6th (BS) the popular local Guti ponach (a kind of dance) was performed to entertain Mother and other guests. A festive mood prevailed in the Basu family.

Every year, Saraswati Puja used to be performed in the courtyard of the temple of Lord Shyamchand. This year, the Puja was celebrated with great grandeur in Mother's presence. It was Saturday, Magha 21 1317 (BS), 4th February 1911. On the night of the worship there was an opera in which there was no dialogue but only music, dance, and little acting. Two boys, who played the leading roles of Radha and Krishna, had such sweet voices and charming poses, that the Mother was highly attracted and wanted the performance to be repeated the next day. Ramakrishnababu gladly complied. Holy Mother liked one Bhajan and sometime she used to sing that Oriya Bhajan. First line of that Bhajan is, "*Kod karila ra Nandar tika pilati! (Ki Korilore Nander Shoto Cheleti!) What Nanda's younger son did! What a Divine Play enacted by Balakrishna.*" The immersion of the Devi's image was also put off to the third day, worship being performed again on the second. Even after two days after Saraswati Puja, 'Sehnai' was being played and devotional singing were conducted in the temple in the evening.

Because of the Mother's presence, the worship of Saraswati was performed that year with great éclat. On that occasion, Ramakrishna Babu and his wife took mantra from the Mother. Three devotees from Shilong- Surendrakant Sarkar, Hemantkumar Mitra, and Birendrakumar Mazumdar- were initiated on the same day. Sri Devendranath Chatterjee, the postmaster of Kothar, who had embraced Christianity in youth under a blind impulse, now felt repentant, and wishing to return to the Hindu fold, consulted many about the possibility of a reconversion. The news reached the ears of the Mother who opined that if he performed a purificatory rite before the image of Radha-Shyama-Chand, the tutelary deity of the Kothar family, on the eve of the Saraswati worship, and recited the Gayatri mantra and wore the sacred thread, he would be re-established in his brahminhood. Following her injunctions, Devendrababu shaved his head, performed purificatory rites, and received the Gayatri mantra and sacred thread from Bramachari Krishnalal and then he approached the Mother in all humility for initiation, which she gladly granted him on the day of the worship of Saraswati, and blessed him by presenting a piece of cloth.

One member of the Mother's party had adopted a very strict regiment for himself for a couple of months, his argument being that he was following the Mother in her austerity. But the Mother one day served plenty of good food on his plate despite his protest and advised him to eat it all. The devotee obeyed for the time being; but in the afternoon he asked the Mother in the course of a discussion, 'Why do you deny yourself the things you serve me so plentifully?' The Mother replied, 'Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly. I tell you, you shall eat.' From that day his hesitation was over.

One incident at Kothar is highly illuminating. The Mother used to take some rest after the midday meal, and then she sat in the rear of the house with an attendant, to have her letters written. A few days later, the attendant found on going there for his duty that the Mother sitting absent-mindedly with her legs outstretched and eyes looking vacantly at something at a distance. After spending about a quarter of an hour in this mood, she woke up to her surroundings and finding the attendant there, asked 'How long have you been here?' 'Not long', replied he. The Mother then went on in her own mood, 'To come down again and again! Is there no respite? Shiva and Shakti move together, where there is Shiva, there is Shakti- there is no escape! Yet people don't understand.' The talk continued in this strain for a pretty long time. Among other things the Mother said that the Master has to incarnate from age to age for the good of his creatures; for they are his to be sure. In this connection she alluded to one of her personal experiences. She once saw that the Master had become everything- the blind, the maimed, all were he; the miseries of the creature were his; and so the Mother too, had to share in the alleviation of their sufferings. When her heart was caught of in this flow of infinite compassion, she

had to forgo her rest and sleep, and it seemed to her then that the only rational course to follow was to give up personal comforts and think out means for the welfare of all creatures. As a consequence when all were resting, she knew no repose. As the talk flowed thus on a transcendental level, the vesper bells of the temple apprised her of the time of the day, and she rose hurriedly for the evening services.

It was arranged that from Kothar the Mother would go on a pilgrimage to Rameshwar in the extreme south. When the proposal was first mooted, the Mother said, 'I shall go; my father-in-law went there.' When the final decision had been taken, Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and Swami Saradananda in Calcutta were informed. Swami Saradananda heartily approved of it, and Swami Ramakrishnananda extended a cordial invitation, intimating at the same time his willingness to shoulder all responsibility. So it was settled that the pilgrimage would start on Wednesday, 8th February 1911. The Holy Mother had said that the covering such long distance at a stretch may create inconvenience to Thakur Seva (worship of Sri Thakur), her own health and also to the youngest niece of hers. So, it would be good if she could take a halt somewhere en route. The party consisted of Holy Mother, Brahmacharis Shukul and Krishnalal, Golap-Ma, Ramakrishnababu's mother and aunt, Kedar's mother, Radhu, and attendant mentioned earlier, as also the mad aunt Surabala who was brought back by the Mother on the eve of the departure. At about 2 p.m. Mother and her companions set out from Kothar under the leadership of Ramakrishna Basu and reached Bhadrak in the evening. Ramlaldada, who had been waiting there, now joined the party. After supper there, on the same night, at about 2.30 a.m. party boarded the southbound Madras Mail at Bhadrak station, Ramakrishnababu accompanied them upto the Khurda Road junction from where he went to Puri.

Leaving Khurda Road behind, the train proceeded southwest and steamed along the shores of the vast Chilka Lake over whose surface ripples danced under the soft morning breeze. Here and there, cranes waking with the dawn were searching for food in shallow water or darting across the blue sky in formation. Round the small islands that dotted the lake, flew various kinds of birds such as the Nilakanthas (blue-necked jays). At the sight of the latter, the Mother became overjoyed like a girl and saluted with folded hands, for such a sight of the bird augured well. With the appearance of the sun, white masses of vapour of various shapes began to rise up and lend an eerie atmosphere to the scene. The train speeded on, and the passengers looked out through the windows towards the fast changing landscape, the vast expanse of the lake-giving place to wooded undulating land. Gradually, at eight in the morning the train reached Berhampore, the head quarters of the Ganjam district. As arranged by Shashi Maharaj, they went to the house of the Bengali Manager of M/s Kelner Company, the caterers of the Railways and stayed there. The house was in Chatterjee lane. In the afternoon, a good number of local devotees, many of whom were originally from Bengal, Madras and Orissa paid their obeisance to her. According to local custom, many of them had the offerings of bananas and green coconut in their hands. On Friday the 10th February 1911, they boarded the Madras Mail at Berhampore.⁸

(Fourth Visit) After spending some days at Bangalore, the Mother and her companions returned to Madras, where they spent a day or two and then started for Calcutta in the afternoon of 1st April 1911. On the way they rested a day at Rajahmundry where they were guests at the house of Sri M.O.Parthasarathi Iyengar, District and Sessions Judge. The Mother bathed here in the Godavari.

Mother's second place for rest was fixed at Puri. The group reached Khurda Road station at about 1.30 on the night of Chaitra, 20 (B.S.). The devotee Ramakrishna Basu had received Mother and took the party to their house named 'Shashi Niketan' in Puri. It was Chaitra 21 (April 4th). Nitaibabu's mother had not still recovered from the attack of fever. Mother had gone to the temple on the same day to pay homage to Lord Jagannath. Bipin Bihari Ghosh, a devotee was staying at 'Shashi Niketan' at that time.⁹

During this time, Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) was in Puri. Atal Bihari Moitra, the Deputy Magistrate, invited Maharaj and other sadhus and devotees to his house. On this occasion, the Mother did puja to Thakur.

Dr. Ratikanta Majumdar of Bengal-Nagpur Railways who was at Puri then, told: "On the day of the function, I had sent a telegram for the news of my eldest son and was waiting for its reply. He was to come from Hazaribagh a few days earlier. I was perturbed over not getting the reply and went to have prasada. Everyone asked the reason for my coming late. Standing near the window, inside the room, Mother heard everything and said, "The boy is all right, and have no fear. Today itself you will get his news." On our way back home, we got the good news."¹⁰

Mother stayed in Puri for about a week. ... This time, it was for the last time that she set foot at Puri. We can infer without any hesitation that as on previous occasions this time also, after reaching Puri Mother went to pay homage to Lord Jagannath straight way without even washing her feet. Mother used to go like a humble beggar to Lord Jagannath in the huge temple situated on the seashore.¹¹

To conclude the visits of Holy Mother to Orissa, three of her reminiscences may be mentioned here as they are of great interest. They are as follows-

Swami Arupananda narrates his two reminiscences about Holy Mother-

FIRST AT UDBODHAN (PRAYER-HALL) ON 29th October 1910

It was early in the morning. I was seated near the Mother's bed. She began to talk to me about the Master.

Mother: On the very day I reached Puri, I quickly finished the worship of the Master in the morning by placing his picture on a tin containing ghee. Then I went to visit the temple of Sri Jagannath after locking the room. When I returned, I saw the picture of the Master at the foot of the tin. The others too came and observed it. All felt that some thief might have entered the house in our absence. But all the things in the room remained undisturbed. At last I noticed that big red ants had gathered on the tin- it was ghee tin, you see. Since they had approached the picture of the Master also, he had come down and settled himself below!

Disciple: Does the Master really live in the picture?

Mother: Of course, he does. The body and the shadow are the same. *F4 And what is his picture but a Shadow?

Disciple: Does he live in all the pictures?

Mother: Yes. If you pray to him constantly before his picture, then he manifests himself through that picture. The place where the picture is kept becomes a shrine. Suppose a man worships the Master there (*pointing to a plot of land north of the Udbodhan*), then the place is associated with his presence.

Disciple: Well, good and bad memories are associated with all places.

Mother: It is not exactly like that. The Master will pay special attention to such a place. *Disciple:* Does the Master really partake of the food that you offer him?

Mother: Yes, he does.

Disciple: But we do not see any sign of it.

Mother: A light comes out of his eyes and licks all the articles of food. His ambrosial touch replenishes them again, so there is no decrease.¹²

SECOND AT UDBODHAN ON 7th July 1912

Disciple: Mother, was it not arranged that you would visit Puri at the time of the Car Festival (*Ratha-Yatra*)?

Mother: Is it good to go there when there is such a rush of people? Perhaps there will be an epidemic of cholera then. Lakshmikanta, the priest, said, "All the rooms and houses have already been rented. There is no place now to stay in. Even the small rooms have been rented for ten rupees each. Please come during the winter."

Disciple: Whose image is worshipped there?

Mother: In a dream, I saw that it was really the image of Siva!

Disciple: Did you not see the image of Jagannath there?

Mother: No, I saw only the image of Siva. The Lord Jagannath Siva was seated on the altar made of a lakh of Salagrams (an emblem of Vishnu). Is it without any reason that thousands of devotees visit the temple? There is also the image of goddess Vimala. A special offering is made to her on the Mahashtami night. Vimala Devi is another form of Sri Durga. So is it not natural that Siva too will be present there?

Disciple: Some are of the opinion that this was originally a Buddhist temple, and the image of Buddha was installed there. When the temple fell into the hands of the followers of Shankaracharya, the image was converted into the emblem of Siva, and still later, when the Vaishnavas got control, they converted it into the image of Sri Jagannath-Vishnu.

Mother: I do not know all this. But I saw the image of Siva! ¹³

The third reminiscence was related by Swami Girijananda: "One brahmachari started from Calcutta on foot to Puri to take initiation from Swami Brahmananda. Maharaj was staying at Puri at that time. Maharaj for some reason did not give him initiation but instructed the brahmachari regarding japam. Having been satisfied with the instructions regarding japam, he returned to Calcutta. Later, one day he went to Udbodhan office to meet Holy Mother. When Mother saw that brahmachari, she asked him, "Son, are you initiated?" The brahmachari replied, "Yes, Maharaj gave me initiation at Puri." Then Mother said, "No, Rakhali has not given you the initiation." Then the brahmachari requested Mother for initiation. Mother fulfilled his desire. Sometime later he told his friends, "Maharaj had given me this mantra and Holy Mother has given me another mantra." When all told him that the Mantras are sacred and should not be disclosed to anybody. Then out of fear, he came to Mother and narrated the matter. Mother said, "See, you foolish fellow! Is Bija Mantra revealed to others? You see this huge banyan tree but its seed is so small. This big tree has come out of a very small seed. If you take care of the seed then only you get a huge tree. Similarly, though Bija Mantra is small, if one does sadhana then one may get even Brahmajnana, the highest realisation through Bija Mantra." Then looking towards him Mother said, "All right, now do not tell Bija Mantra to anybody." ¹⁴

Mother started for Calcutta from Puri by the fast passenger train at about 6 p.m. on Monday Chaitra 27, 1317 (10th April 1911). Radhudi and her mother, Golap-Ma, Rambabu's mother and aunt, Dr. Bipinbihari Ghosh and his wife, Ramlaldada, Tulsi Maharaj, Krishnalal Maharaj and attendant Ashutosh were with her. After seeing them off, Rambabu and Tulsirambabu left Bhadrak. In his diary dated 11th April 1911, Swami Saradananda wrote: 'Holy return of the Holy Mother from Madras.' In her benediction letter dated April 17 to Shashi Maharaj, Mother herself wrote that they had reached Calcutta safely and that she was quite well, and that Nitaibabu's mother was much better. Seeing Mother quite healthy and cheerful after her return from South India, all monks and devotees felt glad at heart. The atmosphere in Mother's house became lively with the presence of a large number of devotees. On the Bengali new year day, Sri 'M' wrote to Shashi Maharaj in English: 'Mother is quite well. But her devotees are very keen to touch her feet.' Meanwhile, one day Mother was heard telling to herself: 'At last Sri Thakur's words have come true. So many places like Madras, Bangalore, Rameshwaram where he did not go, could I visit.' Once Thakur had said to Mother that she would visit these places where he could not go. ¹⁵

A noteworthy thing of Mother's visit to Kothar and Madras was the showering of grace without any reserve by Mother, the Fount of compassion. Mother initiated good number of devotees in those places. Among the blessed ones, some had the vision of Sri Thakur and Mother in their dreams and even received initiation. One day the Mother said to Umeshbabu: "My son, when I had been to Kothar and Madras, whoever came there would say 'dream and dream'." ¹⁶

References:

1. Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother by Swami Tapasyananda Page- 99
2. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda Page- 165
3. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda Page- 200, Bengali Sri Ma by Ashutosh Mitra Page-26-31
4. Bengali Sri Sri Mayer Jiban Katha in by Swami Bhumananda Page-109, Sarada Ramakrishna by Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama (Bengali) Page- 226-236
5. Shyamasundari Devi: Mother of Sri Sarada Devi by Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana Page- 44
6. Sarada Ramakrishna by Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama Page- 239
7. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda Page- 202
8. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda Page- 238-241, Holy Mother in the South by Swami Prabhananda Page- 6-23, Bengali Udbodhan June-2008 Page-393-398, Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi by Monastics, Devotees & others Page-216-223 and Holy Mother Swamiji & direct disciples at Madras by Sri Ramakrishna Math Madras Page-10, Bengali Sri Ma by Ashutosh Mitra Page-87-96 & 110
9. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda Page- 249
10. The Compassionate Mother Sri Sarada Devi (1st Ed) by Br.Akshaychaitanya Translated by Swami Tanmayananda Page- 265 & 275
11. Holy Mother in the South by Swami Prabhananda Page- 61
12. Gospel of the Holy Mother by Her Devotee- Children Page-99-100
13. Gospel of the Holy Mother by Her Devotee- Children Page-131-132
14. Bengali Matri Darshan by Swami Chetananda Page-50
15. Holy Mother in the South by Swami Prabhananda Page- 61
16. Holy Mother in the South by Swami Prabhananda Page-36, Bengali Sri Sri Sarada Devi by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-147

Footnotes:

*F1. As per the book Sri Sri Mayer Jiban Katha in Bengali by Swami Bhumananda, Swami Niranananda was a member of this party while Laxmididi's name did not appear. (Page-107)

*F2. Holy Mother came to Cuttack by Steamer and alighted at the Mata Math Ghat probably on 10th November 1888 where Vivekananda Ashram was started later on. From the Mata Math Ghat, she went to Harivallabha Basu's House near Chaudhari Bazar and stayed there for the night and went to Puri by bullock cart next morning. The first Girls' School of Orissa was started in that house which is now known as Ravenshaw Girls' High school. The first Women's College of Orissa was also started at the same place. The college has now been shifted to another place at Cantonment Road now known as Shailabala Women's College. Vivekananda Ashram Cuttack occupied this place on 12th January 1988 to bring out the procession on National Youth Day. The land belonged to Late K.K.Basu, who donated it later on. It was registered in the name of Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Samiti, Vivekananda Ashram Cuttack on 14th January 1993, the birthday anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. Construction of the temple started there in 2000. Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj consecrated it on 31st October 2006. At present there are Library and Book Sale, Health Service departments and also Coaching Classes and Vocational Training Centre in the Ashram.

*3. We have followed the version given in the book by Swami Gambhirananda- Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Page-238. However, as per the book by Swami Bhumananda- Sri Sri Mayer Jivan Katha Page-202 there is a slight difference about persons who accompanied Holy Mother and who received her at Bhadrak railway station.

*4. It is for this reason that one does not walk over the shadow of an elder. One day, while living at Jayrambati, I was returning home after my bath. The Mother was also coming back from the tank. I was walking by her side, and now and then I stepped over her shadow. The Mother asked me to walk on her other side. At first I did not know that I had been walking over her shadow.

HOLY MOTHER VISITS ORISSA-2

One hundred years ago, Holy Mother had visited Kothar, a small village in Orissa and stayed there at the estate of Balaram Basu's family. She stayed here for about two months from 5th December 1910 to February 1911. As this is the centenary year of her visit to Kothar, it will be most appropriate to go back to those days and visualise her divine play there.

Sri Krishnaram Basu was the great grandfather of Balaram Basu. Guruprasad was his son. Though born in Shakta family he was initiated into Vaishnavism. Guruprasad's family deity was Shyamsundarji. He installed the idols of Radha-Shyam at Vrindavan and built a house called Kalababu's Kunj. At one time due to excessive expenditure he incurred heavy debts involving his property at Calcutta and shifted to Kothar. He took to Kothar the idols of Radha-Shyam, his family deity which was worshiped daily in his house at Calcutta. Guruprasad the grandfather of Balaram Basu had three sons, namely Benimadhav, Bindumadhav and Radhamohan. Radhamohan had three sons namely, Jagannath, Balaram and Sadhuprasad. Bindumadhav also had three sons namely, Nimaicharan, Harivallabha and Achyutananda. Nimaicharan and Harivallabha used to look after the affairs of the estate. Harivallabha was an advocate and used to stay in Cuttack. He expanded and developed the property and wealth of Basu family. He built two houses called Shashi Niketan and Keshtra-Basir Math at Puri. The present building of Balaram Mandir at Calcutta was also built by him. Balaram Basu never had any attraction for property and he liked to engage himself in spiritual discipline. So he entrusted the task of managing the property to his two elder cousins, Nimaicharan and Harivallabha.

Kothar is around 106 km away from Bhuvaneshwar. To go to Kothar from Howrah, one has to go to Bhadrak by train and then by road. Kothar is about 16 km from Bhadrak. (Train no.2821 Howrah- Puri Dhauli Express leaves from Howrah station at 6 a.m. and reaches Bhadrak Station at 10.30 a.m.) Located in a rural area of Orissa, Kothar is situated in a place where one may find natural and quiet environment and typical rural surrounding. When you enter Kothar, you will find a big pond named Krishna-Sagar surrounded by trees. While staying at Kothar, Holy Mother used to bathe in this pond. The bathing ghat, constructed by the Basu family where Holy Mother used to bathe is still standing as a silent witness to Holy Mother's visit to Kothar. Thinking that Holy Mother will come to the pond for a bath, the local people regularly clean the road leading to it even today.

Balaram Basu's family house is situated near this pond. It is quite a big house in dilapidated condition and has a garden behind it. Apart from courtyard, there were seventeen rooms in this house. Next to it is the beautiful temple of Radha-Shyamchandji. In front of the temple, there is a big hall (Nat Mandir) where performances of dramas etc were held. Mother used to move around the village very freely as if she was in Jayrambati. When one enters the house from roadside, first one has to cross a veranda adjoining the window. Mother used to stay inside the house but in order to meet the devotees or for correspondence she used to sit in this veranda.

This place is a witness to Holy Mother's compassion on Sri Devendranath Chatterjee, the postmaster of Kothar. He was taken back to Hinduism and Mother gave him initiation on the day of Saraswati Puja. The period during which Holy Mother stayed at Kothar was a feast of joy for the local people. Villagers as well as devotees from distant places used to come to meet Holy Mother in Khidki Mahal of that house. In the afternoon when others used to take rest, Mother would come and sit here. It is here where she revealed her real identity to a few companions. It was difficult for the devotees to pierce the human veil covering her divine self. By her human aspect she made everybody of her own and with divine aspect she looked after her disciples' spiritual welfare. The room where Holy Mother stayed and the hall in front of it were later renovated and converted into a temple is now called "Sri Sri Saradadevi Smriti Mandir". Though small, it is beautiful. At the entrance of this temple, there are the photos of Balaram Basu and

his wife. In the sanctum sanatorium there is a photo of Holy Mother in the centre on a raised platform and on the two sides there are the photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. In the hall, there are the photos of Jagadhatri, Durga, Kali and Saraswati on one side of the wall and on another side are the photos of Gopaler Ma, Yogin Ma, Golap Ma, Laxmi Didi, Gauri Ma and Sister Nivedita. Outside the veranda where Holy Mother used to sit is a Tulasi grove (Basil plant on a pedestal) on which 'Ma' is written. Next to this house towards the road is Radha-Shyamchand's temple and in a hall in front of this temple there is a huge image of Garuda with folded hands. In the sanctum sanatorium, there are beautiful images of Sri Radharani and Sri Shyamchandji. Holy Mother worshiped these images. Next to these are the beautiful images of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra. The small images were earlier in the house of Balaram Basu at Calcutta where on the Ratha Yatra day Sri Ramakrishna took part in the festival which was celebrated with singing of Bhajan and Kirtan. In 1942, Hatibagan area in Calcutta was bombed by Japanese troops. So Basu family had shifted to Kothar taking the Ratha Yatra images of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra with them. On the other side of Radha-Shyamchandji is kept Shaligram-Shila. The photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji worshiped by Basu family are also kept there. There is a garden of flowers, fruits and vegetables towards the boundary wall. The house is mostly in a dilapidated condition but three rooms out of the seventeen are renovated. In the entrance of the Radha-Shyamchand temple, we may find the huge wooden Ratha in a dilapidated condition. At present, there is a school and also a college in the name of Holy Mother in Kothar.¹

During the stay of Holy Mother at Kothar a number of devotees came to meet her from distant places, many of whom were blessed by her. Basu family, the villagers and many devotees took advantage of Mother's stay there. Below are the few reminiscences of Holy Mother at Kothar to show how important was her stay at Kothar.

(RECORDED BY AN ANONYMOUS DEVOTEE)

The Holy Mother was living in Kothar, Orissa. My second brother, who was staying at Shashi Niketan in Puri, wrote to one of his friends in our native village, "The Holy Mother is now living in Kothar. You can go there to pay your respects." Till that time I had only a vague idea regarding the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna. I had not read any book on them, nor did I know anything in particular about them. None the less I had felt a yearning to see her ever since I had heard about her. After being continuously seized for a few days by such an urge, I left for Kothar. It was almost past midday when I reached the place. But strange to say, my yearning had by now waned, and it was not so strong. The devotees were invited for their midday meal, and accompanied them. The meal over, we seated ourselves in the parlour along with Revered Krishnalal Maharaj and Kedar Baba (Swami Achalananda), when Ram Babu, the only son of the late Balaram Basu, came and told Krishnalal Maharaj, "The Mother has sent for the boy who has come from Cuttack. He should go to salute her now." Krishnalal Maharaj replied, "I have asked him to see the Holy Mother in the afternoon." Ram Babu said, "No, that won't do; the Mother is waiting for him. Only after the boy meets her will she go for her meal." I accompanied Ram Babu and bowed down to the Mother. I had no talk with her then. The next day I came back home.

On my return home, I experienced a similar yearning once again, and so I went to Kothar. After a few days' stay there I went to the Holy Mother one morning and said, "Mother, I shall leave for home tomorrow morning." The Mother replied, "Well, stay here tomorrow and leave for home the next day." I came out of the room. After a while a monk came to tell me, "The Holy Mother is going to favour you. Keep yourself ready for it after your bath tomorrow morning." I wondered what the favour might be. I could make nothing of it and kept silent. Early next morning I made myself ready after my morning bath, when Radhu-Didi announced, "Who is Vaikuntha Babu? The Mother has sent for him."

I said, "My name is Vaikuntha. Am I to go to the Mother!" She nodded and I followed her to meet the Holy Mother. On seeing me, the Mother said, "Come, come inside the room." She asked, "Will you take Mantra?" I replied, "If you are pleased, kindly give me. I know nothing about it." The Mother said, "Well, be seated here." Then she asked, "The Mantra of which deity would you like to have?" I replied, "I know nothing about these things." Thereupon the Mother said, "Well this Mantra will suit you."

The Mother initiated me with the Mantra that very day. It was the seventh lunar day of Magh of 1317 (January-February 1911). One day while on a visit I asked her, "Mother, can I have another spiritual guide for my lessons on Yoga?" In reply she said, "You may have guides for learning various other things, but should have no other person for spiritual guidance."

Ram Babu woke me up at about midnight prior to the morning I was to leave Kothar. He handed over a packet of sweets to me and said, "Vaikuntha, the Mother presents you with these sweet. Carry them with you. The Mother advised you not to take food from any wayside shop."²

(RECORDED BY SRI SURENDRANATH SARKAR)

In December 1910, I went to meet Holy Mother at Kothar along with two devotees from Shillong, namely Hemant Mitra and Virendra Muzumdar. At Kothar that time Ramakrishna Basu, Swamis Dhirananda, Achalananda, Atmananda, a devotee of Sri Nag Mahashaya named Harapasanna Muzumdar and others were present. We took some fruits etc for Holy Mother. We reached Kothar at about 1 p.m. After the bath, we were called for lunch. I told that we would take lunch only after the darshan of Holy Mother. It was communicated to her and she readily agreed. Entering the room, we found Holy Mother who had covered her body with a cloth. Golap-Ma said to Mother that we were just children and had come from far off place to meet her. Hearing this, Mother removed her veil and we could see her divine face clearly. Since that day Mother never put her veil in front of me. I prostrated myself before her and prayed. Mother blessed me by putting her hand on my head and said, 'May you get devotion.'

Myself: Mother we want to stay here for a few days, but it is very difficult to meet you here.

Mother: I will send for you. Have your meals now and take some rest.

After our meals, we took some rest. In the afternoon, Golap-Ma gave us the prasad of Holy Mother. After sometime, Mother sent for us. After offering our pranams, I told her that I wanted to talk to her in privacy. I told Mother how I saw Sri Thakur and Mother in a dream. Then Mother said that whatever I saw in the dream was right. Then I told Mother about the desire of my companions for initiation. Mother agreed to bless them.

Then I told her, "Thakur had worshipped you with flowers etc. We also wish to do the same." Mother consented to my request. After coming out, I felt that though Mother wanted to know about the initiation of my companions, she did not ask anything about my own. So I decided not to ask for my own initiation.

Next day after our bath, we were ready for initiation with flowers etc. We were asked to go to Mother one by one. I went first. It appeared to me that Mother had finished her worship and was waiting for us. When I entered the room, she said, "Whatever Thakur had given you in dream, you do that. I am also giving you something." Then she gave me initiation. Then I worshipped her. Mother accepted my worship. I had a Dhatura flower, Mother forbade me to offer it at her feet saying that it was meant for the worship of Lord Shiva. I offered her a cloth and one rupee.

Mother said, "Why do you give money? You need it for your household." There was no talk about my household but she knew everything.

I said, "Mother, it is all yours. Whatever we earn, if we can offer a fraction of it at your lotus feet then we will feel ourselves blessed." Mother appreciated my feeling. I told her, "Mother, devotees call you Divine Mother Kali, Adyashakti and Bhagavati. In

Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 10.13) it is said that Rishis such as Asit, Deval, Vyas etc knew the real nature of Srikrishna and regarded him as Narayan himself. Srikrishna himself also said it to Arjuna. As it is said by Srikrishna himself, there comes the weightage to what Rishis had said and so people believe it. Likewise, I believe what devotees say about you, but if you repeat it yourself, then all the doubts will be removed from my mind. I want to hear from you whether whatever the devotees says about you is true or not.”

Mother said, “Yes, that is true.” As a result, in future I never had any doubt about the real nature of Holy Mother.

I requested Mother, “Please bless me so that I can have the darshan of my Ishta, as I can see you, talk to you and feel you.” Mother granted my request and replied, “Yes, you will get it.”

Next day before taking leave, I offered my pranams to Mother and saw her in happy and joyful mood.

Golap-Ma asked me, “Are you not going to Puri for darshan of Lord Jagannath?” I Said, “I have a pilgrimage and everything at the feet of Mother, where else shall I go? I do not want anything else.”

Listening to me Mother said, “All right, you need not go anywhere.”³

(RECORDED BY SWAMI KAMALESHWARANANDA)

Holy Mother went to Kothar at the estate of Balaram Basu. As they looked upon Holy Mother as a guru, they did not allow her to do any household work. So Mother said, “Give me some betel leaves, I will roll it. Can I sit idle like this? Thakur never liked me to sit idle. Women should never sit idle.” It is heard that when she had nothing to do, then Thakur used to bring to her fibres for makind a rope or used to give her some similar kind of work. Mother said to Krishnalal Maharaj, “Work, work. If you work, it will do your mind good.”⁴

From Cuttack towards south, one can go to the temple of Divine Mother Virajadevi at Jajpur. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu on the way to Puri visited this temple. Jaleswar, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Chandikhol, Cuttack, Bhuvaneshwar and Puri are on National highway number 5. In that region Sri Chandi Devi of Chandikhol is famous. The temple is in a cave in a forest outside Chandikhol town.⁵

Holy Mother came to Bhadrak from Howrah and after overnight stay at Bhadrak, she came to Kothar in a palanquin on 5th December 1910. To commemorate this occasion, the villagers arrange every year a procession around the village with the portrait of Holy Mother in a palanquin and finally rest the palanquin in front of the house where she had stayed. Blessed is this village which is sanctified by the visits of Holy Mother, Swamis Brahmananda, Akhandananda, Premananda, Subodhananda and many other monks and devotees. Blessed is this village, blessed are the villagers and blessed is the family of Balaram Basu who took part in the divine play of Divine Mother.

To conclude we will relate an incident about Girish Chandra Ghosh who visited Jayrambati to meet Holy Mother. After arriving at Jayrambati, Girish took his bath and bowed down to Holy Mother. His body was shaking with emotion. Casting his eyes upon her, he exclaimed with surprise: “Ah, you are that Mother!” He suddenly recalled a vivid dream of many years before, when he had been bedridden from cholera. A luminous goddess wearing a red-bordered sari appeared to him and offered him some sacred prasad which tasted like the prasad of Lord Jagannath. It soon cured him. He now recognized Holy Mother as that deity and felt that she had always been looking after him as his guardian angel. To verify this Girish asked her: “What kind of Mother are you?” Immediately Holy Mother replied: “Your real Mother, not just the wife of your guru, not a foster mother, not a vague sort of mother. Your real Mother.”⁶

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND JAGANNATH PURI

Once Sri Ramakrishna gave Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath to Swami Vivekananda with the blessing, "May this prasad give you Para-Bhakti."¹

Swami Vivekananda popularly known as Swamiji was the nearest and dearest disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who had specifically chosen him as a leader for his divine work. After the mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, he travelled the length and breadth of India as a parivrajaka. After having travelled extensively, he could feel the heart beat of his motherland and the sufferings of her people.

He had gone up into the Himalayas; had gone west to Dwarka; and had gone to Rameswaram, the southern of the four Dharmas (sacred places at the four "corners" of India). He had not in fact reached Badrinath in the far north; and though he had started out east of Puri, he had not gone there: but what he had not traversed physically he had traversed in spirit by his self-identification with the past and present conditions of India and her people, and by his self-surrender to the cause of her future progress.²

We find several references about Lord Jagannath and the holy city of Puri in his literature. He had great reverence for Lord Jagannath as well as Sri Chaitanya who had his divine play at Puri. In one of his lectures 'The Sages of India' Swamiji spoke about the origin of the Jagannath temple at Puri. He said, "There was a book written a year or two ago by a Russian gentleman, who claimed to have found out a very curious life of Jesus Christ, and in one part of the book he says that Christ went to the temple of Jagannath to study with the Brahmins, but became disgusted with their exclusiveness and their idols, and so he went to the Lamas of Tibet instead, became perfect, and went home. To any man who knows anything about Indian history, that very statement proves that the whole thing was a fraud, because the temple of Jagannath is an old Buddhistic temple. We took this and others over and re-Hinduised them. We shall have to do many things like that yet. That is Jagannath, and there was not one Brahmin there then, and yet we are told that Jesus Christ came to study with the Brahmins there. So says our Great Russian archaeologist."³

The principal place of pilgrimage for the Buddhists is the Dalada Maligawa or Tooth-temple at Kandy, which contains a tooth of Lord Buddha. The Ceylonese say it was at first in the Jagannath Temple at Puri and after many vicissitudes it reached Ceylon, where also there was no little trouble over it. Now it is lying safe. The Ceylonese have kept good historical records of themselves, not like those of ours — merely cock and bull stories. ...⁴

It was not through his teachings that Buddhism came to such degradation, it was the fault of his followers. By becoming too philosophic they lost much of their breadth of heart. Then gradually the corruption known as Vamachara (unrestrained mixing with women in the name of religion) crept in and ruined Buddhism. Such diabolical rites are not to be met with in any modern Tantra! One of the principal centres of Buddhism was Jagannath or Puri, and you have simply to go there and look at the abominable figures carved on the temple walls to be convinced of this. Puri has come under the sway of the Vaishnavas since the time of Ramanuja and Shri Chaitanya. Through the influence of great personages like these the place now wears an altogether different aspect.⁵

For certain that there is no greater Tirtha (holy spot) than the body of man. Nowhere else is the Atman so manifest as here. That car of Jagannath that you see is but a concrete symbol of this corporeal car. You have to hold the Atman in this car of the body. Haven't you read "Atmanam Rathinam Viddhi- Know the Atman to be seated on the chariot" etc., "Maddhye Vaman Masinam Vishve Deva Upasate- All the gods worship the Vamana (the Supreme Being in a diminutive form) seated in the interior of the body"? The sight of the Atman is the real vision of Jagannath. And the statement, "Rathe cha Vamanam Drishta Punarjanma na Vidyate- Seeing the Vamana on the car, one is no more subject to rebirth", means that if you can visualise the Atman which is within you, and disregarding which you are always identifying yourself with this curious mass of matter, this body of yours- if you can see that, then there is no more rebirth for you. If the sight of the Lord's image on a wooden framework confers liberation on people, then crores of them would be liberated every year-specially with such facility of communication by rail nowadays! But I do not mean to say that the notion which devotees in general entertain

towards Sri Jagannath is either nothing or erroneous. There is a class of people who gradually rise to higher and higher truths with the help of that image. So it is an undoubted fact that in and through that image there is a special manifestation of the Lord.⁶

In the west people had many misconceptions about India and its culture. Somebody asked Swamiji, “Do the people of India kill themselves beneath the wheels of Jagannath?” While answering the question he spoke about the Jagannath legend and explained the old practice of the Car-festival in the sacred city, and remarked that possibly a few pilgrims in their zeal to grasp the rope and participate in the drawing of the Car slipped and fell and were so destroyed.⁷

About Sri Chaitanya’s love and devotion for Lord Jagannath Swamiji said, “The stone on which Chaitanya used to stand in the temple of Jagannath (at Puri) to see the image was worn by his tears of love and devotion. When he took Sannyasa, he showed his fitness for it to his Guru by keeping sugar on his tongue for some time without its being dissolved. He discovered Vrindavan by the power of insight he had acquired through devotion.”⁸

It is an immemorial tradition at Puri that no caste distinction is observed so far as the prasad of Jagannath is concerned, so much so, that prasad put into one’s mouth by even a man of the lowest caste, at the Anandbazar within temple precincts, may not be refused. Swamiji perhaps wanted to have same custom during the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna. He writes in one of his letters to Swami Ramakrishnananda from Switzerland on 23rd August 1896: “Let distinctions of sex, caste, wealth, learning, and the whole host of them, which are so many gateways to hell, be confined to the world alone. If such distinctions persist in holy places of pilgrimage, where then lies the difference between them and hell itself?

Ours is a gigantic City of Jagannath, where those who have sinned and those who have not, the saintly and the vicious, men and women and children irrespective of age, all have equal right. That for one day at least in the year thousands of men and women get rid of the sense of sin and ideas of distinction and sing and hear the name of the Lord, is in itself a supreme good.”⁹

Once Swami Brahmananda had gone to Puri. While he was taking the darshan of Lord Jagannath, he was so much overwhelmed with emotion that tears rolled down from his eyes. One day at the house of Balaram Basu in Calcutta, Swamiji was talking with Swami Brahmananda about the latter’s visit to Puri. Swamiji started pulling his legs and said, “Hey fellow, why did you shed tears when you saw Lord Jagannath? Were you so scared to see the big round eyes of Lord Jagannath?” Then enlarging his own eyes and making a face, he started making fun of Brahmananda. This was not at all to hurt his feelings but to prevent him from getting carried away by emotions.¹⁰

Before leaving his mortal body, Swamiji had requested Swami Brahmananda to arrange for his mother’s pilgrimage. After his death, Maharaj arranged for her visit to Puri. He personally went to see her off at the railway station. The request of Swamiji was obeyed by Maharaj with utmost reverence. One day during the Snan Yatra festival, a certain person was criticizing Swamiji in Belur Math in the morning. During that time Brahmananda was in Puri. On the same day Turiyananda left for Puri from Belur Math. After reaching Puri, he narrated this incident to Brahmananda, who became very angry to hear this. He was so annoyed that he would always scold and rebuke that man. This incident shows the love and reverence the brother disciples had for Swamiji. Here is one more incident. Once on the way to Puri, Brahmananda stayed at Kothar. There he saw a good quality of hubble bubble. He asked for one, not for himself but for Swamiji. He would never ask for anything for himself but he asked it for Swamiji. When he presented it to Swamiji, he became very happy and used it for quite sometime.¹¹

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SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

Tirthi Kurvanti Tirthani- Whenever Saints or Holy persons go to the places of pilgrimage; the existing spiritual power of these places is further glorified. From ancient time Orissa is considered as one of the religious centres of India. Many saints visited this holy land and by their presence the glory of this land is increased manifold. Jagannath Puri, the abode of Lord Jagannath is sanctified by the visits of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi, many direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and other spiritual saints. Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi visited this holy land on four different occasions and visited Puri, Bhuvaneshwar, Kothar and many nearby places. Many of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna visited this land on different occasions. There are many incidents associated with these places which are quite inspiring and very helpful to spiritual aspirants.

We could not find any record of Swami Vivekananda's visit to this holy land. But other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna like Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda, Akhandananda, Premananda, Turiyananda and others visited this land and their lives were very much associated with this land.

Swami Brahmananda was popularly known as Raja Maharaj or Rakhhal Maharaj or simply Maharaj. He was the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna used to say about him, "He could run a kingdom." Swami Vivekananda understood that the Master wanted him to be the future leader of his disciples, so he told brother disciples, "Henceforth we shall call Rakhhal our Raja, king." Swamiji knew that he would not live long, so he made him the first President of the Ramakrishna Order. Raja Maharaj visited Orissa on many occasions- he was mostly either in Puri or Bhuvaneshwar. Once Sri Ramakrishna had advised Rakhhal to go on a pilgrimage to Puri rather than Gaya, because in Gaya he might merge into the divine and not return to the relative world.

In Puri Brahmananda used to stay at Shashi Niketan, a retreat home of Balaram Basu. The holy shrine of Lord Jagannath (Krishna), the wholesome climate, and the panoramic view of the seacoast kept him in a high spiritual mood. Quite often Brahmananda would experience ecstasy while visiting the deities- Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra- in the inner sanctuary of the temple. One day he saw a cowherd boy in place of the deities; perhaps he saw his own real nature as the eternal companion of Sri Krishna. During the Chariot Festival of Jagannath, according to custom he would help to pull the Chariot containing Lord Jagannath's image. He experienced all pervading consciousness in Puri and established a monastery at Chakratirtha.¹

Of all the holy places he liked Varanasi, Vrindavan, Puri, and Haridwar most. When at Varanasi, he would be full of the thoughts of Vishwanath and Annapurna, the presiding deities; at Vrindavan the association of Sri Krishna would throw his mind into ecstasy; at Puri his emotions would be stirred by the remembrance of Chaitanya and Jagannath, whereas at Haridwar his mind would be absorbed in contemplation of the all pervading presence. At different places he would be in different moods- everyone as inspiring as another.²

Whenever he had time and opportunity he would practise sadhana in one of his four favourite holy places. He said: "Each place has its own time, when it is favourable for spiritual disciplines. The auspicious time in Vrindavan is midnight; in Varanasi, from 3 a.m. to dawn; in Puri afternoon; in Bhuvaneshwar and Belur Math at 4 a.m."

"But it is completely different at Bhadrak (Kothar- Balaram Basu's estate). There most favourable time for meditation is from 2 to 4 in the afternoon."³

Swami Brahmananda visited Puri many times. In the year 1888 for 4 months from the end of August to November, in 1904 for 2 months in November and December, in 1906 for 7 months from June to December, in 1907-1908 for 9 months from May to January, in 1908 for 4 months from June to October, in 1909-1910 for 9 months from June to February, in 1910 for 6 months from June to November, in 1911 for 7 months

from May to December, in 1915 for 9 months from April to December, in 1917 for 6 months from May to November and in 1919 a few days and in 1920 for 2 weeks.⁴

Whenever Maharaj used to go to Puri, he used to stay in Shashi Niketan. By his holy presence, that house used to turn into a house of joy and happiness. The host, Ramakrishna Basu, the only son of Balaram Basu, a very close devotee of the Master, like his father had offered his life and soul to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Holy Mother and direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna used love him as their own. Rambabu, the name by which he was known, used to serve the monks of Ramakrishna Math and feel blessed. He used to serve Maharaj generously and by his personal attention, his staffs in Puri were always ready to serve Maharaj. We can mention an incident which shows the regard for Maharaj Rambabu had. Once when Maharaj decided to go to Puri, that time Rambabu was in Calcutta. Few days back, Shashi Niketan was given on rent. It was to be vacated after a week of Maharaj's arrival at Puri. So Rambabu requested Maharaj to reschedule his visit to Puri by a week. Maharaj did not agree to this proposal and wanted to visit as per his schedule. That time Maharaj stayed at the outhouse on the seashore of Sri Atal Maitra who was known to him. Rambabu felt embarrassed and by his order, his manager of Puri estate Sri Varada Chakravarty requested Maharaj repeatedly to come to Shashi Niketan, as tenant had vacated Shashi Niketan. After staying at Atal Maitra's house for few more days, Maharaj shifted to Shashi Niketan. Atalbabu developed more and more regards for Maharaj as the days passed. He used to visit Maharaj twice in a day, not only that sometimes he would directly come from court in office dress. People of Puri were surprised to see this, because he never mixed with other people. In the holy company of Maharaj, he developed a test for spiritual life. He had strong desire to perform Durga Puja in image. But that time image was not easily available at Puri. Maharaj encouraged and helped him in many ways in this matter.

Whenever Maharaj used to come to Puri, the local distinguished people, government servants, young men and people of various strata used to visit him. Not only spiritual guidance and conversation, humorous talks and amusement, but also there used to be a feast of Prasad. Many devotees used to send the Maharaj various type of fruits and sweets from all over India. Sometime, Maharaj used to send portions of it to various devotees. Again sometime, Maharaj used to arrange for Mahaprasad from the Jagannath temple and feed all lovingly. People used fondly recall Maharaj's love and affection for them.

Once a certain devotee after listening to the conversation of Maharaj in complaining tone said that because of his grandson he could not concentrate on spiritual life. Maharaj advised him to look after the grandson as Gopal (baby Krishna) and serve him. Our false I and mine should be transformed to thou and thy. On another occasion one devotee asked Maharaj how to control a mind. Maharaj advised him to concentrate the mind on God gradually by practice. One should be alert so that evil thoughts cannot enter one's mind. When mind goes astray then one should bring it back to God with intense longing and prayer only then mind comes under control. Thakur used to say that even if all these do not serve the purpose then one has to go through the sufferings only then mind comes under control.

In Puri, one day there were arrangements of worship of Divine Mother, Phalaharini Kali Puja. He used to get nod from Thakur before starting any auspicious venture. That is why he used to say that, he would not be able to do anything without Thakur's nod.

The proposal for Pilgrimage to Puri attracted quite a number of devotees, and thus Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda, Saradananda as also Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma's Mother and Laxmidevi started with Holy Mother. The coastal railroad had not yet been constructed; hence they went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandanbali on 7th November 1888 from where they proceeded by a launch to Cuttack, and by cart to Puri. Arriving at Puri they visited Lord Jagannath as an inauspicious period would commence from the next day. Then the Holy Mother and the women went to live in a

house of Balarambabu, called the Kshetra-basir Math or a resort for the dwellers in the holy place, the monks had their own separate place. The Mother stayed here for a little more the two months, returning to Calcutta in the middle of January next year.⁵

Just after a few days Swami Turiyananda also joined Swami Brahmananda. They decided to stay in Emmar Math for doing intense sadhana and begging their food from door to door and passing the days in the thought of the Lord. Holy Mother was concerned about the austerities done by these swamis. So sometimes she would instruct Sri Balarambabu to feed these monks sumptuously. Sri Balarambabu began to put pressure on Maharaj to stay with him in more comfort. Maharaj found it difficult to continue his sadhana in his own way and so he decided to leave this place and go to Barahanagar.⁶

In February 1904 when Maharaj was staying in Belur Math after the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna, he had an attack of typhoid. He was shifted to Balaram Mandir for better treatment. In spite of good care, typhoid lasted for fortyone days. Swami Virajananda then took him to Shimultala for change of weather which proved to be of very little use. The disease started showing its effect not only on his body but also on his mind. He was struggling to keep his spiritual mood but opposite thoughts engrossed his mind. He used to tell about this mood, “ If this mood would have continued for a few more days the body would have given way.” Swami Saradananda wrote in a letter dated 5th December 1904, “His long illness has left him not even the strength of a child.” Swami Saradananda understood his condition and arranged to take him to his beloved place Puri in November 1904. Whenever Maharaj went to Puri, he preferred staying at Shashi Niketan, a place belonging to Sri Balaram Basu. At Puri, Maharaj would visit Lord Jagannath temple daily and take Mahaprasad. By this, his spiritual mood, which was disturbed due to typhoid, was completely restored and he regained his health.⁷

In the temple of Jagannath at Puri, there are three images. Sri Krishna stands on one side, his brother, Balaram, on the other, and Subhadra, his sister, stands in the centre. Here Maharaj once saw the living Krishna on the altar; the three images had disappeared. Maharaj visited this temple many times, and whenever he went there he seemed to dwell in another realm, and his face shone with a radiant smile.⁸

It was his daily routine to visit Jagannath temple. Everyday he used to be in different moods. He used to wave his hands and head in such a way as if he was talking to someone. He returned to Calcutta in the beginning of 1905. After returning from Puri, people could see drastic change in his divine mood. He was seen always in indrawn mood, always in higher state of consciousness oblivious of outer surrounding.⁹

After his siege of typhoid, he spent a long convalescence in Puri, a city sacred to Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe. The wholesome climate of this city on the Bay of Bengal and its religious atmosphere made it very congenial to him, and he would often return to it for long stays. His health improved here, but he was never again able to work as he had during the first years of his presidency. It now became necessary for him to rely on the other officers of the Math to attend to administrative details.¹⁰

On 5th June 1906, Maharaj went to Puri along with Swami Premananda from Calcutta via Bhadrak. Before Ratha Yatra festival Swamis Shivananda, Akhandananda joined them. On 23rd August 1906 Swami Abhedananda arrived at Puri to meet Maharaj and other swamis. Two days later, Swami Ramakrishnananda also joined them. *F1 On 15th September 1906 he visited the Atmaguneshwar temple along with brother monks and returned to Puri on 17th September 1906. With so many brother monks at one place, it was a mart of joy. On 10th November 1906 Swami Abhedananda returned to America via Mumbai. Then Maharaj arrived at Kothar on 28th November 1906 and returned to Belur Math on 26th December 1906 to meet Mrs. Sevier who had come from Mayavati.¹¹

During this period we find a touching incident that took place at Puri Railway Station when Maharaj & other brother monks went to receive Swami Abhedananda who had come from America. Dr. Ratikanta Mazumdar reminiscence about it, “It was the year 1906. I was then working for the Indian Railways and was stationed at Puri. I saw four dignified-looking sannyasins strolling back and forth on the platform of the Puri Railway

Station. Curious, I asked one of them why they were walking back and forth on the platform.” He replied that they had come to receive Swami Abhedananda, who was to arrive there by the Madras Mail. I informed them that the Madras Mail was running late that day by one hour. I then invited them to come and wait inside a saloon car, which was at the Railway Station. After they were all seated, I came to know that the Sannyasi with whom I had been talking was Swami Brahmananda. The other three were Swamis Shivananda, Akhandananda and Premananda. After talking to them for a while I asked, “You all seem to be Advaitins, why then do you respect the wooden image of Jagannath?” Swami Brahmananda replied, “We know Lord Jagannath to be no other than Satchidananda Brahman!” His words immediately penetrated my heart. Having been associated with Brahmo-Samaj, my thinking had been greatly influenced by Brahmo teachings, such as a God can’t have any images, and God is formless, no amount of reasoning or argument have been able to dislodge my views in the past. But just by hearing Swami Brahmananda’s words once, I got a new light. My mind then had a wonderful glimpse of Lord Jagannath in his unparalleled, spiritual splendour. I remained speechless. I had no desire to question or argue any more. Such was the impact of a knower of a Brahman on my mind! ¹²

On 6th May 1907 after staying at Belur Math and Balaram Mandir for a few days, Maharaj started for Puri. On 1st December 1907 he went to Bhadrak and stayed there for a week. On 8th December 1907 he came to Kothar. When he was in Bhadrak, there was an epidemic of Cholera. So the devotees requested him to leave that place. But he stayed there for a few days encouraging and guiding the devotees to follow the rules of hygiene in order to control the spread of the epidemic. On 26th January 1908 he returned to Belur Math. ¹³

On 21st June 1908 Maharaj went to Puri before Ratha Yatra and then left for Madras on 27th October 1908 with Swami Ramakrishnananda. He visited Rameshwaram, Madurai, Bangalore and Madras. By his presence the seeds of Ramakrishna Movement were sown in South India. After his return from South India on 4th May 1909 to Calcutta, Ramakrishna Mission was registered. Then on 6th June 1909 he left Calcutta for Kothar where he stayed at Balaram Basu’s house. For the next nine months he stayed either at Puri or at Kothar. A beautiful description has come in Ramakrishna Basu’s diary about the visit of Raja Maharaj to Kothar. He wrote on 26th December 1909: “I came out at 9.30 a.m. with the kirtan party. We waited near the bank of Rewa River. After sometime news came that Maharaj’s palanquin had been seen and cannon was fired. We were happy to see Maharaj. Along with the kirtan party and the palanquin, we first came to temple then Hari Ghat and Anandbazar and finally to Chauri house (Cutchery-House).” At Kothar in Balaram Basu’s house the daily worship of their deity Shyamchand was performed. On 1st March 1910 he left Kothar for Calcutta and reached Howrah station next day. On 30th May 1910 he returned to Puri and stayed there for few months. At that time, there was a great conflagration in Bhuvaneshwar. Many houses were reduced to ashes. The monks of the Ramakrishna order did relief work there and helped the affected people in many ways like rebuilding their houses. Maharaj returned to Calcutta on 29th November 1910. ¹⁴

Swami Brahmananda was charmed to hear Nama-Ramayana or Ramnama-Sankirtanam when he visited Bangalore in South India. He collected those songs and brought them along with him to Puri in May 1909. He added some extra hymns to the songs and adding new melodies, arranged for them to be sung first at Shashi Niketan, and at the Sri Mandir. Nirad Maharaj (Swami Ambikananda) had accompanied him on his trip to South India. It was Nirad Maharaj who added the melodies to the songs and taught others to sing them. Later, in 1911, many copies of the Nama-Ramayana were printed and distributed to the devotees. And the singing of the Nama-Ramayana, along with the worship of Lord Mahavira, was introduced in all the Sri Ramakrishna Ashramas. ¹⁵

On 22nd May 1911 Maharaj arrived at Howrah Railway Station for proceeding towards Puri. Many devotees had come to see him off. He was offered garlands and people were rejoicing. It was a very charming atmosphere. The train departed at 5.30

p.m. While staying at Puri, he went to Kshirchora-Gopinath on 20th December 1911 accompanied by Hari Maharaj and Kedar Maharaj and returned to Puri on the same day in evening. Next day (on 21st December 1911) he returned to Calcutta accompanied by Hari Maharaj. ¹⁶

There was a very strict district Magistrate in Puri district named Atal Maitra about whom we have referred to earlier. People were very afraid of him. He used to come to Maharaj regularly. He had very deep regards and devotion for Maharaj. Without any hesitation he used to tell Maharaj about his faults and shortcomings. Maharaj used to listen to him very patiently. The quality of the water of his well was very good. He used to send that water and cow's milk to Maharaj and served him in many ways. Once Maharaj stayed at his house in Puri for about a month. He provided everything to him as per his instructions. He used to come to Maharaj straight from the office for his holy company. On the one hand, he had so much respect for Maharaj and on the other hand, he behaved very rudely with others. He was very arrogant. Armed guards always accompanied him as his life was in danger but he never bothered about it, because he believed that his Guru always protected him. Though very proud and haughty, he would behave very politely with Maharaj. He would be full of humility when he would come to him. In the presence of Maharaj, he would be like a charmed snake, calm and quiet. ¹⁷

Once Durga Puja was being celebrated in Atal Bihari Maitra's house at Puri. On the day of Mahashtami, after the sandhyarti singing of Bhajans started. Maharaj was sitting in the courtyard with devotees and monks. He was absorbed in listening to the Bhajans. Suddenly there was a hue and cry inside the house. Atalbabu rushed inside the house. After sometime he came out with the information that while the ladies of the house were listening to the Bhajans they suddenly saw an unknown woman wearing broad red-bordered Sari and ornaments hurriedly climbing the staircase. After a thorough search of the house nobody could be found. After hearing all this, Maharaj laughingly said, "Don't you understand? When all of us were listening to the Bhajans and thinking of Divine Mother, then who else would come at that time other than the Divine Mother and accepted your puja?"¹⁸

In 1911 Swami Yatishwarananda went to meet Maharaj at Puri and joined the Ramakrishna Order. He wrote in his reminiscences- Maharaj asked me to perform Jagaddhatri Puja in the house of Atalbabu. Hari Maharaj was tantradharak. Kumari Puja was also performed. Then Maharaj asked me to go to Madras with Swami Sharvananda. Before leaving I requested him for his guidance. He replied seriously and affectionately, "Struggle! Struggle! Struggle!" This had remained the main theme of my life. I still remember his advice. One day Atalbabu said to Swami Sharvananda, "What kind of monks you people are without occult power." Hearing this Maharaj replied, "It is easy to get occult power but difficult to get purity of mind which should be the aim of life." ¹⁹

Sri Biharilal Sarkar was a Munsiff at Puri. He was impressed and drawn towards the Maharaj. As and when he was free, he would come to Maharaj for spiritual guidance. In the holy company of Maharaj, he developed strong devotion towards Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. He had genuine regards for the monks of Ramakrishna Order. Later he was promoted to the post of Judge. One day Maharaj was sitting in the Veranda of Shashi Niketan at Puri. Munsiff Biharilal Sarkar, few devotees and monks were present at that time. It was evening. Suddenly there was a sweet fragrance. But there was neither any flower plant in close vicinity nor any breeze. When somebody brought this to the notice of Maharaj, he said, "When gods travel through the space then comes such fragrance." ²⁰

Swami Purnananda told once to Swami Saradeshnananda about his stay at Shashi Niketan in Puri with Raja Maharaj- At that time Maharaj used to be always at higher plane of consciousness. One day on a full moon night with the sky absolutely clear everything appeared to be full of joy. As per the instruction of the Maharaj, beds were arranged in the courtyard. He was talking while lying in bed. We all were listening to him. It was quite late at night. We were feeling sleepy. Suddenly Maharaj remembered the divine play of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at Nilachal. His heart was filled with emotion

and he said lovingly and earnestly, “Mahaprabhu would not be able to sleep on such full moon night due to pang of separation from God. He used to weep throughout the night for not getting the vision of Lord Sri Krishna.” Talking about Mahaprabhu in such a way, Maharaj also had the same feeling of separation from God. He also could not sleep and was feeling restless in bed. Tears rolled down his cheeks. Seeing his divine mood nobody could sleep that night. ²¹

Maharaj used to go to Puri many times. He used to get immense joy there. He had an intense desire to start a centre at Puri. Sri Ramakrishna Basu, the only son of Balaram Basu, who also happened to be a very large hearted person like his father fulfilled his desire by donating the land in 1916. The Math at Chakratirtha was started subsequently in 1932. The land and the buildings were said to have been sanctified by the presence of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda, Swami Vijnanananda and some other direct disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Mahendranath Gupta (‘M’) stayed here and is said to have worked on the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (Kathamrita) in one of the two rooms in the front. The small statues of elephants on the two pillars at the open veranda in front had earned it the nickname of “Hathi Kuthi”. ²²

In May 1915 Maharaj went to Puri and stayed at Shashi Niketan. Before Ratha Yatra, Swamis Saradananda, Premananda and others joined him. They took part in Ratha Yatra festival. A few days after the Ratha Yatra, he went to Bhadrak. On 18th October 1915 Swami Subodhananda wrote from Kothar that Maharaj was keeping well in Bhadrak and he was staying with Amulya Maharaj and Vishvaranjan Maharaj. On 10th December 1915 he returned to Belur Math. ²³

On 21st July 1916 Maharaj started for South India and reached Madras on 23rd. He visited Bangalore, Mysore, Haripad, Trivendrum, Kanyakumari, Kanchipuram and Tirupati. On 11th May 1917 he returned to Puri from Madras. He was then staying at Shashi Niketan. On 4th June 1917 Hari Maharaj, Sharat Maharaj, and Dr. Kanjilal joined him there from Calcutta. ^{*F2} On 21st June 1917 after Ratha Yatra Festival, he accompanied by Hari Maharaj went to see the new temple built by the queen of Puntia. He praised the style of sculpture like that of Varanasi. ²⁴

On Snan Yatra day, Maharaj and Hari Maharaj went to Jagannath temple and observed the Snan ceremony of Lord Jagannath, Subhadra and Balaram. They were overwhelmed and overjoyed by the darshana of Lord Jagannath. With all devotion they took Mahaprasad at night. On 20th June 1917 was the Nava-Yauvan day. (*As per the tradition, the deities are kept out of view for 15 days after the Snan Yatra. After this period, the day on which doors are opened is called Nava-Yauvan day.*) On this day at 6 a.m. Maharaj went to temple with all others to take darshan. He was then in an ecstatic mood. Next day was the Ratha Yatra festival. To keep fit and to enjoy the festival he advised everyone to take light food. They finished their food hurriedly and went to Jagannath-Vallabha Math. Around 1.30 p.m. three chariots arrived and the procession began. Hari Maharaj, inspite of too much rush all over, went to pull the chariot. Maharaj instructed his two sevakas to go and take care of him. Maharaj was seeing the procession with folded hands. He was then in an ecstatic mood. When chariot reached near him he pulled it for some distance. On the day of Navami, monks and devotees went to Gundicha temple. Maharaj and Hari Maharaj sat on the floor itself and partook the Mahaprasad in the same plate with everybody with great joy. On 29th June 1917 it was the return journey of the Chariots. Hari Maharaj could not go to see it due to fever. Maharaj went with others to Jagannath-Vallabha Math to take the darshan. In those days he was always on a high level of consciousness and always in great joy. Everyday he used to take darshan of Jagannath Temple Dome (Shikhar) and offer his pranams. On special occasions Maharaj used to go to the temple for darshan. One day a sannyasi offered pranams to him, Maharaj who was in divine mood exclaimed, “See! See! Everything is Chaitanyamaya, everything is Chaitanyamaya!” ²⁵

The following incident happened in June 1917 when Swami Brahmananda was in Puri and staying at Shashi Niketan. One day a dark-complexioned young man came to the Shashi Niketan carrying a small suitcase and saluted Swami Brahmananda.

The Swami exclaimed, "Hello Kanti, how come you are here? What happened?"

The young man replied with much emotion, "Maharaj, I have now clearly understood that worldly life is useless. The path of renunciation is the best. I've come here giving up everything. Please invest me with sannyasa."

The Swami said, "We'll see to that later. Now go and take a shower. As you were in the train the whole night, you couldn't sleep. It's very likely that you didn't eat anything either."

Kanti said, "What you say is true! For the past seven or eight days I've been in such a mental state that I can't sleep, nor do I find joy in eating, resting or walking. I don't enjoy anything! This time I have made up my mind to live with you and have sannyasa." Swami Brahmananda gestured to his sevak who took Kanti to the inner quarters of the house and gave him some snacks to eat. On inquiry the sevak came to know from him that his full name was Kantichandra Ghosh and that he was the younger brother of Purnachandra Ghosh, one of the intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

The next morning, after ablutions, Kanti came to see Swami Brahmananda, who said, "Hello Kanti, did you have good sleep last night?"

Kanti replied, "I had excellent sleep. I haven't slept this well for several days."

The Swami said, "Very good! Are you going back home today?"

Kanti scratched the back of his neck and ran his fingers through his long hair nervously two or three times.

Then he answered, "Maharaj, may I go back by the evening train today?" He never came and met the Swami again. A few years after this incident, he married a Western lady, and later acquired some fame by translating the Omar Khayyam into Bengali poetry.²⁶

Swami Prabhavananda narrates in his reminiscences about Puri. "One morning Swami Shankarananda, Maharaj's secretary, handed me a bill and said, 'Take it to the railway station and give it to the stationmaster.' On the way I met the young brahmacharin who used to do that job. I asked him, 'This was handed to me. What am I to do?' He said, 'Oh, there's nothing to do. Just give it to the stationmaster, and when the basket comes, he will send it.' So I handed it to the stationmaster, and, as I was coming back, I approached the gate of the house. I saw all the swamis watching, waiting. Somebody asked me, 'Where is the fish?' I said, 'Fish?' Then, Maharaj's secretary took a cab and went to get the fish. It was to be cooked for Maharaj's lunch. The whole day—that was the first time—Maharaj just went after me, scolding and scolding and scolding. 'He has no intelligence.' Like that, he went on. I just listened; in my heart I knew I was innocent, but I didn't say a thing. In the evening, when Maharaj and Swami Turiyananda were having their supper outside, I was fanning to keep away the insects, and Maharaj was still going on. I kept quiet. Swami Turiyananda said to me, 'Do you understand why Maharaj is scolding you?' I said, 'Frankly speaking, I don't.' Swami Turiyananda said, 'You see, the disciple who is asked to do something and he does it; that's a third-class disciple. Then the disciple who can read the thoughts of the guru and does it; that's a second-class disciple. Before the thought has arisen in the mind of the guru, the disciple who accomplishes it; that's a first class disciple. Maharaj wants you to be a first-class disciple.' Then Maharaj—his comment was very interesting—said, 'Yes brother Hari, I have become very old, so they don't obey me. You pour a little intelligence into their heads.'

One day in Puri I was seated in a big hall; I saw Maharaj walking up and down. Whenever Maharaj walked up and down, he would be in a very high spiritual mood. The whole monastery would vibrate. He looked very compassionately at me, and the next morning I received a letter from my mother that my father had passed away. I read the letter to Maharaj. Later, I felt that when he was walking up and down and looked at me

the day before, he knew my father had died, and he was giving him liberation. That's my personal belief.

After a father or mother dies, the sons and daughters are supposed to observe the occasion by cooking their own meal. In one pot rice, dal—lentil—and any vegetables are cooked together. You are not to sleep on a bed, but on straw. The idea is to pray and live a very pure life, think of God, and pray for the departed soul. Maharaj had said, 'You don't have to do anything, you are a brahmacharin.' Again he said, 'Take prasada from the Jagannath temple.' Then he said, 'Take my prasada.' So I was there for three or four days and suddenly Maharaj looked at me and said, 'Why are you here? Go to your mother.' He bought the ticket and sent his secretary to put me in the car with food from the Jagannath temple. When I arrived home my mother, brothers and sisters said to me, 'Something happened. As soon as you came, our grief was turned into joy.' All grief was gone. It became a festive occasion. Maharaj must have sent something through me. That is my belief.

When I came back to Belur Math, Swami Premananda wanted me to remain as an assistant to Swami Saradananda and to learn the job of a secretary. He told me, 'We are getting old. You boys have to conduct the whole work. So stay with Swami Saradananda.' I agreed. And then I got a letter from Maharaj asking me to come to him immediately. I told Swami Premananda and he said to me, 'Write to Maharaj that you won't go.' I said, 'I can't do that.' Then he said, 'What! You won't obey me?' I said, 'When it comes to obeying Maharaj and obeying you, I have to obey Maharaj.' Then—you see, his love was so great—he got excited and said, 'Get away from me! I can't look at you!' I went and bought some shoes, and when I came back, somebody said, 'Go upstairs. He is waiting for you'. Swami Premananda gave me some sweets and water and then asked, 'Are you mad at me?' I said, 'Why should I be mad at you?' 'Well, I scolded you.' 'But, Maharaj,' I said, 'your scolding is a blessing.' And really I always felt that way. He then said, 'Don't tell Maharaj that I scolded you. You see, this is the last you will see of me.' And he added, 'Of course, I had some plans for you, but Maharaj has others, so go.'

As soon as I arrived at the feet of Maharaj, he asked me, 'How is brother Baburam?' I answered that he was sick and suffering. He said, 'Did he ask anything of you?' I answered, 'Yes, he asked for some of the Lord's bathwater from the temple.' Maharaj exclaimed, 'And you have kept quiet! Such a great soul asking for such a little thing and you kept quiet all this time?' He turned to his secretary to get the prasada water and to send it to him immediately. He said to me, 'Do you know how great he is? If he looks in one direction, that direction becomes purified.'

After I was at Puri for some time, he sent me to Madras. He always considered me not very intelligent, not very practical, so he used to take care of me in a very motherly way. He was sending me to Madras, but he said to his secretary that since it was a long way to go, I must break my journey at such and such a place. He wrote a letter to a disciple and asked him to arrange for my stay with him."

While I was at Puri, Maharaj gave me the charge to take care of two young women who were his disciples- to take them to bathe in the ocean, to take them to the temple, in other words to show them the place of pilgrimage. One day they wanted to visit the famous monastery established by Shankaracharya, but they did not dare approach Maharaj. They requested me to ask permission of him. His reply was, 'Shankara, Shankara will give you liberation! Go and meditate!' These women ran away! And he told me, 'Meditate, meditate, meditate. Then you will find that people suffer for no reason when there is the mine of bliss in everyone's heart. Then your heart will go out in sympathy and compassion for everybody.'

He emphasized what is known as the easy path to realize God: to keep recollectedness of God as often as possible. You see, we pass our time idly. We have time for everything else- we can sit and gossip for hours- but we have no time to meditate! That is the situation. But if you are a spiritual aspirant, the best method is to

keep remembrance of God as often as you can; and remembrance means to feel the presence of God. Of course, Maharaj emphasized work also- work and worship, work and meditation. As he said, 'With one hand hold on to God, and with the other hand work.' ²⁷

In 1917 while returning from Puri, Brahmananda stopped at Bhuvaneshwar to visit the famous Lingaraj Shiva Temple. He stayed there for three days and felt a wonderful spiritual atmosphere. He arranged to purchase a plot of land for a monastery. The monastery was dedicated on 31st October 1919. He commented: "This place is very conducive for practising yoga. It is a place of Lord Shiva- a hidden Varanasi. Practising a little spiritual discipline here, one can accrue immense results. It is a healthy place. After getting tired from working in other places, the monks may come here to rest as well as practise meditation." He also advised the householder devotees to build homes around the centre and to lead a quiet life in solitude. Maharaj visited Bhuvaneshwar many times for health reasons, and also trained some monks in that isolated retreat. One day he reminisced about Sri Ramakrishna: "The Master's body was so tender that once while breaking a *luchi* (crispy fried bread) his finger was cut." At this a gentleman remarked: "How is it possible for a person to cut his finger by breaking a *luchi*?" Brahmananda immediately became silent. If anyone interrupted him, his mood would break and he could not talk further.

"It has been said", wrote Christopher Isherwood, "that Brahmananda was so entirely fearless that others could not feel fear in his presence. Once, when he was walking with two devotees in the woods of Bhuvaneshwar, a leopard appeared and came straight towards them. He stood still and confronted it calmly until it turned tail." ²⁸

The last important act of Maharaj was to build under his personal supervision an Ashram at Bhuvaneshwar, in Orissa. He was of the opinion that Bhuvaneshwar had such a congenial atmosphere that progress will be very rapid if one undertook spiritual practice there. He saw that many monks of the order had to work so hard that they did not find sufficient time for *tapasya*. And those who went to Rishikesh and other places for this broke down in health by too much hardship. He desired very much that there should be a place where the monks could get proper facilities for spiritual practice. He had an idea of personally carrying out the development of the place according to this plan. ²⁹

On 15th July 1917 Maharaj entrusted Swami Shankarananda (Amulya Maharaj) to go and search for a piece of land in Bhuvaneshwar for starting a centre there. Accordingly Swami Shankarananda found out a suitable land 4.42 acres for establishing the Math. Maharaj consented to this proposal and the land was purchased and registered on 26th July 1917. On 21st September 1917 Maharaj arranged for offering of Anna-Bhoga to Mahaprabhu and Vimaladevi and served many Brahmins sumptuously to their full satisfaction. Then Maharaj went to Bhuvaneshwar and stayed in sanatorium from 2nd November 1917 to 4th November 1917. Swami Shankarananda took him to the land purchased for the centre. He was satisfied to see the land, which was not very far from Lingaraj Temple. ³⁰

Pointing to an adjoining piece, he said, "There, in olden times, stood a large Buddhist monastery, where thousands of monks attained nirvana." ³¹

He returned to Puri on 6th November afternoon. Meanwhile Hari Maharaj was not keeping well. So on 9th November 1917 Maharaj, Hari Maharaj, Sharat Maharaj and Dr.Kanjilal started for Calcutta from Puri. ³²

In the year 1908 Swami Shankarananda was sent to Chilika with Swami Subodhananda for relief work. His selfless work and his rapport with the local people laid the foundation for the deep regard he had for Orissa and its devoted people. Swami Shankarananda had spent most of his monastic life in this part. Many times he came with Raja Maharaj. Regarding his pioneering work for the Bhuvaneshwar Math he said, "Construction work was taken in the year 1917-1918 and I was entrusted with this task by Raja Maharaj." He used to stay at a small rented house at Kedar-Gauri and cooked his own food. He would finish his meals in the morning at 8 a.m. and go straight to the construction site. At that time it was difficult to get good mason. Hence he had to manage

with the local lads. Temporary huts were erected for them at the site. He had to face lots of trials and tribulations while constructing the Math. Raja Maharaj had come down from Belur Math twice and stayed at Sharat-Kutir to supervise the work. He used to come to the site one or two times a day. The purchased land was in a remote place covered with thick forest. Wild animals like tigers, leopards and bears were very common what to speak of poisonous snakes and scorpions!³³

When Amulya Maharaj went to supervise the construction of the building for the Bhuvaneshwar Math, Maharaj verbally instructed him about the architectural plans, etc. He said to Gokulbabu, "There will be the statue of a lion on the top of the gate of the Bhuvaneshwar Math. Please make a model of that lion for us." The lion on the gate of the Bhuvaneshwar Math is a replica of the model made by Gokulbabu.

Swami Brahmananda was then busy finishing the construction of the Bhuvaneshwar Math. He was in need of some money for the work but nevertheless, if someone offered to give money, he would sometimes refuse it. Or if someone gave a certain amount, he would take only a portion of it; the rest would be returned to the donor. He used to say that sometimes money is made through swindling people in various ways or causing suffering to others. The curses of those people are on such money. Swami Brahmananda also used to say, "The householders are turning into renunciates by giving away their hard-earned money. And the monks are becoming attached to enjoyment by taking their money."³⁴

Swami Brahmananda founded the Bhuvaneshwar Math so that the monks of the Ramakrishna Order could go there for both rest and the performance of spiritual austerities. He would ask the monks very cordially, "When are you going there for a visit?" Someone asked him once, "Why have you made the gate of the Bhuvaneshwar Math so massive and tall?" Smilingly he replied, "Now I am the President of an Order that has very little financial resources. But in future, the Presidents of our Order will enter this Math in great grandeur, sitting on the back of an elephant. That is why I wanted the gate to be built like that." However, as per reminiscences of Swami Nirvanananda, Maharaj had smiled and replied, "In future, this place will awaken. Bhuvaneshwar will be the centre of activity in Orissa."³⁵

Bhuvaneshwar Math was surrounded by thick forest. One day a big bear fell into a large well of the Math. It was lifted out of the well by chain and rope with the help of many people. The moment it was brought out of the well it ran to the forest. One day, one known hunter came to Maharaj and said, "In this forest there is a tiger troubling the people. I am going to kill it. Please bless me for success." Maharaj became serious and replied, "I can not bless you for killing an animal, but I will pray to Sri Ramakrishna for your safety." In all matters his thinking was positive.³⁶

On 29th October 1919 Maharaj reached Bhuvaneshwar from Belur Math with many monks and devotees. It was the time of Durga Puja. On 31st October 1919 the Maharaj consecrated Bhuvaneshwar Math. Next day there was a big Bhandara for Brahmins as well as the poor people (Daridra Narayan). During this period Maharaj stayed in Bhuvaneshwar for around one year. In this period there was famine in that region. Maharaj arranged for relief work in that area. In order to make a good arrangement of medical treatment for local people, he started a permanent charitable dispensary in the Bhuvaneshwar Math.³⁷

As per the reminiscences of Swami Shankarananda, it was a single storied building consisting of four rooms, a hall in middle and wide verandas on north and south side. There was no guest room. Raja Maharaj used to stay in a room west to southern veranda. In front of his room there was the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna. The construction of the first floor of temple was started during his time but was completed after his passing away. He instructed Mahapurush Maharaj to install the image of Sri Ramakrishna on the first floor.³⁸

The compound of the Bhuvaneshwar Math, previously heavily littered with gravel, was decorated in one year with fruit trees and flowering plants by Swami

Brahmananda. To anyone who came for a visit the place was like an oasis in a desert. It is here where Swami Brahmananda once said, "Trees have feelings. They know who takes care of them. They become happy when the person who takes care of them comes near them. They become sad when that person goes away. Their feelings are similar to the feelings of human beings. They are never ungrateful. By offering fruits and flowers they serve the person who takes care of them."³⁹

Swami Kamaleshwarananda writes in his diary that one day he went to Belur Math to take medicine from Raja Maharaj. Maharaj called Baburam Maharaj and said, "Please give him the roots of that plant. I cannot uproot it. I see it conscious." We have heard many times from him that he used to see consciousness in many things. Once he was walking towards the jungle in Bhuvaneshwar, when he came near a flowering tree, he found that the tree was calling him and saying, "Come, come and smell my fragrance." These things are in the realm of super conscious level and such utterances suits only a person of that stature like Maharaj.⁴⁰

Swami Brahmananda found a cutting of some plant in a corner of the backyard of the Shashi Niketan. He asked Mr. Chakravarty, the caretaker of the property, about it and learned that it was the cutting of a particular type of lemon tree (Pati-Lemon). Unfortunately, it had not grown at all in the past two or three years. Examining the cutting the Swami said, "It looks like it is still alive!" Then he started taking good care of it. Within a few days new buds appeared on the cutting, and in a few months it grew into a large, bushy tree. While he was in the Shashi Niketan blossoms appeared on the tree. After his return to Calcutta from Puri, when he was staying at the Balaram Mandir, a large basket full of large lemons arrived- the first fruits of the tree he had so fondly taken care of in Puri.⁴¹

In those days it was difficult to buy any vegetables other than a few edible roots such as "skanda-mool," taro roots, and pumpkins in Bhuvaneshwar Math. That's why a disciple of Swami Brahmananda used to send two parcels of vegetables every week from Calcutta. But even those vegetables were not sufficient for the needs of monastery. One day while rinsing his mouth after his meal, the Swami saw a seedling growing next to a gutter in the inner courtyard. After examining it he determined that it was brinjal seedling. He said, "Don't disturb it; let it grow." After getting care, the seedling grew and branched out into a large healthy plant. Shortly thereafter it started yielding a lot of brinjals as if to repay for the care it had received from the monks.⁴²

Swami Yatishwarananda reminisces: "Towards the end of December 1919 one evening Sri Atal Maitra of Puri arrived with his first wife. The old man was very much downcast, filled with sorrow. Sri Maharaj asked Swami Varadananda to sing. Varadananda sang the song beginning:

*O mind, make thy refuge the feet of the
Divine Mother who dispels all fears.*

Hearing the song, and more than that by having the darshan of Sri Maharaj and hearing his words the old man's face brightened and he was filled with joy. We all felt very happy at this transformation."⁴³

On 12th January 1920, on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's Birthday celebration, Maharaj ordained nine Brahmacharins into Sannyasa and one into Brahmacharya. On 23rd January 1920 his birthday was celebrated and in the evening Ramnam & Bhajans were sung. On 1st March 1920 at the earnest request of Rambabu, Maharaj went to Puri for six days and stayed there at Shashi-Niketan & then he returned to Bhuvaneshwar.*^{F3} This was his last visit to Puri. Rambabu stayed on at Bhuvaneshwar for about three months- during this period Rambabu spent considerable sums for Bhuvaneshwar Math. Swami Saradananda and Vaikunthnath Sanyal also came there. On 7th March 1920 Maharaj started for Calcutta. Again on 27th March 1920 he returned to Bhuvaneshwar with Ramlaldada.⁴⁴

P.Seshadri Aiyar narrates in his reminiscences: Another person who met Maharaj at Puri told me of his experience. He had gone on pilgrimage with his mother and some

other female relations. Learning that Maharaj was at Puri, he hastened to Shashi Niketan, his residence, without informing the other members of his party. As soon as he prostrated, Maharaj asked him about his whereabouts. When he learnt that the devotee was from Travancore, Maharaj specially enquired of Sri Thampi and asked an attendant to note his address. Afterwards, Maharaj said to him: 'I think you had been to the temple of Jagannath, but did not get the sacred Prasad. Take Prasad here.' That remark of Maharaj astonished the newcomer, for that was the fact: How could Maharaj have known it? He took Prasad and Maharaj was watching him all the time. As soon as the devotee had washed after partaking of the Prasad, Maharaj suddenly told him: 'Go at once; your people are anxious about you and they are seeking you here and there.' He took leave of Maharaj and started. On the way, he met his mother and others who were worried as they did not know where he had gone.⁴⁵

Raja Maharaj liked Bhuvaneshwar Math very much, he regarded it as his Tapovan. Math building was like a grand palace but the construction cost was hardly between five and six thousand rupees. Raja Maharaj made adequate arrangements for a permanent source of income for the Bhuvaneshwar Math. There was an expert mason by name Bhagavan who worked for the construction of the Math from the beginning to the end with full devotion without caring for money. He was an expert in plastering and knew carpentry also. Raja Maharaj highly appreciated his work, his craftsmanship and his devotion to work. Maharaj awarded him a silver medal. He always paid his obeisance to Thakur and monks of the Math. He used to attend the evening Aarti everyday. He requested Maharaj for initiation and his request was granted. One day he expressed his desire to become a monk and to serve the Maharaj, Maharaj fulfilled his desire and allowed him to stay at the Math. He not only rendered his services till his death but also devoted equal time to Japam and Meditation. In this way his life was transformed. Bhagavan mason became Swami Nityasiddhananda. (*He joined the Order in 1924 and got Sannyasa in 1937 and died in 1945.*)⁴⁶

After establishing Bhuvaneshwar Math, Maharaj used to spend most of his time with the monks and devotees in giving instructions, spiritual conversations as well as Bhajan-Kirtan. One day one monk after offering his pranams to Maharaj asked for blessings so that he may get devotion at the feet of the Master. Maharaj became silent and serious and said: "You see, if one can become humble, totally depending on only God and keeps the spirit of poverty then only he may get devotion." After telling many things about Japam and Meditation, one day he told him, "Always do Japam even when you are breathing. Once you develop this habit then Japam becomes natural to you and it continues even before and after sleep. If one does his Japam and Meditation properly then by the virtue of his tapas on Math can run well."

In 1919-1920 relief work was going on at three places of Bhuvaneshwar area. The monk incharge of relief was working tirelessly. One devotee named Sakhichandbabu used to collect a large quantity of clothes from different places for distribution to the needy. Once he handed over the lot to Maharaj and a list of very needy people to Manager Maharaj for distribution. In reply Manager Maharaj told, "Unless we verify the list we will not distribute the clothes only because you have collected them. We distribute the clothes to the people as per the decision of the Mission." By this rude behaviour Sakhichandbabu felt sad. Without telling anything to anybody he left the place. When Maharaj came to know about this incident he called the monk and verified the truth of the incident. The monk said that he had only followed the rules and regulations of the Mission. At this Maharaj became annoyed and told him that, "To follow etiquette is also one of the rules of the Mission, you could have told him that the clothes will be distributed after due enquiry." As per Maharaj's instruction the monk begged apology from Sakhichandbabu who felt very embarrassed.⁴⁷

Pundit Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod narrates the following incident in his autobiography: "In 1920 I met Swami Brahmananda in the Bhuvaneshwar Ashrama. Then I told him, "I could have seen Sri Ramakrishna. It is my misfortune that I missed

the opportunity. I was a student then. Having heard about him, one day I wanted to go and see him in Dakshineswar. I started for Dakshineswar, but when I reached Alambazar, I remembered that he could read the thoughts of people and sometimes would talk about them. I was a young man then, and I had all kinds of thoughts in my mind, some of which I would keep carefully hidden. If he talked about them in front of others, I would be extremely embarrassed. This thought scared me and I turned back. That's why I didn't get to see him!"

Swami Brahmananda said, "Since you went as far as Alambazar to see him, it was as good as having seen him."

"No, Maharaj," I insisted, "I haven't seen him."

"Then I started shedding tears, remembering my great misfortune. He said again, "I'm telling you that you actually saw him!" Just then I quickly glanced over at him and saw that it was not him, but it was Sri Ramakrishna who was sitting there!"⁴⁸

In April 1920, while Maharaj was staying at Bhuvaneshwar Math, one day he went to Pandav Caves. He sat for a while in meditation. He was absorbed in the divine mood. We can see his photos taken in Pandav Caves as well as in Bhuvaneshwar Math. Apparently he was enjoying the hubble-bubble, but he was lost in meditation.

During this period, Sri Boshishwar Sen, a great agricultural scientist who was closely associated with the monks of Ramakrishna Order, came to Bhuvaneshwar and stayed with Maharaj. Regarding his visit, he wrote to Swami Turiyananda. In reply to his letter, Swami Turiyananda wrote, "I am very happy to know that you have spent your Ester holidays very joyfully with Maharaj. Swami Saradananda had already given me the news of Bhuvaneshwar Math. I am also happy to receive the news from you especially about the sound health ***of Maharaj."⁴⁹

While he was staying at Bhuvaneshwar in 1920, in the month of April on hearing the news of passing away of Swami Adbhutananda, he became very sad. Soon after this in May 1920, on receiving the news of illness of Rambabu, he became very disturbed and worried. He asked the monks to pray to Thakur for Rambabu. But after untimely death of Rambabu on 14th May 1920, he was filled sorrow and became silent and sombre for few days.

It was 20th July 1920. This was the day when the Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi left her mortal coil. Swami Brahmananda was then at the Bhuvaneshwar Math. He was sleeping and suddenly got up from bed and asked, "What is the time now? I don't know why I am suddenly feeling sad. I wonder how the Holy Mother is doing in Calcutta!" On Thursday morning just as he was getting ready to go out for a walk, a telegram came from Swami Saradananda carrying the sad news of the Holy Mother's passing away. Hearing the news, Swami Brahmananda became so overwhelmed with grief that he could no longer stand up. He immediately went and lay down on bed. He rose a little later saying, "I shall observe mourning". Then he told to other monks, "Those of you who are disciples of the Holy Mother must not wear shoes during the three days of your mourning. You will all eat only Havishya." He also ate only Havishya during the three day mourning period, did not wear shoes for several days in honour of the memory of the Holy Mother. He kept all his grief inside. Only once he said, "As long as the Holy Mother was with us, I felt like I was in the protective shelter of a mountain."⁵⁰

In 1920 when Maharaj was in Bhuvaneshwar Math, he asked one monk whether he was getting proper food. The monk said that he was not happy with the kind of food served in the Math. After listening to this Maharaj became serious and kept quiet for sometime and then said, "How much food thus one need? What a wonderful place this is for doing Sadhana. Where will you get such a place? How much hardship we had undergone during our period of sadhana? We never cared for food."⁵¹

On 9th November 1920 Kali Puja was celebrated in Bhuvaneshwar Math. As per the instructions of Maharaj, the idol was brought from Cuttack. It was made by a renowned sculptor Natubabu. Maharaj became very happy to see the image and told that it was just similar to that of Dakshineswar and he blessed the sculptor. Swami

Ambikananda performed the Puja. Maharaj was in ecstatic mood whole day. It was a wonderful occasion. On 4th December 1920 in the evening he started for Belur Math. ⁵²

On 1st April 1921, Maharaj travelled to Bhuvaneshwar by Howrah Puri Express along with Mahapurush Maharaj and other monks and brahmacharins. He reached there next day morning. On 15th April 1921 there was Ratha Yatra festival at Lingaraj Temple. All took part in it. With Mahapurush Maharaj he went to South India on 18th April and returned to Bhuvaneshwar at mid night on 21st November 1921. Maharaj stayed at different places in South India for seven months. By his presence there the level of spiritual awareness was greatly heightened. In his third and last trip to South India monks and devotees could feel the manifestation of his spiritual power at highest level. After his return to Bhuvaneshwar his attendants could find him in more indrawn mood. He used to walk in the Math campus itself oblivious of outer surrounding. In this period he said to Mahapurush Maharaj twice, “Tarakda, henceforth you people take the responsibility of running this organisation. Now I want to stay at one place quietly.”

One day on the terrace near the staircase in Bhuvaneshwar Math Ramlaldada told Raja Maharaj sadly, “In the company of Sri Ramakrishna you people did so much Sadhana. But now a days we do not find such intensity in new monks.” Maharaj replied, “You see Ramlaldada, how much these boys are struggling for the betterment in spiritual life. As much as they struggle so much opposition they have to face from the world, gross and subtle. If they can repeat the name of Sri Ramakrishna then by the grace of Guru they will get everything in spiritual life.”

One day Maharaj was sitting in the hall with Ramlaldada at Bhuvaneshwar Math. He told one monk, “See, by the grace of Guru you will get everything, but if you want to realise God in this very life then you have to pray to Him with all humility.” ⁵³

Swami Kashishwarananda narrates in his reminiscences: A sanniyasin of the Order came to Bhuvaneshwar Math after a sojourn in Punjab. It was November 1921. Maharaj, Mahapurush Maharaj and possibly Ramlal Dada were at Bhuvaneshwar Math. At that time the shrine room of the Math was located on the ground floor. That evening Maharaj was seated in the central hall, surrounded by monks and devotees. He was trying to persuade the monk with great care and affection that he should not leave and that he should remain in Bhuvaneshwar Math. He all but prostrated before the monk in his attempt to coax him to stay. But the sadhu did not listen. At last he told the sadhu, ‘What do you want? Do you want to worship and meditate in a secluded place? All right. I shall arrange for a separate cottage for you and send you food there. But I beseech you, please do not leave this place.’

All those present there were much moved by his sincere pleadings, but the monk did not heed his pleas. After half an hour of such pleadings, the monk still insisted that he would go away. Then Maharaj said, ‘Listen son, a human being is helpless. Can he accomplish everything that he wishes for or live a pure life? There are so many evil propensities.’ Saying this, he became grave and silent.

Mahapurush Maharaj, who was listening to all this, told the sadhu, ‘You did not heed Maharaj’s advice; you will soon realise your folly.’ Very soon after his departure from Bhuvaneshwar Math, the monk committed a grave offence. He fell from the moral ideal and was expelled from the Order.

Swami Kashishwarananda narrates in his reminiscences: What an extraordinary devotion he cherished for Mahaprasad of Sri Sri Jagannath Dev! Once I informed him that I would be going to Puri from Bhuvaneshwar. He told me, Good. Please bring me some Mahaprasad.’ In due course I brought him Mahaprasad. How happy he was! Later, his attendants told me, ‘When your train was to arrive, he became very anxious and kept on looking at the railway line and fidgeted about. He was waiting for the arrival of the train and the Mahaprasad.’ ⁵⁴

When Maharaj was in Bhuvaneshwar Math, there was a woman who was working as sweeper. When she used to see people going for Thakur’s darshan, she also developed desire to have the darshan of Thakur. She went to Maharaj to seek his permission and

asked, “Do I have a right to visit the temple and have Thakur’s darshan?” Maharaj was pleased and said, “Why not? Take this soap, have a bath, put on clean cloths and go for Thakur’s darshan”. She did the same. When people of her community came to know about it, they frightened her saying many things. She went to Maharaj worriedly and told everything. Maharaj assured her saying, “You need not be afraid. Thakur is merciful and showers his blessings on all.”

Bhuvaneshwar Math was Maharaj’s most favourite place. He wanted this Math to be a place for Tapasya. He wanted to plant varieties of trees here. He wished to have a cow and a hut (Kutir) for Sadhana. He was fond of custard apple. Bhuvaneshwar Math was surrounded by custard apple trees.

According to his brother disciples, Maharaj looked like Sri Ramakrishna when observed from behind. In April 1920 at Bhuvaneshwar Math his photograph was taken from behind. One day when he was walking Hari Maharaj saw him from behind and mistook him for Sri Ramakrishna. Only when he came near he found that it was Raja Maharaj who was quite tall and healthy.⁵⁵

Satyendranath Mazumdar came to Bhuvaneshwar from Calcutta on a visit. After staying in Bhuvaneshwar for a few days, and just as he was getting ready to visit Puri, Swami Brahmananda asked him not to go there, but instead to return to Calcutta. Mr. Mazumdar said that he had come all the way from Calcutta mainly wishing to visit Puri. But Swami Brahmananda wouldn’t pay heed to Mr. Mazumdar’s words, insisting that he must return to Calcutta and not go to Puri. When Mr. Mazumdar reached the Bhuvaneshwar railway station, he was amazed to see that the Swami had already sent a brahmachari there to make sure that Mr. Mazumdar bought a ticket for Calcutta. Later, Mr. Mazumdar came to Belur Math one day and asked Swami Brahmananda, “Maharaj, why didn’t you allow me to go to Puri?” He replied, “The time was most inauspicious for your visit to Puri. Had you gone there you would have died.”⁵⁶

Once he was going to Puri. On the way, a small incident happened which shows Swami Brahmananda’s spirit of renunciation, discrimination and dispassion. He was accompanied by a person. They went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandbali and then by bullock cart to Puri. While travelling by bullock cart, they saw a ten rupees note lying by the side of the road. Maharaj just ignored it and continued to do Japam. His companion took the note inspite of Maharaj’s forbidding him. Maharaj told him that a monk should not pay any heed to such money matters. The companion argued with Maharaj justifying his act. He said that if money might not be utilised for oneself but it could be utilised for helping the others. Hearing this, Maharaj became annoyed and kept quite. Since then Maharaj did not have any regard for him. Afterwards that person got married and engrossed in the worldly matters.

After the death of Balaram Basu’s father, Radhamohan Basu, it was decided to perform the Shraddha ceremony at Kothar. Balarambabu, Tulsiram and Rakhai Maharaj were going to Kothar with the required articles for the ceremony by big steamer named Sir John Lawrence. Near the Diamond Harbour it faced a big storm. Leaving behind their luggage in the steamer they returned to Calcutta. That very night that steamer sank due to a storm and as a result of which around 750 people died. Afterwards they left for Kothar by another steamer named Karlu.⁵⁷

The construction of Bhuvaneshwar Math was in progress. Raja Maharaj was there supervising the work. His disciple Tarasundari, a famous actress of the Bengali stage, was suffering from dyspepsia. Maharaj advised her to take the water of Kedar-Gauri tank which would cure her from all sorts of stomach problems. When she went to Bhuvaneshwar and was staying at Dudhwala Dharmashala, she would not eat except the prasada of Sri Ramakrishna. Prasad was arranged from the Bhuvaneshwar Math. Maharaj personally looked after this matter daily. As soon as offerings to Sri Ramakrishna would over, he would send the prasada immediately for Tara. She would perform puja daily and would not take even water till she received the prasada from the Math. A person from Math used to bring the prasada, betel roll offered to Sri Ramakrishna and material for

making tea. These materials were not available there at that time. She never got the parental love and affection but this was fulfilled by her guru. Thinking of this her eyes used to become moist. Sometimes out of hesitation she used to say that she would come to take prasad in Math from the next day. Maharaj would not permit her saying, “Mother Tara, it was very hot and no vehicle is available. Don’t take the trouble of coming here, I will send the prasad to your house.”⁵⁸

Tarasundari reminisces: “Once I went to Puri with the desire to see Lord Jagannath. On the way to Puri I stopped in the city of Bhuvaneshwar and stayed in a dharmashala. Then I heard that Swami Brahmananda was staying at the Bhuvaneshwar Ramakrishna Math. So I went to see him there. O how heartily he welcomed me! With great eagerness and affection he made me sit and inquired about what I would like to eat, etc. He said, ‘Alas, scorching sun must have made your mouth dry. You’ve come here for your health. You shouldn’t have walked in the scorching sun! ... Where do you have your meals? Starting tomorrow you must come and eat your meals with us. Tell me what kind of food you like.’ Then he said lamenting, ‘My child, we are penniless sadhus, sannyasins and fakirs! I wonder what good things can we procure for you here!’

“His love and cordiality completely overwhelmed me and left me speechless. Just think of who I was! Think of the low level of society to which I belonged! I was so low that I didn’t deserve anything but hatred and disrespect from the world. I had no father, relatives or friends to call my own. ‘The entire world to me was somebody else’s home, and I was a stranger. No one would even talk to me or look at me without self-interest! But today Swami Brahmananda, the all-renouncing monk who is respected by one and all, accepted me as his own through his pure love, affection, and the unexpected attention that he gave me!

“I thought, ‘Is it paternal affection? No, it must be something much higher than that!’ I couldn’t stop crying. It was as if all my pain and suffering began pouring out as my tears, and started falling to the ground, soaking it wet. I felt that at last I had found a place where I could find real solace and peace. I had at last found someone with genuine love and sympathy for me. To him I was not a fallen woman; I was not an untouchable; I was not a hated creature! No, I was the spiritual daughter of Swami Brahmananda! He was my father, my abode of peace, and my God!

“Swami Brahmananda told me so many things that day. I don’t remember them all. But what I remember is the sole refuge of my life. He told me, ‘My child, you’ve seen that the world is full of suffering. Don’t think that we never suffered. When I first went to Thakur I was young. I used to do my spiritual practice, but wouldn’t find peace. Many thoughts would arise in my mind. Sometimes I would wonder why I hadn’t found peace yet! Thinking in that manner one day I felt that I wouldn’t even go and see Thakur. I would quietly run away. Just then I saw him standing in front of me. He said, “What are you thinking? You’ve been going through a lot of suffering, isn’t it?” I kept quiet. Then he gently stroked my head with his hand. Instantly all my suffering was gone! Then I felt great peace and joy.’ “Hearing Swami Brahmananda’s words, suddenly these words came out of my mouth: ‘Father, I am also burning inside. It’s too much suffering; I can’t tolerate it any more. That’s why I restlessly wander here and there. Father, would you please soothe my burning heart?’

“With great affection and sympathy he said, ‘My child, please pray to Thakur. There is no fear. He came only to relieve our suffering. Chant his holy name. At first you will find it a little difficult. Later Thakur will make everything all right. Don’t be afraid my child; there is no cause for fear! Eventually you will have great joy, great fun.’”

Tara wanted to live near her guru, so she bought a piece of land to the west of the Lingaraj Shiva temple in Bhuvaneshwar. Maharaj went to see the land. As he stood there, in a meditative mood, he remarked: “It is a wonderful spot for practising spiritual disciplines. This place is very auspicious and Lord Shiva (the Lingaraj Temple) is in the northeast.” Later on, she built a room at that place. In that room, she kept a photograph of Thakur. She would decorate the photo with flowers and garlands and used to sing and

dance before it as if Thakur Himself was seeing and listening. This was her way of showing devotion and reverence to Thakur.⁵⁹

Until 1921 Tara continued her acting with tremendous enthusiasm and passion. But when her guru, Swami Brahmananda, died in 1922, she felt renunciation within. She built a house at Bhuvaneshwar and planned to retire there. She then lost all interest in acting and went into a deep depression. Swami Shivananda heard about her condition and summoned her to Belur Math. She cried for Maharaj, and Shivananda consoled her. He asked her to build a temple on her property in the name of Maharaj. Tara followed the swami's advice. Aparesh named the temple "Rakhal Kunja." (Rakhal was Brahmananda's premonastic name and kunja means "garden temple.")

Swami Shivananda went to Bhuvaneshwar to inaugurate Rakhal Kunja and install the pictures of Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda on the altar. Later, Swami Subodhananda installed some of the relics of Swami Brahmananda under the altar of Rakhal Kunja with a special ceremony and a homa fire. Tara's dream was fulfilled. She was excited about her place of sadhana, and she spent hours in worship and meditation there. However, she had a desire to offer cooked food to the Master but felt herself unworthy. One day Swami Akhandananda visited Rakhal Kunja and remarked: "Mother Tara, what is this? The Master looks emaciated. Don't you offer cooked food?" Ashamed of her sinful life, Tara replied, "No, swami." Swami Akhandananda advised her to offer cooked food and milk to the Master every day. As Tara listened to the advice of a disciple of Ramakrishna, tears came to her eyes.

At the age of 54 Tara finally retired from the stage to live in Rakhal Kunja in Bhuvaneshwar, where she remained for 12 years. Her daughter, Pratibha, lived with her.

Tara spent hours in her shrine, and her method of worship was unique. She had such deep concentration that one day she didn't even notice that there was a fire in her cowshed. The neighbours tried to extinguish the fire, but when they called her they could not break her meditation. Another day at noon Swami Subodhananda went to Rakhal Kunja and found no one around. The door and windows of the temple seemed to be closed and the whole area was quiet. He then observed that a window was partially open. When he peeped through it, he saw Tara dancing in front of Sri Ramakrishna's picture. She was completely oblivious to the world. As she had always given joy to the audience in the theatre by her acting, she was worshipping the Master with her acting and dancing in the same way. Without disturbing her sadhana, Swami Subodhananda returned to the monastery.⁶⁰

In those days many people used to go to Bhuvaneshwar for a change. While staying there, some of them also visited the Bhuvaneshwar Ramakrishna Math. Once a gentleman named Kshitish Babu, accompanied by his brother-in-law Yogesh, came for a visit from Khulna.

They often used to come to our Bhuvaneshwar Math. Swami Brahmananda liked them. He was particularly fond of Yogesh. Once during a conversation Yogesh remarked, "We grow very high quality rice in the rice field at our country home."

Swami Brahmananda then told him, "That's very nice. Why don't you arrange to bring some of that rice to be offered to Thakur in our shrine?"

So a few days later Yogesh came to the Math carrying a small postal parcel containing rice and said to Swami Brahmananda, "Maharaj, this rice has come from our country home."

Seeing the small size of the packet, the sevaks were not too happy. It most probably contained only one or one and a half seers (three pounds) of rice. Every now and then the Math used to receive several maunds of rice (One maund is equal to 82 lbs.) as a gift from Ram Babu's estate in Jhankar. But when Swami Brahmananda saw the rice brought by Yogesh he was very pleased and said, "Excellent! This is very good quality rice! The payesh for Thakur will be made with this rice."

Throughout the week he went on praising the quality of the rice brought by Yogesh. On some days he went to the storeroom to check if the rice was all right. He

would also warn the monk in charge of the storeroom and kitchen, "Make sure that not a single grain of this rice is wasted or eaten by mice. If that happens you will face the consequences. I shall break your head with my cane!" (This was just a humorous way of asking them to be very careful. Surely the Swami wouldn't hit anyone with his cane!) While praising the rice, he would also praise Yogesh. Eventually, the rice was used to prepare payesh for Thakur. Swami Brahmananda praised that rice so highly because it had been given with great love and devotion by Yogesh.⁶¹

In a farming area at some distance from the Bhuvaneshwar Math, a piece of land suitable for growing rice was available for sale at a very low price. The sale proceeds from the rice obtained from that property would be enough to meet the annual expenses of the Math. Even after those expenses were met, some rice would be left as surplus. At first Swami Brahmananda was quite enthusiastic about the property, but he later lost interest in buying it. If anybody would raise the topic of buying the land, he would say, "All right, let us think about it." Finally he told everyone, "It is better for the Math not to acquire such properties. If we acquire estates, we may end up oppressing the labourers."

The reason he changed his mind about buying the property was that some complaints had reached his ears about those who were engaged in managing the work at the Math or who were conducting relief work in that area.⁶²

Swami Mukteswarananda related, "Once Swami Brahmananda said to us at the Bhuvaneshwar Math, 'The kitchen storeroom is empty because you don't do your spiritual practice properly. If you perform spiritual austerities food will be provided by God.'" ⁶³

The following incidents happened in the Bhuvaneshwar Math in 1920:

Nirod, Dwijen, Amiya, Haripada and a few others came to Swami Brahmananda at the Bhuvaneshwar Math to be invested with brahmacharya. I was married and had come there for a visit. When those monks had their brahmacharya, I felt that I had deprived myself of that wonderful opportunity because I had married. The thought made me quite sad. Understanding my mental condition, Swami Brahmananda said, "You needn't worry. I'll shoulder the entire burden of your spiritual life." But due to my weak mind, it was hard for me to feel comforted by his words. That's why I kept on asking many questions: Without showing the slightest displeasure, he gave me the same assurance again.

The following morning I accompanied him during his walk. We walked a fairly long distance. While walking, he discussed many things. I brought some water from a pool and gave that to him to wash his hands. As I was going to the pool to collect the water, he became worried lest I slip and fall into the pool. Out of his loving concern, he cautioned me a few times to be very careful.

When I was visiting the Math, he would often say, "Good foodstuff is pretty scarce here. I wonder what we can give you to eat. Alas, we haven't been able to give you any good food!" ⁶⁴

Swami Nirvanananda narrated the following story about Raja Maharaj when he was in Bhuvaneshwar Math- It was lunar eclipse. In the evening Maharaj was sitting on an easy chair in the Math veranda and meditating. I was sitting near him under the staircase. I was doing Japam with my eyes closed. Eclipse was nearing to an end. While doing Japam, I felt something cold on my leg. Without opening my eyes I removed that object with my hand. After sometime I felt the same touch. When I opened my eyes at first I thought it was a frog, but when I tried to remove it, I was shocked to see a snake. When in moonlight I gazed at it, I found that it was a poisonous cobra. It was sitting on my leg in a coil. Bhuvaneshwar was famous for poisonous snake. I cried, "Snake!" By my voice his meditation was disturbed. Maharaj told, "Keep quiet and don't move." In the moonlight I saw snake going away slowly. Maharaj told, "By the grace of Guru you have been saved this time." ⁶⁵

One day at Bhuvaneshwar Math, Maharaj was standing near the staircase and was to go upstairs. Suddenly from somewhere above colour powder (Abhir) fell on his body

and feet. After a thorough search, nobody was found on the terrace. Dr. Ratikant was standing behind, Maharaj asked him, "Is there colour festival today (Dol Pournima)?" Nobody was aware of it. After going through the almanac it was found that it was the day of colour festival (Dol Pournima). Doctor was a devotee and humorous fellow. He collected the colour powder from the floor and smeared his forehead with it. Then colour was brought and Maharaj offered it to Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine. Others present there did the same. Then all joyfully played colour with one another. Maharaj also took part in it.⁶⁶

Swami Saradananda had long been engaged in solving an organisational problem at Varanasi, but had not fully succeeded. So he came to Bhuvaneshwar to seek the help of Swami Brahmananda in setting things right. That was in the beginning of 1921, though the troubles had been brewing for long before that. The way the two leaders tackled the problems revealed at its best the technique they had developed for the smooth working of their religious organisation; and this was nothing more than the stimulation of love, spiritual fervour and the democratic attitude of making concessions to each others opinion. So Maharaj complied to the request of Swami Saradananda to come to Varanasi and reached there on 20th January 1921. Swami Brahmananda's presence had an instantaneous salutary effect, though, curiously enough, he never talked about business, but rather on high spiritual topics. He had diagnosed the disease as lack of spirituality; and the cure lay in heightening the spiritual ardour. In his august presence, petty mindedness took flight, and the scheme drawn up by Swami Saradananda a year before was given full play leading to satisfaction all around. The whole process culminated in Swami Brahmananda's initiating thirty-five persons into Sannyasa and Brahmacharya on January 30, 1921, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda.⁶⁷

Swami Bhaskarananda relates the following story which he had heard from Swami Gangeshananda when he was staying at Belur Math around 1970. The incident happened many years ago at the Bhuvaneshwar Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Order in India. At that time Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Order, was residing there. One day he called Swami Gangeshananda, a junior monk, and said to him, "Bring me some holy Ganga water." Swami Gangeshananda brought a small bottle of Ganga water to Swami Brahmananda, who sprinkled some of it on his body. Putting the bottle aside, Swami Brahmananda called his sevak (attendant), Swami Nirvanananda. When the swami came, Swami Brahmananda pointed to a book in a bookcase, and asked Swami Nirvanananda to bring it to him. Then Swami Brahmananda sat down on a chair, apparently to read it. But he did not open the book. Instead, he looked at it for a while, and then closing his eyes, sat for some time as though meditating. Then he returned the book to Swami Nirvanananda and asked him to put the book back on the shelf. After that Swami Brahmananda got up and walked out of the room.

Swami Gangeshananda watched everything from a distance. He became curious to know why Swami Brahmananda felt he had to purify himself with Ganga water before touching the book. What holy book could it be that needed such purification? To satisfy his curiosity, Swami Gangeshananda took the book from the shelf. To his amazement he saw that it was not a religious book at all; it was a copy of Emerson's Essays. Swami Gangeshananda couldn't at first understand why Swami Brahmananda considered the book so holy. But when he opened the book he saw Swami Vivekananda's handwritten inscription on the first page, indicating that he had given the book to Swami Brahmananda as a loving gift. Swami Gangeshananda now understood that the book was so sacred to Swami Brahmananda because it had come from Swami Vivekananda. According to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda was born a free soul and was the greatest among his disciples. Sri Ramakrishna considered him an incarnation of the ancient sage Nara, as well as of Lord Narayana. This incident proves what deep respect and admiration Swami Brahmananda, who himself was a great saint, had for his brother disciple Swami Vivekananda. Swami Brahmananda's spiritual emotion was roused thinking of the book's association with Swami Vivekananda.⁶⁸

Swami Ashokananda narrates one incident in his reminiscences: Swami Sharvananda had sent him a ricksha from Madras; it was uncrated, and a morning was fixed for Maharaj to ride in it to visit the great Lingaraj temple. It was not far from the monastery, and many of us followed on foot. When the party entered the huge temple, almost all went close to the Holy of Holies, but Maharaj stopped some distance away from the Deity. I stayed near him. He seemed deeply absorbed, standing there. Then, because the monk who was the treasurer of the monastery had not brought money for offering, he spoke of him as being, deaf to rhythm' -of course he used the Bengali term. I was impressed by this expression, because its implication is so true to be unrhythmical is to make all kinds of mistakes.

On our way back, outside the temple, we came upon a middle-aged nun. Maharaj talked to her and urged her to pay more attention to spiritual practice. She seemed to be a stranger or semi stranger; but advanced monks consider it their duty to admonish other monastics if such admonition is necessary.⁶⁹

Swami Bhuteshananda told one incident which he heard from Maharaj's attendant. There was a hotel nearby where pilgrims from different parts of the country stayed when they visited Bhuvaneshwar. Not everyone came for pilgrimage, of course. Many came for just sightseeing or to experience the quiet of a little town, away from the din and bustle of city-life. It seems three young men from Calcutta were staying at the hotel and they asked the manager about the places worth visiting. He mentioned the names of the prominent temples there and told the young men that they could also visit in the town a branch of the Ramakrishna Order. Then he shared with them the local gossip. He said, 'The head of the monastery (meaning Maharaj) lives in a princely style. His hukkah is made of gold. The monastery has a big campus.' The young men said, 'It's outrageous that a monk should live in such a luxurious way. Why don't you people teach him a lesson?'

The hotel manager said, 'Oh my God! That's unthinkable. A lot of big guns visit the place and I don't have the courage to say anything against the swami.' 'All right, then,' the young men said. 'We are not afraid of anybody. We shall go and teach him a lesson.'

At the monastery Swami Brahmananda was sitting in the parlour with his attendants. It looked like he was expecting somebody. He told his attendants not to disturb him when the visitors came. Indeed, after a few minutes the three young men arrived. They were taken to Maharaj's room, offered seats, and the attendants came away closing the door behind them.

What exactly happened inside the room the attendants didn't know. They only heard peals of laughter. After sometime the young men took leave of Maharaj and returned to the hotel. The manager asked them how they had found the princely swami. The young men replied, 'For the first time in our lives we have seen a really great man. He exudes love, sympathy, and understanding. It was an experience of a lifetime.'

This was typical of Swami Brahmananda. He sometimes impressed people by his mere silence, sometimes through amusing talks and, when he chose to do so, through his spiritual teachings. Whatever might be the contents of Maharaj's talk, all who met him carried a deep impression of his spiritual personality. So when we went to him as boys, we did not have the courage to ask him questions. Just seeing him was enough. That gave us enough fulfilment and joy. It was enough to fill our minds with love and respect for him and these have remained with us undiminished all through life.⁷⁰

Swami Saradananda wanted wholeheartedly that Maharaj should consecrate the temple of Holy Mother at Belur Math on 20th December 1921. But Maharaj expressed his inability to leave Bhuvaneshwar Math. Swami Saradananda requested Maharaj repeatedly to come to Belur Math. Though arrangements were made many times for Maharaj's going to Belur Math, it never materialised. At last when Swami Saradananda wrote a letter that he was coming to take him personally, then immediately Maharaj asked somebody to arrange for his travel to Belur Math. So on 11th January 1922 he along with

Mahapurush Maharaj, Ramlaldada and his attendants started for Belur Math by night train reaching Belur Math next day. This was his last visit to Orissa.⁷¹

After the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna that year Maharaj left Belur Math for Balaram Mandir. There he suffered from cholera and then diabetes. Expert doctors were trying their best. When Dr.Nilratan Sarkar came to examine him, Maharaj told him, "Get me well soon." Sometimes he used to tell his attendants, "Take me to Bhuvaneshwar, I will get well there by drinking the well water there. I do not like the polluted air of Calcutta, let us go to Bhuvaneshwar, there we will get fresh air."⁷²

Even towards the end of his life he had an intense desire for going to Bhuvaneshwar Math. This shows his immense love for Orissa, especially for Bhuvaneshwar Math. He passed away on 10th April 1922.

Footnotes:

*F1: As per the Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda Vol-7 Page-573, Swami Abhedananda went to Puri with Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Paramananda. But according to Swami Gambhirananda's book Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika Vol-1 Marathi Page-78 & 231 Swami Ramakrishnananda reached Puri two days after Abhedananda's arrival at Puri.

*F2: As per the details of the books, Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika by Swami Gambhirananda Vol-1 Marathi Page-214 and Bengali Swami Saradananda Jibani by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-126-129, Swami Saradananda and Vaikunthanath Sanyal went to Puri on 17th October 1917 after getting the news of Hari Maharaj's illness. In one letter Swami Turiyananda wrote from Shashi Niketan Puri that he had reached Puri from Belur Math on 4th June 1917. (Bengali Swami Turiyananda Patra by Udbodhan Page-193)

*F3: As per the details of the book in Bengali by Dr.Vishwanth Chakravarty, Swami Shankarananda Page-92-93, date of Maharaj's visit to Puri with Rambabu was from 1st February to 6th February 1920.

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4. Swami Brahmananda Charit by Swami Prabhananda Hindi Page-268
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SWAMI SHIVANANDA

Swami Shivananda's natural inclination was towards solitude and meditation. But he was always ready to accept his share of the duties which were imposed by the foundation of the Math and Mission. In 1922, after the death of Swami Brahmananda, he became the second President of the Order. On the anvil of those years and the ones in which he began doing works of service were forged the character and personality later adored as Mahapurush, head of the Order, how constantly lived in God an overflowed with love and blessings to all. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, he lived at Baranagore Math for about two and a half years developing his own spiritual life. From the beginning of 1889, he felt an urge to lead the free detached life of an itinerant monk. For over a decade he travelled in different parts of India sometimes in the Himalayas sometimes on the plains and sometimes in deserts or forest.

Swami Shivananda visited Orissa many times. He visited Puri in 1906. He visited Bhuvaneshwar twice in 1921 while going to and coming from Madras. He visited Bhuvaneshwar in 1923 to consecrate the new temple of Sri Ramakrishna. He visited Bhuvaneshwar in 1924 on the way to Madras, and finally in 1926 he visited to Bhuvaneshwar and Puri on the way to Madras. He was also fond of Bhuvaneshwar Ashrama like Swami Brahmananda.

Swami Shivananda was doing intense spiritual practice and undergoing hardship which resulted in breaking down of his health. So at the end of 1906, he went to Puri to recover his health. Next year Mahapurush Maharaj stayed at Chidki at the foot of Pareshnath hill but his health was not much improved. Then in the end of 1907 he returned to Belur Math. Since then till the beginning of 1912 he stayed at Belur Math.¹

In the year 1906, Swami Brahmananda was staying at Shashi Niketan, Puri. At that time Mahapurush Maharaj was staying at Varanasi from where he went to Puri to see Swami Brahmananda before Ratha Yatra. Swami Akhandananda also came to see Maharaj, Swami Premananda was present there at that time. Afterwards Swami Abhedananda arrived from America via Madras to Puri along with Swami Ramakrishnananda. (As per another version, Ramakrishnananda arrived at Puri two days later.) Thus there was a great gathering of so many brother monks at Puri, which created an atmosphere of happiness and joy.

Mahapurush Maharaj narrates the story of that time at Puri- After arriving at Puri, I did not go for the darshan of Lord Jagannath for a few days. I used to get news and Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath from others. Maharaj noticed this and one day said to me, "Tarakda, why don't you go for darshan of Lord Jagannath?" I replied that I would go soon. Swami Vivekananda jokingly used to comment on the eyes and wooden image of Lord Jagannath. After listening to these comments I did not have much inclination to visit Lord Jagannath. To fulfil the wish of Maharaj, one day I went for the darshan of Lord Jagannath. When I entered the temple and was standing in front of the deities, Lord Jagannath granted me the vision of *Virat* that overwhelmed me with joy and I was engrossed in divine mood. Somehow I controlled myself, I bowed down to the deities and returned to my place and simply laid down. When I went to see Maharaj, he smilingly asked me, "Tarakda, how was the darshan?" I was still in that divine mood. I bowed down my head and said that it was very wonderful. It was as if he knew everything about what transpired in the temple. This incident changed my outlook. Afterwards whenever I went to Puri, I would visit Lord Jagannath first. Now I understand why Maharaj goes to Puri so frequently!²

One day at Belur Math on the bench of eastern veranda, Swami Premananda was sitting with Swami Akhandananda. Swamis Brahmananda and Shivananda came and joined them- so did many monks and devotees. A talk was going on regarding Gowardhan Math of Puri. Then Maharaj started telling, "I saw a monk aged between ninety to ninety-five at Puri. He was a very austere monk and had strong faith and devotion in God. He kept himself aloof from people. He sometimes used to go to

Atalbabu's house. He would not take any food except the one offered to Lord Jagannath, not even milk. Once he fell ill, but he would not take medicine. At last I mixed the medicine with milk which was offered to Lord Jagannath. At last after repeated request he took it. His name was Rangaswami. Such was his devotion to Lord Jagannath!" Then Mahapurush Maharaj said, "Yes, I know him very well. I was at Puri that time. He came to Puri at the age of fifteen and stayed there for another eighty years. I have not seen a monk like Rangaswami in Puridham. He used to stay in Jagannath temple." Then Maharaj said, "Tarakda, do you know, whenever he got the news of my arrival at Puri, that old monk will come to meet me and embrace me. But he will not allow others to touch him. On seeing me he used to say that he derived in my company immense joy and his mind got elevated and he found no other monk in Puri with whom he could talk. He had one or two disciples also."

It will be interesting to give here the gist of his letters written from Belur Math in the year 1917 regarding the proposed Bhuvaneshwar Ashrama. Swami Shivananda wrote, "... Maharaj and Hari Maharaj are both still in holy Puri. They are not keeping well there, however we hear that they will be leaving shortly for Bhuvaneshwar. Maharaj has long cherished a desire to have an Ashrama at Bhuvaneshwar. Bhuvaneshwar is first a large mango grove. Next, it is a holy place for the devotees of Shiva. Moreover, it is a very healthy place. Nothing can compare with its water. It comes from a clear spring. There you get the sea breeze, and the natural scenery is good. The peak of Khandagiri is very close. As far as I can tell, Maharaj's long cherished desire is now about to fulfilled. A piece of land measuring five acres has been purchased. We got it very cheap. It cost us only Rs.400. Building materials and labour are both cheaper there than elsewhere. We expect the construction cost of the Ashrama building will not be too high. ... [Both Maharaj and Hari Maharaj are now in holy Puri. They will soon visit Bhuvaneshwar and lay the foundation stone of the new centre there and will start the construction work so that at least few rooms will be available at earliest. I understand they are both better now. ... I have decided to go and stay with Maharaj for some time at Bhuvaneshwar when he comes there. ...]"³

On 1st April 1921, in response to an earnest invitation of the monks and devotees staying in South India, Swami Brahmananda the Head of the Order, made a trip to Madras. The immediate objective was the dedication and opening of Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home. Mahapurush Maharaj accompanied Swami Brahmananda in compliance with his expressed wish. This visit to the south gave Mahapurush Maharaj an opportunity to become familiar with the centres and the devotees of that area. On the way, they halted at Bhuvaneshwar Math for 15 days. They left Bhuvaneshwar on 18th April 1921 for Waltair where they stayed for a week and reached Madras on 25th April 1921. After Madras both of them visited Bangalore and Mysore, and returned to Madras after four-months' stay. The greatest and the most significant religious event that happened there that year was the worship of Divine Mother Durga and Mother Kali in the images, performed for the first time in the history of South India. It was Swami Brahmananda's inspiration and fervent desire that eventually materialised in the celebration. It was also he who guided the details of the ceremony and made it a splendid success. It was not long after this that the Swamis and their party started on their journey back to Bengal. On the way they stopped at Bhuvaneshwar, as they had done before. They reached Bhuvaneshwar Math on 21st November 1921 at mid night. They stayed there for two months and returned to Belur Math on 12th January 1922. In this period Swami Abhedananda returned from America. On the request of devotees Mahapurush Maharaj accompanied by Swami Abhedananda Maharaj went to East Bengal (now Bangladesh).⁴

Swami Pavitrananda narrates about his visit to Bhuvaneshwar in the following words: During the Christmas holidays in 1921, I went to Bhuvaneshwar to see Maharaj and consult him about my desire to join the Order. After his tour in South India he arrived

at Bhuvaneshwar and was staying there. When I arrived I found that the Mahapurush Maharaj also was there. He recognized me and was very pleased to see me. I was in Bhuvaneshwar for nearly a week. During my stay I seized every opportunity to accompany Maharaj on his morning and evening walks. On one or two days I went for a walk with Mahapurush Maharaj also. Perhaps he would take walks only in the evening. While walking with him, I could talk with him very freely. At that time the Non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi was in full swing. There was great excitement all over the country. Hundreds and thousands of people, young and old, joined the movement. Though I wanted to join the Ramakrishna Order, I had great sympathy for those who dedicated themselves to the political movement. I greatly appreciated their courage, sacrifice and dedication. And with that perhaps now and then the thought unconsciously crept into my mind- who was right, I or they? To get things clear, I took the opportunity of my walk with Mahapurush Maharaj to ask him the question. I said, "Intense political struggle is going on in the country. Swami Vivekananda had so much love for India. Some political workers complained that the Ramakrishna Mission does not take part in independence movement". When Mahapurush Maharaj heard these words he stopped walking, looked at me, and very firmly said, "Sri Ramakrishna showed us a different path for serving the country. He did not tell us to go into the political field. If he had done that we would have plunged into the political movement and would not in the least have feared a Lloyd George. Sri Ramakrishna did not tell us to do that". These words he uttered with such feeling and power that it seemed me as if his very stature grew taller and bigger. Afterwards our conversation turned to some other topics, but what he said before, settled finally what I should do. All doubts and hesitation were gone.⁵

While at Bhuvaneshwar one morning I went to see Khandagiri and Udaygiri, which were at a distance of six or seven miles. In the 8th and 9th centuries there were Buddhist and Jain monasteries at these places. Many monks had undergone severe austerities and spiritual practices there. The caves where they lived can still be seen. The same day I went with Mahapurush Maharaj on his walk. In the course of conversation he asked me what I felt at Khandagiri and Udaygiri. I said in reply, "In those places many monks underwent intense spiritual practices. They passed through many hopes and fears, many phases of struggle. Did they reach the goal for which they struggled? If not it was a deplorable thing, a great tragedy". While I was saying this, Mahapurush Maharaj kept silent. After a little pause I continued, "This thought also came to my mind that so many persons had struggled, surely some may have attained the goal". Hearing these words, Mahapurush Maharaj felt very happy. His face beamed with joy, his eyes sparkled and he said, "You are right. You are right. Surely some amongst them realised God". I as a spiritual aspirant thought in terms of hopes and fears. He, a man of God, saw in terms of positive achievements in spiritual life! That was the impression I was left with.⁶

The day before I left Bhuvaneshwar, in the afternoon I told Mahapurush Maharaj that I will be leaving for Puri the next day on my way home. I do not know the reason why, but Mahapurush Maharaj asked me, "Do you believe in these things (meaning pilgrimages to sacred places)?" In all frankness I told him, "To speak the truth, personally I have no great faith in them, but when I see that you and other revered swamis believe in these things, I feel inclined to do as you do". My answer did not annoy him in the least but rather he felt glad and said, "Yes, you are right, perfectly right." I was amazed to see his liberality and sympathy.⁷

In 1922 Swami Brahmananda had expressed his desire to celebrate the Vasanti Puja in Bhuvaneshwar Math and at the same time to consecrate the newly built temple of Sri Ramakrishna on the first floor. But he passed away on 10th April 1922 after a short illness. To fulfil his last desire, in 1923 Mahapurush Maharaj after consulting with senior monks decided to celebrate Vasanti Puja (24th March 1923) and to consecrate newly built temple at Bhuvaneshwar. He came to Bhuvaneshwar accompanied by forty monks of Belur and nearby centres. It was a great occasion for Bhuvaneshwar Math. Many

devotees through out Orissa came either by walk or by bullock cart and took part in celebration. On the day of Mahashtami after the special worship, Mahapurush Maharaj consecrated the temple by installing image of Sri Ramakrishna. On the day of Navami, Mahapurush Maharaj gave initiation to 22 aspirants who came from Cuttack, Madhyamgram and other places. After sitting in the temple for two and half hours and giving initiation when he came out of the temple, his body was shaking in divine mood, his face radiant with joy, eyes half open. Somehow he came down to his room. Owing to the strain undergone by him during this consecration ceremony and initiation, his health broke down. He was not keeping well in Belur Math itself and it became worse due to travelling. In spite of his bad health, he participated in every function on this occasion. On the day of Navami, there was an arrangement to feed around forty poor people, Daridranarayan Sewa. In all around seven thousand people took prasada during this celebration event. On the day of Ekadashi, Mahapurush Maharaj ordained the Sannyasa to one Brahmachari. During his stay there some times he used to go to Lingaraj Temple with monks. One day he visited Rameshwar Shiv temple and he used to send offerings everyday to this temple. Mahapurush Maharaj was in Bhuvaneshwar for one and half month feeling the lively presence of Raja Maharaj, many devotees derived inspiration from him. He was not willing to return to Belur Math, but owing to some important work he returned to Belur Math in the beginning of May 1923.⁸

It was 1924 that Mahapurush again left Belur for Madras. Swami Sharvananda the head of Madras Math, Swami Bodhananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, then on leave in India, together with several other monks accompanied him. Mahapurush and his party broke their journey at Bhuvaneshwar and again at Waltair, staying in each place for few days.⁹

In 1924 on the way to South India, Mahapurush Maharaj stayed at Bhuvaneshwar. Swami Brahmeshwarananda narrates- Probably, it was an auspicious occasion of Guru Pournima. Myself and three more brahmacharins requested Mahapurush Maharaj for sannyas. Accordingly Mahapurush Maharaj ordained us with sannyasa. There were a few dilapidated Shiva temples near Lingaraj temple. There was no daily worship in those temples. After Sannyasa ceremony was over, Mahapurush Maharaj gave us the sannyasa names after the names of Shiva of those four temples. So our names were Megheshwarananda, Kapileshwarananda, Bhaskareshwarananda, Brahmeshwarananda. Then he said, "A monk is like Lord Shiva. Now these monks are like living Shiva and will accept the worship from the people". He had a different vision, he used to see infinite in finite, an ocean in a drop (Bindu me Sindhu). He used awakened God consciousness in the minds of people. One day in the context of the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, he told me, "I wish, you become desireless by doing the worship of Sri Ramakrishna." Regarding the dinner he said that a monk should have light food at night. As the householders have to work hard whole day, they take sumptuous dinner at night.¹⁰

Tarasundari was a famous actress of the Bengali stage. Swami Bhaskareshwarananda narrates in his reminiscences: Though an epitome of purity, Swami Shivananda never hated the sinner. Tarasundari was a concubine of the famous dramatist Apareshbabu. Once she was enacting the part of Ramanuja in a play. Swami Brahmmananda and others were invited to see that play. She was coming to Swami Brahmmananda to have his blessings before every entry. She was so much absorbed in the part of Ramanuja and so deeply influenced by it that it brought about far-reaching change in her life.

When Mahapurush Maharaj became the President of the Ramakrishna Order, Tarasundari came to Belur Math to meet him. She sent a word for him. Mahapurush Maharaj himself came downstairs to receive her. Mahapurush Maharaj took her upstairs and talked with her for quite a long time. It had a very positive effect on her life. Afterwards she used to tell that from that day her life was changed for the better. Then she left Calcutta and settled down in Bhuvaneshwar. She built a house there and named it

‘Rakhal Kunj’. She went to Belur Math to request Mahapurush Maharaj to come to Bhuvaneshwar for Vastupuja, house-warming ceremony. Mahapurush Maharaj gave his consent and went to Bhuvaneshwar. I was also there in Bhuvaneshwar at that time. With the consent of Mahapurush Maharaj, the Homa fire was lighted for Vastupuja and the mantras were chanted. In the process she was asked about her gotra (lineage). She felt very sad and burst in to tears. She told Mahapurush Maharaj that she was leading such a life that there was no question of having a gotra. Mahapurush Maharaj sat in solemn silence and said, “Oh Tara, who says that you are impure? I see the Divine Mother in you. You are my mother and you belong to my gotra.” It consoled her immensely and she became happy. The ceremony was over smoothly and peacefully.

On the request of many centres from South India, Mahapurush Maharaj and Swami Sharvananda together with several other monks started for Madras on 7th April 1924. They broke their journey at Bhuvaneshwar for two days. He enjoyed the pleasant surroundings and environment of Bhuvaneshwar Math. On the third day an incident happened while he was going to Railway station for Madras. In those days motorcar was not so common. So the Head of Bhuvaneshwar centre had arranged for a horse carriage. Mahapurush Maharaj along with a few monks was going to the railway station in a horse carriage in the morning. But the horse, instead of going towards the station started going in opposite direction. Coachman tried his best but could not control the horse. So the carriage toppled and fell in a ditch by the side of the road. All other monks came running to bring it on track and take out the monks inside the coach. Mahapurush Maharaj was safe and he started going towards the station by walk. Others in the coach suffered a few injuries but there was no time even for first aid. Other monks started whispering that due to holy company of Mahapurush Maharaj they had been saved. While talking about this incident, Mahapurush Maharaj one day said, “The horse was intelligent, it knew that it will be put to hardship and so it tried to escape. Who wants to do hard work?” Then he became serious and said, “If Krishna wants to save who can kill and if Krishna wants to kill who can save? Thakur is the only saviour.”¹¹

In the year 1926, the convention of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math. As requested by many monks of South Indian centres, Mahapurush Maharaj went to visit South India for a few months and then to Mumbai and Nagpur. On 2nd May 1926 he started with few monks for Madras. On the way he stayed in Bhuvaneshwar Math for five days. He felt very comfortable in Bhuvaneshwar Math started by Raja Maharaj. While staying there one day he went to Puri to have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. On that day, he became ready quite early in the morning and was sitting in southern Veranda. In course of conversation he said to the monks present there, “The images in the Puri Temple, Jagannath, Subhadra and Balaram are the symbol of Buddhist era. In the latter era when Vaishnavites became predominant then they changed the images into the existing form. Our Swamiji is Buddha, Holy Mother is Sangha and Thakur is Dharma. Buddham Sharanam Gacchami, Sangham Sharanam Gacchami, Dhammam Sharanam Gacchami. Sea represents the huge (*Virat*) image of Lord Jagannath. It will be nice if there will be a centre of Ramakrishna Order in Puri.”¹²

Mahapurush Maharaj himself one day told who he was to Sri Vishwanath Mukhopadhyay. He said, “Does this body come frequently in this world? It came with Bhagavan Budhha before 2500 years.”¹³

The moment he entered the Jagannath Temple at Puri, he was engrossed in the divine mood standing in front of the image in joy with folded hands and speechless, went in a trance. After staying in this mood for long time, other monks brought him outside. Whole day he was in that divine mood. So they went nowhere that day. After returning to Bhuvaneshwar Math he said while talking with monks, “Lord Jagannath is very much lively deity”. After staying two days at Waltair he reached Madras 11th May 1926.¹⁴

On 5th May 1926 Wednesday, he went to Puri with all others by train. From the railway station he came to Jagannath temple by a car at around 7 in the morning. Others

came either by car or by horse carriage. Some monks were waiting there near Arunthmbha to receive him. He entered through the main gate and everybody followed him. Guard requested Swami Sharvananda to remove his leather belt. The arrangement were made beforehand for VIP passes but Mahapurush Maharaj refused to avail himself of that facility and preferred to go to the temple with all other common people and said that the darshan of God should be taken with all humility with other devotees. The Panda guided Mahapurush Maharaj to the Shrine holding the lamp in his hand and others followed him. It was summer and sanctum sanatorium was a small place, there was huge rush and smoke of the lamp everywhere, it was getting hot. Mahapurush Maharaj stood in a corner for a while and came out. Then he went to the temple of Vimaladevi, one of the fifty-one Shaktipithas of Divine Mother. As per his wish, the garland of Champak flowers was offered to Vimaladevi. After offering his pranams he came out and went to Laxmi Temple. He was introvert, speechless, was circumbulating the temple and sat in the corner of Nat Mandir of Laxmi temple. Then he went to Anandbazar where the Mahaprasad was being sold. Coming out of the temple and went to his disciple Harendranath Chaterjee's house that was on the way to the sea and near Shashi-Niketan. There he talked about Sri Ramakrishna. He told that Sri Ramakrishna used to take a morsel of Mahaprasad (Atke) regularly and asked Swamiji to do the same. But Swamiji had no faith in it. Swamiji said, "What will happen by that?" So Thakur told him, "Every material has its property, like poison it has its effect. Take it. Take a few morsels when your mind is upset." Hearing this Swamiji was convinced.

In the evening at 6.30 Swami Shivananda boarded the train Kalikata Express for Bhuvaneshwar. On the way at Khurda railway station one devotee named Rajen (Rajendralal De) who was a railway employee came to meet him. He was talking very joyfully and enquiring about the welfare of the devotee. When the devotee told about the bad health of his wife, Mahapurush Maharaj became compassionate like a mother and consoled him. He said, "The nature of the world (sansara) is like this, pray to Thakur, he will remove your sorrows". Then he himself became introvert as if praying to Thakur for devotees' welfare. On arrival at Bhuvaneshwar, the Stationmaster received and presented him a new walking stick. The monks from Math came with a rickshaw that was earlier used by Raja Maharaj. Mahapurush Maharaj went to Bhuvaneshwar Math by the same rickshaw, when they reached Math it was 9 o'clock at night. On 6th May 1926 in the morning at 7.30 other monks went to take bath in Gauri Kund and then came to Lingaraj temple where they met Mahapurush Maharaj who went there with other senior monks. Renovation of the temple was going on. Pandas in the temple were calling them, Mahapurush Maharaj instructed someone to give them some money. After the darshan he came out of temple, sat in a rickshaw and returned to the Math via Bindu Sarovar. About 10 in the morning he gave initiation to spiritual aspirants. After his evening stroll he sat in veranda and addressed the devotees. He told that one has to take out some time for spiritual practices from the whirlpool of the world, otherwise our life will become as that of an animal. When you have taken an initiation you have to spare some time for Japam and Meditation. On 7th May 1926 Friday, in afternoon at 2.30 p.m. he boarded a train for Waltair and after short stay there, he reached Madras on 11th May 1926.¹⁵

Swami Shivananda gave initiation to the Queen of Balangir Patna (Princess of Mayurbhanj). The Garden-House, now called Shivananda Smriti Kutir (Guest House) building, looks like a palace which was constructed by her with a desire that she would stay there till her last and then it would be donated to Bhuvaneshwar Math. She made a separate Shrine in adjacent room and installed a beautiful statue of Swami Shivananda in meditation. Simple worship with flowers, incense stick etc is performed in that shrine even today.¹⁶

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SWAMI SARADANANDA

Swami Saradananda is popularly known as Sharat Maharaj. He carried the heavy responsibility of the young Ramakrishna Movement for over thirty years. One day at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna sat upon his lap in an ecstatic mood and later said that he was testing how much weight Sharat could bear. With the vision of a seer Swami Vivekananda also knew the potential of Swami Saradananda and made him the General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Mission. And he carried this responsibility for nearly three decades. After Swami Trigunatitananda's going to the west, he took over the responsibility of Holy Mother until she passed away in 1920.

As per the record, Swami Saradananda visited Puri seven times and Bhuvaneshwar three times. He visited Puri in March 1887 for about six months (on their return journey he visited Bhuvaneshwar and Kothar), in November 1888 for two months, in November 1904, in March 1913, in 1915 for ten days, in October 1917 and June 1925 for nine weeks and then he stayed in Bhuvaneshwar for two weeks. He came to Bhuvaneshwar in February 1920 for about ten days and November 1924 for around 35 days.

After Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday celebration in March 1887, Saradananda went with Premananda and Abhedananda on a pilgrimage to Puri, a place sacred to Lord Jagannath. In those days streamer would go only upto Chandbali and thence one had to go to Cuttack by bullock cart. At Cuttack they met with two brothers of Balaram Basu. One of them Harivallabhababu gave them a letter of introduction in the name of the Mahanta of the Emmar Math at Puri. From Cuttack, they came to Puri on foot. After a few days of travel, Swami Saradananda's mind was filled with pangs of separation from Sri Ramakrishna and he became weary. He remembered his days with Sri Ramakrishna and love of Sri Ramakrishna for him. One day, his pangs were so intense that he became very restless and impatient. It was near Sakshi Gopal that he had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna. Then he got intense joy and his tiredness had vanished. When he visited Puri for the last time, while returning by train, pointing towards Sakshi Gopal he said, "It is here where I had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna for the first time and I got solace."

At that time his mind was full of bliss and happiness. He went on praying to Lord Jagannath on the way. After reaching Puri and getting darshan of Lord Jagannath his mind became engrossed with spiritual mood. They had brought an introduction letter from Advocate Harivallabha Basu of Cuttack. They stayed in Emmar Math of Ramanujachari Vaishnav sect. There Swami Saradananda engaged himself in intense sadhana somewhere in the temple or at Swargadwar or at any secluded place. They used to solely depend on prasad of Lord Jagannath. He took part in Chariot Festival and got immense joy. Saradananda latter reminisced: "I would look at the image of Chaitanya without blinking. The view of the vast sea would make my mind limitless. Sitting on the seacoast at Swargadwar, I would spend the night fearlessly. I lived by begging food from Anandbazar (the temple food market)." One day they went to Chilika Lake by bullock cart. Then Swami Premananda had an attack of typhoid. The other two brother disciples served him wholeheartedly. By their service and loving care his health recouped fast.

While returning all the three Swamis visited the Sun Temple of Konark, Udaygiri, Khandagiri and Dhauli hillock where they saw the inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka. On the way, in a dense forest, they could get drops of frozen milk of tigress. Apart from these places, they went to Sakshi Gopal near Puri and Lingaraj temple of Bhuvaneshwar. Then they went to Kothar to meet Nimaibabu, nephew of Balarambabu and returned to Calcutta from Cuttack by launch. The inmates of the Math could feel a change in their beloved Sharat. He had become lean and thin but his face was radiant with joy. He became more indrawn, his body was emaciated and his face was aglow with devotion. This time he stayed in and around Puri for six months.

The visit to Puri had made great spiritual impact on his mind and after around a year he got an opportunity to visit Puri again. This time, he went with Holy Mother Sri

Saradadevi, Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda, Yogin-Ma and her mother, Golap-Ma and Laxmididi. The party started their journey by launch on 5th November 1888 from Chandbali to Cuttack then by bullock cart to Puri. Ladies stayed at Kshetrabasir Math of Balarambabu and monks somewhere else. It can be easily inferred that Saradananda showed her in and around Puri. In free time he used to do Japam and Meditation at secluded place. After staying at Puri for two months they returned to Calcutta (Baranagore) on 12th January 1889.¹

In 1904 after the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna, Maharaj had an attack of typhoid. It was life threatening. He was taken to Shimultala for change of weather which proved to be of some use. He was struggling to keep his spiritual mood as opposite thoughts engrossed his mind. Swami Saradananda wrote in a letter dated 5th December 1904 that, "His long illness has left him not even the strength of a child." Swami Saradananda understood this and took him to his beloved place Puri. It was November 1904. Whenever he used to go to Puri he preferred staying at Shashi-Niketan, a place belonging to Sri Balaram Basu. At Puri, Maharaj would visit Lord Jagannath temple daily and take Mahaprasad. By this, his mood, which was disturbed due to typhoid, was completely changed and he regained his health.²

In 1913, he was not keeping well and was suffering from arthritis. The doctor suggested to him for a change of weather to recoup his health. After the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna, he went to Puri in March 1913 (Dol Pournima) and stayed there till July for five months. Yogin-Ma, her mother and a Brahmachari accompanied him. There is a big house of Balaram Basu called Shashi Niketan. Like Balaram Bhavan at Calcutta, this house was always available for the monks and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The host Ramakrishna Basu, son of Balaram Basu had made all the arrangements for their comfortable stay. He stayed there along with his companions. He used to go to darshan of Lord Jagannath daily and prayed intensely standing in front of the deities. He used to follow all the rituals and traditions of that place like other devotees such as, ringing the bell etc. In the evening he used to go for a walk on the seashore. Dr.Kanjilal and Dr.Durgapada Ghosh had specifically told him to walk in the seawater for his arthritis. After returning from the seashore, he used to sit in the hall and talk on various topics- sometimes on his sadhana in Puri in early days, sometimes on Sri Chaitanya's life, sadhana and hardship in Puri. One day he told a story from Sri Chaitanya's life. Once Sri Chaitanya was standing beside the Garuda Sthamba in Jagannath temple. On that day there was some festival and there was so much rush in the temple that it was difficult to take the darshan of Lord Jagannath. One lady devotee trying to take darshan, climbed on the back of Sri Chaitanya. On seeing this, there was a commotion in the temple. Sri Chaitanya gestured them to keep quiet and told the people later that blessed was his body which gave service to a devotee. What a devotion! One day Yogin-Ma asked Sharat Maharaj to sing a bhajan. He sang few bhajans, last bhajan was by Guru Nanak. The bhajan started with the following stanza.

Gaganmay thale ravichandra dipak dale

Tarakamandal- chamake moti – re||

After singing this bhajan, he told that once Guru Nanak went to vrindavan and went to visit the temple of Govindaji. The pandas did not allow him to enter the temple. He sat outside the temple and sang this bhajan. People gathered around him to listen a bhajan. Yogin-Ma then told the Master's saying on the oneness of Bhagvat-Bhakta-Bhagavan. Sharat Maharaj told that the Master had said this many times.

Grand sons of Puntia's queen Smt. Hemantakumaridevi used to meet Swami Saradananda. Those three brothers were very young then. Though Saradananda was serious by nature, he used to talk very freely with them.

On the Ratha Yatra day, Sharat Maharaj and his companion went to the Jagannath temple. Just before the start of the procession they went to a place between Jagannath and Gundicha temple and waited there. While they were waiting, he told them what Sri Chaitanya used to do at the time of Ratha Yatra. He told, "On the day of Ratha Yatra,

Chaitanya will first sweep the road. Then he will stand in front of the chariots with folded hands. Just when the procession would start, he would push the chariot with his head from the back. Once the procession started he would sing and danced in front of the chariot.” At around 1 p.m. chariot arrived at that place where the party was waiting. He pulled the Chariot of Lord Jagannath for sometime. The party then returned to Shashi Niketan at around 2 p.m. At night as usual Sharat Maharaj started talking about the history of Ratha Yatra and about the passing away of Sri Chaitanya.

One day in the evening he went for a walk and returned at 8 o'clock. To his surprise, the whole building was brightly lighted up, tents were erected in open space and armed guards were posted near the gate. The caretaker informed him that the King of Bundi had taken possession of the house. Saradananda kept his cool though the private secretary of the King talked roughly in English and was told Saradananda to leave the place with bag and baggage. Then Saradananda told him, “This is not your Bundi State but it is under British Rule.” After that the secretary prostrated before him and with folded hands told him about the mischief played by the Pandas with them and told about their helpless condition. The Pandas had made arrangements for the king's stay in a Dharmashala, which he refused. So Pandas showed this house to the king. Saradananda never got agitated in such unexpected and uncomfortable situations like this. So in order to help them he shifted with others to another two-storied house of Balaram Basu on the seashore and stayed there for two week. After the king left and the house was cleaned, Saradananda and party returned to Shashi Niketan. In spite of so much chaos, he never lost his cool. He was calm and quiet all the while, although his companions were greatly disturbed.³

Swami Nikhilananda narrates: When the Swami was somewhat improved in health, he decided to go to Puri and told me that this time I would be in charge of the party. The day was fixed and we went to Howrah station to take the train. There were three ladies in the party. I believed many swamis and devotees came to the station to see us off. I was busy arranging the swami's bed in the second-class compartment, which was in the middle of the train. The ladies compartment was near the engine and ours was in the rear. Remembering the incident about the ladies' clothes in Benares, I did not bother to look after them when we boarded the train. Some of the devotees took them to their compartment. At 10.00 p.m. the train stopped at Kharagpur and I ran to the Swami's compartment to enquire if he needed anything. He answered in a solemn voice that he did not. Early in the morning the train stopped at Bhuvaneshwar and several swamis of the local Ashrama came to the station. Again I ran to the swami's compartment to find out if he needed anything. He asked me rather sternly to go to the ladies' compartment and see what they wanted. I brought them some water. The train finally arrived at Puri at about 10.00 a.m. Swami Shankarananda and a few devotees were at the station to meet us. I packed the swami's bed and arranged the luggage. Swami Shankarananda went to the ladies' compartment and helped them with their luggage. I believed Swami Saradanandaji, Swami Shankarananda and ladies drove in the car to the Shashi Niketan where we would spend the vacation. We, the male attendants with our luggage came to the house in a horse-drawn carriage. I saw Swami Saradanandaji seated in the big living room with several devotees, taking coffee and smoking from the Hubble-bubble. I took his luggage to his room on the second floor, opened the suitcases and arranged his bed under the direction of another swami who had lived for a long time with Swami Saradanandaji. As I was a novice about these things, the swami asked me to make the night bed on a big couch and the day bed on the floor. When everything was ready, I came downstairs and told the swami that his room was ready. We came together to his room and without any apparent reason he scolded me for making his bed on the couch, which was generally used by householders. His anger mounted up. His face and eyes showed it. He wanted to know who asked me to make his bed on the couch. For a few minutes I kept quiet and then asked him why he was so upset. I would be glad to bring down his bed to the floor. Somehow I felt that the real cause of his anger was quite

different. Then he said, "I am very angry with you. I am surprised at your strange behaviour. I cannot look after the ladies. As you know, I have gout. At the Sealdah station you did not at all pay any attention to the ladies. Other devotees took them to their compartment. At Bhuvaneshwar you began to fuss about me and it was I who asked you to find out if the ladies required anything. At Puri you did not go near the ladies at all. Shankarananda helped them with their luggage. In Calcutta I told you that you would look after the whole party. If you purposely kept yourself away from the ladies because you are a monk, then you should not have come with me. Suppose your mother or sisters were in the party; would you have neglected them in that way?" I learned my lesson. I believed Swami Saradanandaji wanted to teach me to act according to time, place and circumstances.

At Puri Swami Saradanandaji revealed to me for the first time why he had asked me to come to Benares with him as one of his assistants. The Mohanta of the Emmar Math, a well-known monastery, used to drive to the beach in a beautiful phaeton with some of his attendants. He put on a gorgeous yellow robe and looked like a divinity. I saw the carriage almost every afternoon passing by our house. One evening Swami Saradanandaji was lying on his bed after supper. While I was fanning him I asked whether it was befitting a monk, especially the leader of a monastery, to drive in a beautiful carriage to enjoy the fresh air at the beach. The Swami suddenly became excited and said in an animated voice: "The Mohanta of the Emmar Math is an eminent person. He enjoys much respect and honour from his devotees and disciples. Is it an easy thing to digest honour?" Then looking at me he said: "I have been noticing you since you joined Mayavati. First you wrote the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Then you travelled extensively in northern and western India where you were entertained by several maharajas and other high officials. I heard all this and said to myself: "This young man wanted to be a sannyasin but he began his life in a wrong manner. He started writing books and giving lectures. He has not seen anything of a life of the sadhu. Before long he will be puffed up with vanity like a finger swollen into plantain tree. He will never know the life of a monk." Then he added: "We at first practiced austerity and then we began to write books and give lectures. I really felt worried about you. That is why I asked you, after your return from the lecture tour, to live with me, so you could see how a sadhu should live. I am sure you did not understand why I made you one of my assistants in Benares." I was overwhelmed by his compassion. Even now when I recall the incident my eyes become moist.⁴

In the year 1915, on the occasion of Ratha Yatra, Swami Saradananda accompanied by Swami Premananda and others went to Puri on 9th Bhadra 1322 (24th August 1915). Swami Brahmananda was already present there and was staying at Shashi Niketan. They all took part in Ratha Yatra. After Ratha Yatra, Swami Brahmananda left for Bhadrak. During this stay at Puri, Swami Saradananda wrote two letters, first one to Kedarbabu of Koalpada on 24th August 1915 and second letter to Holy Mother on 26th August 1915. He wrote to Kedarbabu, "... It will not be feasible for me to come there on the way to Calcutta. Otherwise I would have definitely visited your Ashrama and Jayrambati etc. One can visit Kamarpukur and Jayrambati only if fortune favours him. When Holy Mother's grace is there on you then there is nothing to worry. By her grace you will get everything in due course of time. Just keep faith in her, serve her as far as possible and follow her instructions. You will not have any difficulty." Swami Saradananda returned to Calcutta on 20th Bhadra 1322 (4th September 1915).⁵

Towards the end of 1917, Swami Brahmananda after his visit to South India came to Puri. Swami Turiyananda came to meet him. After staying for a few days at Puri in the company of Maharaj, he became ill. His two legs had to be operated upon one after another. The operation was performed without anaesthesia. Doctor was surprised to see his capacity to bear pain. Hearing the news of his illness, Swami Saradananda sent one attendant to serve Hari Maharaj and instructed the attendant to write to him immediately in case his presence was required there. During this illness, Hari Maharaj wished to see

Swami Saradananda, waited anxiously for him and expected him everyday at the arrival time of a train from Calcutta. And he would become sombre for not seeing him. At last Saradananda got the news of his illness. Immediately he came to Puri with Vaikunthanath Sanyal on 17th October 1917. They came to Shashi Niketan where Raja Maharaj was sitting on a chair in the veranda. Sharat Maharaj prostrated before Raja Maharaj. Raja Maharaj asked Sharat Maharaj to sit near him and told, "You have come, so now I am relaxed." Vaikunthanath Sanyal, however, after prostrating to Maharaj, rushed to Hari Maharaj. Seeing him after a long time, Hari Maharaj burst into tears.

Then Sharat Maharaj went to see Hari Maharaj. Though there was no talk between the two, Hari Maharaj started crying like a child. Pulling a chair, Sharat Maharaj sat near him and took his hand in his own and sat silently.

From Puri Sharat Maharaj wrote a letter to Holy Mother in which he writes: "Mother, kindly accept my humble pranams. I have come here on last Wednesday with Vaikunthanath Sanyal because Hari Maharaj is not keeping well about which I had written to you before coming here. I hope you have received the letter. After coming here I could realise the seriousness of Hari Maharaj's illness, but he is better now. If his health improves further, the doctors will allow us to take him to Calcutta after 10-12 days. He is bedridden. He had been operated upon his left hand and both the legs, puss had been removed from septic at three places. Thakur had given him a wonderful capacity to forbear and he has full faith in you. He is joyfully spending his days in spiritual talks and bhajans. Mother, please bless us so that we may take him to Calcutta as early as possible. He conveys his humble pranams to you. Rakhhal Maharaj is also keeping well. He was worried and anxious about the health of Hari Maharaj. Now after the assurance of the doctors and our arrival here, he is a bit relaxed. He also conveys his humble pranams to you. Amulya, Jnanananda, Ishwar and other boys who are here and Sri Sanyal are conveying pranams to you."

After the arrival of Sharat Maharaj at Puri, doctors decided to have one more operation on Hari Maharaj. He was not willing for that. But Sharat Maharaj persuaded him with his sweet words and motherly care. Operation was done successfully. To keep him in joyous mood, Sharat Maharaj used to talk to him for hours after hours. Sri Sanyal used to tell the stories of their golden days in Baranagore Math and the wanderings in Himalayas. His health improved a little. Sharat took him and Maharaj to Udbodhan. At that time Swami Premananda was ill at Balaram Bhavan. Sharat Maharaj started taking care of him as usual. Swami Saradananda had to serve both the brother disciples and that he had done joyfully. He had a natural inclination and love for service to others. If any Brahmachari or Sannyasi fell sick, he wished to convey the message of his illness to Saradananda so that he would receive motherly care from him. Not only his close ones but also the outsiders received the same care and affection from him.⁶

After the Mahasamadhi of Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda did not take much interest in work but still in the year 1923 under his leadership the temple of Holy Mother was consecrated at Jayrambati. Due to old age and lack of vigour he suffered from many disease. So doctors and others requested him to go to Bhuvaneshwar for change of climate. So he left for Bhuvaneshwar on 12th November 1924 along with Swamis Nirmalananda, Shankarananda, Vaikunthnath Sanyal and attendant Swami Asehananda. He wrote to one person on 30th November 1924, "This morning I had been to Bhuvaneshwar temple (Lingaraj). After having the darshan of the Lord and offering Puja, I return to Monastery. After coming here, this time it is my first visit to the temple." During his stay at Bhuvaneshwar he had an attack of blood dysentery. Doctor had prescribed him Emitine injections. After the treatment he recouped his health. He wrote to one brahmachari on 4th December 1924 from Bhuvaneshwar Math that the Ashrama was very calm and a quiet place. He walked about two to three miles daily. And there was no swelling on his legs. As the winter season had already started, he hoped that his health would improve day by day. But one day he got the news that Golap-

Ma was not keeping well. So he had to return to Calcutta on 10th December 1924. Golap-Ma left her mortal body on 19th December 1924.⁷

Swami Aseshananda narrates: In his dealings with us younger monks the swami's love and forgiveness were limitless. One day when I was with him at Puri, he told me he couldn't find the beads that he usually kept in a drawer. "They belonged to the Holy Mother and I kept them after her Mahasamadhi," he said. "They were strung on golden thread. Probably somebody came and took them on account of the golden thread while we were away seeing Lord Jagannath at his temple." I was concerned. I thought perhaps I had accidentally thrown the rosary in to the sea along with the flowers after evening worship. I returned to the beach and searched for a long time but found nothing. The Swami consoled me: "One by one everything is going away. This is the will of the Mother. What can be done? Don't worry."⁸

At Bhuvaneshwar Math my duty was to draw water from the well and pour it into the 'kunjo', a porous mud vessel, for swami's drinking purposes. One day while I was carrying the vessel by its slender elongated neck, the vessel slipped from my hand, broke, bottom falling out and spilling the water. It was a real mess. The water soaked the white linen sheet and the mattress on which the swami was seated reading his correspondence. I was very much afraid thinking that perhaps he would be so angry that he would not allow me to serve him anymore. It would have been a great blow to my heart to be denied the privilege. I prayed to Sri Ramakrishna to forgive me and to intercede in this matter. Seeing my gloomy face Swami Saradananda said, "Why are you so sad! This water pot will go on its way alone; it will not have cholera or typhoid. Don't worry, I am going for a walk. You take the mattress upstairs and put it in the sun on the roof of the porch. The sun is bright and scorching today; within half an hour the mattress will be dry. You bring it back to my room and all will be well." My heart brightened; I followed the swami's instructions meticulously, and everything was perfect.⁹

Swami Saradananda was a gifted musician who learned his art from Swamiji. In Puri I saw Swami Saradananda teaching that style of singing and chanting to the senior swamis, passing along a legacy of beauty that still remains and is treasured by our Order.¹⁰

The great ones have gone from this world of illusion, but they are not gone beyond our reach. Swami Saradananda told one of the disciples of Holy Mother, while we were travelling together by train on our way to Puri, that Sri Ramakrishna blessed him with a vision near Sakshi Gopal, which is close by Puri, pointing out the exact spot where he saw his Master's face lit with a heavenly smile. He had received the vision at the time when he was grief-stricken at the loss of Sri Ramakrishna and his heart was longing for a vision. When we want to see them as deeply as the swami wanted to see his Master, they will be there for us. They lived to show us the way. The rest is up to us.¹¹

I believe Saradananda's favourite deity was Mother Kali. When we went to Puri I was privileged to gather flowers for his daily worship and remove them in the evening. At that time I saw his album which contained the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Mother Kali in her pose of great power (Mahashakti).¹²

On 6th February 1920 he came to Bhuvaneshwar Math along with Vaikunthnath Sanyal where Swami Brahmananda was staying. There he informed everything to Maharaj regarding the Kashi Sevashrama. After staying there for ten days he returned to Calcutta on 17th February 1920.¹³

Swami Saradananda had long been engaged in solving an organisational problem at Varanasi, but had not fully succeeded. So he came to Bhuvaneshwar to seek the help of Swami Brahmananda in setting things right. That was in the beginning of 1921, though the troubles had been brewing for long before that. The way the two leaders tackled the problems revealed at its best the technique they have developed for the smooth working of their religious organisation; and this was nothing more than the stimulation of love, spiritual fervour and the democratic attitude of making concessions to each other's opinion. So Maharaj complied with the request of Swami Saradananda to come to

Varanasi and reached there on 20th January 1921. Swami Brahmananda's presence had an instantaneous salutary effect, though, curiously enough, he never talked about business, but rather on high spiritual topics. He had diagnosed the disease as lack of spirituality; and the cure lay in heightening the spiritual ardour. In his august presence petty mindedness took flight, and the scheme drawn up by Swami Saradananda a year before was given full play, leading to satisfactions all around. The whole process culminated in Swami Brahmananda's initiating thirty five persons into Sannyasa and Brahmacharya on January 30, 1921, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda.¹⁴

Sharat Maharaj had gone to Varanasi and after Annapurna Puja he started for Calcutta on 3rd April 1925. This time he stayed in Calcutta for two and half months. There he had a fever and suffered for a few weeks. He became weak. After finishing his Mission work he started again for Puri and reached there on 17th June 1925. There he stayed at Shashi Niketan. Laxmididi, niece of Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Puri for about two years. Devotees constructed a house for her named 'Laxmi-Niwas'. One day Saradananda went to see her. On another day she came to meet Sharat Maharaj at Shashi Niketan. Sharat Maharaj received her very cordially and gave her fruits. After some conversation on spiritual matters she sang a few bhajans in Bengali and Oriya. After spending a few hours, Laxmididi took leave of him. Sharat Maharaj paid for her fare and for sweets.

Thus the days were passing. On the day of Ratha Yatra festival after having snacks, he went and sat in Puntia's temple along with the monks. He waited in the sun for the arrival of Rathas. When the Rathas came near, he had the darshan of Lord Jagannath. He pulled the ropes of all the three chariots one after another. He was very happy at that time though his health was not so good. During this period they were around 10 to 11 people including Amulya Maharaj and during Ratha Yatra time they were around 20 to 22 people including monks from Bhuvaneshwar Math. One day he told to one Swami, "Look, one thing we have learned at this stage of our lives that we are not the doer, nothing depends on us. This world will move on even without us. One need intense spiritual practice otherwise one feels that he is the doer." On hearing this experience of the senior monk many learned a new lesson.

This time Swami Saradananda stayed at Puri for more than nine weeks. Puri was his favourite place of pilgrimage. He came to Puri for the first time in 1887 and in his life he came there many times. Whenever he came to Puri he derived immense joy from the darshan of Lord Jagannath. Whenever he was free in the evening he would sit in the veranda of the first floor of Shashi Niketan, continuously gaze at the endless sea from there and would be engrossed in a divine mood. While leaving Puri, he was heard to be muttering, "Will I have the darshan of Lord Jagannath again?"

He left for Bhuvaneshwar on 24th August 1925 and stayed in the Math for two weeks and left for Calcutta on 6th September 1925.¹⁵

In 1925, during Ratha Yatra, Swami Saradananda was staying at Shashi Niketan at Puri. One day during that time he had himself mentioned about the adverse circumstances under which he had written Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga (Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master). He told, "Holy Mother was staying at that time in Udbodhan upstairs with Radhu and there was a rush of devotees. I had to keep the accounts and there was a pressure of huge debt incurred for constructing the Udbodhan House for Holy Mother. I used to write Lilaprasanga in a small room on ground floor. Nobody dared to talk to me in those days. I had no time to talk with anybody, if somebody asked for anything I would answer in short. So people thought of me as egoistic. I wrote many volumes (Chapters) of this book sitting in this house. There is no end to write about Sri Ramakrishna. I could not write much about devotees. I could write only when my mood was suitable for writing." The Chapter named *the essence of the Madhura Bhava (Sweet Mood)* was written while staying at Shashi Niketan at Puri. He thought it was the best chapter of this book.

Once Swami Saradananda was writing about divine aspect of Swami Brahmananda in Lilaprasanga while staying in Puri. Swami Premananda came to know about this writing. He forbade him to write about this. Before Rakhal's arrival at the Master, Master in a vision saw that Balakrishna holding the hand of a cow-headed boy standing on a lotus leave. Soon when Rakhal came to the Master, he realised that it is the same cow-headed boy seen in the vision. The Master forbade his disciples not to speak to Rakhal about this vision. If he comes to know about his real nature, his body will not last long. So Swami Premananda reminded him about the Master's instruction in this matter. Accordingly Swami Saradananda dropped this portion.¹⁶

Swami Saradananda was talking with his disciple Sri Gurudas Gupta about Jagannath temple at Puri: He was of the opinion that the temple was originally a Buddhist temple. Then it came under the influence of Sri Shankaracharya and finally under the control of Sri Ramanuja. Absolute freedom regarding food and Mahaprasad was the result of Buddhist influence. People from different castes take Mahaprasad together. The animal sacrifice in Vimaladevi Temple for three days of the puja, the dress and ornaments of the goddess show the direct influence of Tantra under the leadership of Sri Shankaracharya even today. Many monks in this period used to stay in the temple premises. However, after the influence of Vaishnavism they took shelter in Govardhan Math of Sri Shankaracharya.¹⁷

The only daughter of Gopalvasini Guha passed away. She came to her Guru Swami Saradananda and sadly expressed her inability to forget her daughter. Sharat Maharaj consoled her saying, "It had happened long ago and Thakur had given you shelter at his feet. Why then are you worried?" Afterwards that lady went to Puri and told Saradananda again about her daughter. She told, "For the last three days I have been seeing my daughter whenever I close my eyes. I cannot sleep. What can I do?" Sharat Maharaj asked her whether she had given offerings in the temple of Goddesses Vimaladevi. When she replied in the negative, then he himself arranged for offerings. On that night she had a good sleep. Then Sharat Maharaj said, "After coming here you have forgotten to give offering to Vimaladevi, so she came in your dream as your daughter and asked for an offering. As you have fulfilled the wish of goddess now, so there will be no further repetition of such dreams."¹⁸

A certain disciple narrates his reminiscences about Swami Saradananda when he was staying at Puri. One day he asked Swami Saradananda how to get rid of lust. In reply Sharat Maharaj said, "Sri Ramakrishna had said, 'Do you think I am free from lust? It is still there but it can't raise its head.' Unlike wood and stone human being can't be without sentiments but it can't overpower him. If a bad thought happens to arise in the mind, why should you go on brooding over it? Sometimes those feelings come and go. Think of God only."

In the holy company of Saradananda, if any doubt arose in a mind, the answer would come to the mind automatically or he will answer the doubt even without being asked for. Even the small desires used to be fulfilled easily by his grace. Once I had a desire to visit Puri and it was fulfilled. Still another time a desire came to my mind to have a prasad in Gundicha temple and even without asking for it, the desire was fulfilled. He arranged for our prasad there. A fortnight after the Snan Yatra, I went to Jagannath temple for darshan. But I could not embrace the Lord. Hearing this Maharaj asked me to go to the temple in the evening. Next day I went with Maharaj to the temple and all my desires were fulfilled unexpectedly.¹⁹

During the days of Baranagore Math, Sharat Maharaj had once gone to Puri. After the darshan of Lord Jagannath, he often used to sit in the temple premises. He had almost found out the height of the temple by measuring the shadow of it for which he used trigonometric method. As he was well educated, he was not only satisfied with the darshan of the Lord Jagannath but also curious about the dimensions of the temple. Once he saw a person climbing up the temple dome for tying a flag with a Chakra of the Kalash. The height of that person was upto the centre of the Chakra. It means the height

of the Chakra was double the man's height. If the man's height is three and a half hands then the diameter of the Chakra must be seven hands. That Chakra looked very small from the ground level. That is how he found out the height of the temple.²⁰

Swami Saradananda had great regards for the Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath. Once he wrote to a person advising him to take Atke Prasad of Lord Jagannath daily and meditate on chosen deity thinking of him as an embodiment of purity, all pervading like an ocean of Satchidananda.²¹

After the demise of Swami Brahmananda, the senior monks of the Math wanted him to become President but he calmly and resolutely told them: "Swamiji has appointed me as the Secretary of the Math and I will not leave that post"; and he remained as the Secretary of the Math till his death. He left his mortal coil on 18th August 1927.

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SWAMI TURIYANANDA

Swami Turiyananda was popularly known as Hari Maharaj. He was much interested in Meditation and study of Vedanta scriptures. Though apparently he appeared to be a vedantist but by the grace of the Master, there was a wonderful combination of knowledge and devotion in him. He extensively travelled in India visiting different places of pilgrimage. When Swami Vivekananda went to the west second time, he took Hari Maharaj with him. There he propagated the idea of Vedanta. After his return to India, he again went to many pilgrimage places and engaged himself in intense Sadhana. Hari Maharaj was instrumental in starting and setting up new centres and moulding the lives of young monks. In spite of his illness, Swami Turiyananda was always ready to speak about God and spiritual life.

Among the places of pilgrimages, he liked Haridwar, Almora, Varanasi and Puri most. He visited holy land of Orissa many times. He visited Puri in 1911, 1915, and 1917.

In early 1911, Turiyananda went to Puri from Belur Math. Brahmananda was also in Puri, and he always enjoyed Turiyananda's company. There is a Hindi saying, "When an ass meets another ass, they kick each other; and when a holy man meets another holy man, they only talk about God." In Puri they used to visit Jagannath temple regularly and had very nice time in Japam, Meditation and studying scriptures.

While staying at Puri, Turiyananda consulted a doctor, who diagnosed that he had diabetes and his treatment was started there. Although Turiyananda's health slightly improved in Puri, he had some trouble with eyes. The doctor prescribed eye drops. One morning, as soon as his attendant, Sharvananda, put eye drops in his eyes, he cried out: "I think you have given me the wrong medicine. See what you have used!" The attendant was shocked when he discovered that it was diluted nitric acid. Filled with remorse and fear, he began to tremble and cry while someone else washed the acid out of the swami's eyes. Turiyananda remained calm and composed. He was the embodiment of forbearance. He later consoled his attendant: "You see, as soon as you put the drops in my eyes, I felt a terrible burning sensation covering my whole body. I thought: 'O Mother, what can I do if You want to take away my eyes? May your will be done!'" Brahmananda also prayed. By the Master's grace, his eyes were saved. On 21st December 1911 Brahmananda and Turiyananda left Puri for Belur Math; then they went to Varanasi on 20th March 1912.¹

In October 1911 Swami Yatishwarananda went to Puri and joined the Ramakrishna Order. Maharaj and Turiyananda were staying in Shashi Niketan. He also stayed there. It was there that Hari Maharaj encouraged him to study initially the treatises of Shankaracharya (Prakarana Granthavali). That time the Jagaddhatri Puja was celebrated in the house of Atal Bihari Maitra, a devotee and high government official. Br.Suresh (Swami Yatishwarananda) who had been trained in ritualistic worship by Swami Ambikananda performed the puja. Hari Maharaj was tantradharak, whose function was to direct the worshiper. On the appointed day the puja began. Worship of Jagaddhatri is a very elaborate one and the brahmachari found it tiring to do Nyasas (a ritual in which the worshiper invokes the presence of the Deity in himself by uttering mantrams). He spent an excessively long time on meditation at points during the worship. Swami Turiyananda noticed this and ignored it once or twice. Later he said firmly: "Meditation is over. Now go on with the worship." Br.Suresh proceeded with the puja, but when the next meditation came, he gladly entered into it and became completely absorbed. Suddenly the Swami with great firmness, admonished him: "You have meditated a lot. Now continue the worship. By too much meditation you lengthen the puja and tire the devotees." When the puja was over we all sat down to take refreshment. Hari Maharaj transferred the delicacies from his own plate to Suresh's plate affectionately. The sadness caused due to the scolding of Hari Maharaj during the puja time disappeared by his affectionate behaviour now. And by his blessings Suresh's mind was filled with joy.

When the puja was over the Swamis and Brahmachari had returned to Shashi Niketan. Turiyananda called Suresh and said to him: “The meditative mood you were creating during the worship is very good. But if you meditate too long, the ritual, the offerings, and everything will be delayed; It is not proper.” Then he added: “Do you know what our ideal is? As soon as a desire to meditate arises, one should go into one’s room, close the door and commence. But again, if it is necessary to do so, one should give up the meditation, come out in a natural way and enter into the activities.” Before leaving for Madras Maharaj in consultation with Turiyananda gave Suresh the new name Brahmachari Nityachaitanya and blessed him wholeheartedly.²

In 1915, Raja Maharaj was in Puri. Swami Turiyananda came to Puri and stayed with Maharaj for few days.^{*FI} He used to inspire the monks and devotees to have the holy company of Maharaj. He wrote to one devotee, “The holy company of Maharaj is rare and precious.”³

On 4th June 1917 Swami Turiyananda went to Puri from Belur Math. Swami Brahmananda had already returned from his South India tour to Puri on 11th May 1917 and was then staying at Shashi Niketan. Swami Turiyananda became very happy to see Maharaj after a long time. In one of his letters written from Shashi Niketan Puri dated 13th June 1917, he wrote, “... I left Belur Math on 3rd June 1917 and reached here next day. I became extremely happy to see Maharaj in good health and spirit. He too was very happy to see us after a long time. We had great satisfaction to hear from him about his pilgrimage to South India in detail. We had the darshan of Lord Jagannath on the occasion of Snan Yatra. Perhaps Maharaj would stay here for two-three months more. He is also asking me to stay with him. I am thinking of staying here till Ratha Yatra Festival. After coming here my health is deteriorating. Let us see what happens afterwards. All the companions of Maharaj are quite well. ...” On 21st June 1917, he wrote, “Yesterday we visited the temple of Lord Jagannath to see Nava-Yauvan Ceremony and today we are planning to visit the temple to see the Vamanrup Ceremony. The queen of Puntia has consecrated today a temple of Radha-Krishna at Puri. We went to see it. The temple is beautiful. ...” In another letter dated 31st July 1917, he wrote, “... Here also Jhulan Yatra of Lord Jagannath is being celebrated these days. All are enjoying the festival. There are many Ashramas in Puri. In all of them celebrations are going on. ...” On 11th August 1917, he wrote, “... Plans are being made to visit Bhuvaneshwar- it may materialise soon. Jhulan Yatra of Lord Jagannath and Sri Krishna are over. Yesterday we all partook Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath with great joy. ...”

Swami Turiyananda’s diabetes became worse. At one time he was so ill that he was on the verge of death. Swamiji appeared before him and said: “Brother Hari, where are you going? Your time has not yet come.” Another time, Turiyananda fell into a coma and doctor’s lost hope. All of a sudden, he opened his eyes looked at Swami Shankarananda who was seated next to him and said, “I am not going this time.” The doctor did some surgery on his boils. Turiyananda recovered somewhat and returned to Calcutta on 10th November 1917 with Brahmananda and Saradananda. He stayed at Balaram’s house, where he could get medical help more easily than he could be at Belur Math.⁴

One day at Benaras, he recalled the Puri incident, saying: “I had a very strange experience, at that moment it seemed I must die. First many sages appeared before me, and later the forms of different gods and goddesses. Then suddenly I felt my prana was going out. At the same time, however, I saw another power rising up within, which endeavoured to retain the prana. There was an actual ‘tug of war’ between these two powers. My vital breath was on the point of leaving the body when Swamiji appeared and said in his usual endearing manner: “Haribhai! Where do you think you are going? Your time has not yet come.” At once some energy rose in me violently, drew the prana back and made it to take its accustomed seat within. Shortly after this I opened my eyes and told Amulya that I was not to die this time.”⁵

In his reminiscences Swami Atulananda wrote about this incident, "In 1917, Swami Turiyananda was staying in Puri along with Swami Brahmananda. Then Hari Maharaj became seriously ill and expressed his desire to see me. So I went to Puri. Dr. Durgapada and other doctors had come from Calcutta to treat him. During that time he told me, 'Before your arrival, I saw two images had come out from my body. They were life and death. They started fighting with each other. Both were equally strong. Sometime one was wining sometime other one. At last life defeated the death. I understood that I will not die this time though my health continued to be precarious.' After recovering a little we all returned to Udbodhan taking Hari Maharaj with us."⁶

In June 1917 when Swami Turiyananda came to Puri, he along with Swami Shankarananda used to visit Jagannath Temple everyday early morning. He was keeping well. One day Shankarananda was going to temple as usual found Turiyananda sleeping. Without disturbing him, Shankarananda started for temple alone. Shortly he heard Turiyananda's call and both went to Jagannath Temple. Visiting daily the Jagannath temple was the main part of their sadhana at Puri. On some special days, both of them visited the temple without the knowledge of other to satisfy ones yearning. In the evening when they met, Shankarananda told that he had visited the temple trice. After listening to this, Swami Turiyananda showed his five fingers of right hand without uttering any word to indicate that he had visited temple five times. This shows their yearning and devotion towards Lord Jagannath.⁷

In 1917 Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda was staying at Shashi Niketan in Puri. One day Maharaj told Hari Maharaj, "Since you are here why not read Srimad Bhagvatam daily?" Hari Maharaj happily agreed. In the evening Ishwar Maharaj (then a brahmachari in future became Swami Mukteshwarananda) used to read and Hari Maharaj used to explain difficult portion of it. Maharaj used to seat for the reading. There used to be 18 people in the audience including one or two outsiders. Reading was done of tenth Skanda till some portion of Rasalila. The reading was discontinued after Hari Maharaj became ill.

Once there was a lesion on Hari Maharaj's leg and he was to be operated upon. After listening to this Maharaj became very anxious and like a child became restless, sometime coming to Hari Maharaj and sometime going out. When operation was over Hari Maharaj was resting peacefully in bed. Maharaj asked Hari Maharaj whether there was any pain in his leg. Smilingly, Hari Maharaj replied that he didn't feel any pain- not even as much pain as one gets from an ants bite. Hari Maharaj said, "Maharaj I beg you to leave the room. I can see that you have been suffering much more than I." Then he placed his hand on Maharaj's hand and said consolingly, "Please don't worry. Really, I am not in pain." Maharaj returned to his room. There were tears of sympathy in his eyes. He was very much concerned about Hari Maharaj's health.⁸

At the end of 1917 Swami Turiyananda became very ill at Puri and wished that Swami Saradananda should stay with him. To fulfil his wish Saradananda went to Puri. There he stayed for a month and served Swami Turiyananda and brought him to Udbodhan (10th November 1917). At the same time, Swami Premananda was ill at Balaram Mandir. Swami Saradananda had to serve both the brother disciples and that he had done joyfully.⁹

Around the year 1916 Swami Turiyananda worked hard for establishing a centre at Almora at the cost of his health. Eventually Swami Turiyananda reached Belur Math arriving there in the middle of February 1917 around the time of Shivaratri. The Swami's health did not improve in anyway at Belur Math either and so the devotees advised him to leave Bengal as soon as he could. He stayed on, however until June 3 and then left for Puri where he joined Swami Brahmananda. Turiyananda always had a special fondness for Maharaj, and after reunion in Puri wrote as follows: "I can not described how happy I felt seeing Maharaj in fine health and free from responsibility. He was also happy to have me near him after such a long time." It was a period when there were important

celebrations in the Jagannath temple, and Turiyananda attended all functions in the company of Maharaj.

But in Orissa as in Bengal, there was no end to the Swami's suffering. He started bathing daily in the sea, but he developed a swelling in one ear and had to discontinue it. Then a number of other complaints followed one after another. In spite of all this, his mind was never affected by physical suffering.

In one of his earlier letters Turiyananda had written: "This is just the way the body is- all right today and bad the next day. After all it can only move towards its destruction. One's body is not eternal; one day or another it has to go. So why all the fuss?" This summed up the Swami's attitude toward his body and his health.

The letters Turiyananda sent from Puri are filled with inspiring ideas but with very little about himself. On July 1917 he wrote, "... The Lord is the Inner Ruler. You have to lay bare before Him your heart's aspirations. When He sees that you are sincere, He will fulfil them. There is no doubt about it. Try to keep your mind in the Lord. He will surely come to your aid. There is no question about it. When the mind becomes impure, doubts immediately make their appearance. Watch that your mind does not give room to selfishness. Surrender your mind to the Lord. Then there is no need to search for Him...."

Swami Turiyananda's frequent illness and the appearance of what seemed to be boils on his body caused the doctors to suspect some deeper infection. They found that his diabetic condition was leading to blood poisoning and they diagnosed the swelling as carbuncles. They suggested surgery. To perform the operation, a doctor was sent to Puri. Swami Saradananda, Gurudas and Dr.D'Mello also went to be near Turiyananda. It was then the latter part of October 1917.

The doctor wanted to administer chloroform before surgery. But Turiyananda refused the anaesthetic and underwent the operation in full consciousness by voluntarily detaching his mind from the body. Swami Bhaskarashwarananda who had a good fortune to stay with Swami Turiyananda narrates in his reminiscences: Hari Maharaj was established in pure atman. He had no body consciousness. While staying at Puri, Hari Maharaj had the carbuncle. When Swami Brahmananda called European Doctor to operate upon the carbuncle, Hari Maharaj did not allow doctor to use the chloroform in spite of repeated requests from Raja Maharaj. He said, "By the grace of the Master, I have realized that I am not the body." The operation was performed without the chloroform successfully. Afterwards, when Raja Maharaj wanted to pay the doctor operation charges Rs.500, the doctor refused to take the money saying, "I have read some books on Indian Yogis and had also heard about them that they have no body consciousness but nowhere I have found such yogi until now. Today I am convinced that there can be such yogis in whom we can find absence of body consciousness. I will not accept the money." Afterwards he used to come to Hari Maharaj often.

The incidence that we relate here has been vouched for by reliable sources. Swami Turiyananda did not speak much of his mystic experiences during the early part of his life, but in his later years he confided some of his realisations to attendants and some intimate devotees. It would seem that the highly charged atmosphere of the holy city of Puri may have been conducive to producing the spiritual manifestation mentioned below.

One day, we are told, Turiyananda went to Jagannath temple to worship. As he was going up the entrance steps, he suddenly saw Sri Ramakrishna, with a garland of flowers around his neck, coming down the steps toward him. Turiyananda rushed forward and prostrated. But when he stretched out his hand to touch Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he could not see him anymore. Then only did the Swami remember that the Master was no longer living in the body. Turiyananda concluded that Sri Ramakrishna, who he believed, had been Lord Jagannath in a physical body, had graciously appeared before him in vision.

One day in the Puri temple, the Swami said, he heard the Anahata- the cosmic sound Om. The sound had been described as resembling the long peal of the bell. Turiyananda added that the experience was extremely thrilling and made him feel as if he

were floating on air. He realised that he had heard the sound- Brahman referred to in the scriptures.

From Puri, Turiyananda wrote many appealing letters to the devotees. In his counsel he tried to impress on them the surpassing importance of spiritual life. His correspondence was voluminous and full of religious fervour, revealing his intense faith in God and spirit of renunciation which were so characteristics of him. We shall include one of these letters in order to give a more complete picture of the Swami.

Puri,
21.07.1917

My dear D....,

I was very glad to receive your letter. The Lord has blessed you with good intentions. Your heart is becoming purified. One can see clearly that this is happening, and I am very glad of it. May he continue to bless you! This is my sincere prayer.

It is true that one cannot give up all desires; but if mind become discriminating, desires cannot exert their previous powers. You read in the Yoga Vasista, "If one moves about with discrimination as one's friend, one does not fall prey even to great temptations." And that is actually true. If one maintains discriminations steady and strong, no illusion can ever overpower a man. If you constantly remember that the world is unreal, what can desires do? There is no harm in fulfilling small desires, but those which make one forget the Lord are dangerous. It does not matter that you have to live in the world; if you but keep remembrance of the Lord, desires cannot lead you astray. Constantly pray to Him; tell Him your wishes; He will set everything right.

In the Yoga Vasista there is a following story: A certain brahmacharin, considering himself to be a man of renunciation, gave up all material possessions, retaining only a few cloths, a meditation rug, and a water pot. In order to make the disciple understand the meaning of real renunciation, his teacher told him: "What have you renounced? You have not renounced anything?" The disciple was surprised and thought: "I have, after all, but a few clothes, a rug, and a water pot. Does my teacher want me to give up these few possessions also?" He built a fire and threw clothing, water pot and rug into the flames, one by one. Then he told his teacher, "Sir, I have now renounce everything." The teacher said: "Do you think you have renounced everything? If you mean the pieces of cloth, what are they made of? A few strands of cotton. Likewise the other items are but forms of matter. By giving them up, what renunciation have you achieved?" The disciple began to think, "What else do I have? Yes! I have my body. Alright- I shall offer up my body in the fire." He was about to throw himself on the blaze when teacher called out: "Stop! Stop! Think a moment about what you are doing. Is the body yours! It came into existence through your mother and father. Food made it grow. What right have you to it." On hearing these words, the disciple suddenly saw the light. By the blessing of his teacher, he realised it is the ego that one has to get rid of. If you can give up pride, then you really renounce. Otherwise, the giving up of material objects, and even of your body does not constitute real renunciation.

Hence, remember that so-called receiving and giving up are perplexing an unreal. The only refuge is the Lord. You have constant devotion to Him and to have a taste for repeating God's name- these only are real prayer.

With my best wishes,

Yours,
Turiyananda

Such counsel would come from the Swami's inmost heart. He always spoke and wrote according to the dictates of his vast spiritual experience. Once he made following illuminating remark concerning himself to Swami Achalananda: "Kedarbaba, do you think the Divine Mother is sleeping! No, She is ever awake here (pointing to his heart)! So what I say is not just a matter of words; it comes from my personal experience."¹⁰

Swami Mukteshwarananda writes in his reminiscences, "In 1917, Maharaj and Hari Maharaj was at Puri along with other monks. One of us was suffering from fever

and was staying in a hall of first floor of Shashi Niketan. I was busy in many works so I could not go to see him. Once Hari Maharaj asked me about his health. When I told him that I could not find time to go to see him due to the pressure of work then he told me that, “One of your colleague is suffering and how you can say that you could find no time to see him. I am ill now otherwise I would have gone myself to see him.” In this way he taught us how to feel for others.

One day at night in Shashi Niketan we all heard a terrible sound. By that sound, the huge mansion of Shashi Niketan was shaken away. I never heard such sound. Listening to that sound Maharaj came out of his room and enquired from where the sound had come from. Hari Maharaj was awake all along and said that it appeared as if sound had come from the outer corner of the bathroom of his room. On hearing this Maharaj’s mood was changed for the worse and he told that it was a work of spirit and was very inauspicious. In that period Hari Maharaj and Amulya Maharaj used to go to Jagannath Temple at 3 a.m. for Mangalarati and used to return after taking bath in a sea. After this incident while taking a bath a seashell pierced in Hari Maharaj’s leg and that wound became poisonous and became very big. For that he had to suffer for two months. It was said that the Shashi Niketan was a hunted house and Maharaj had seen there a ghost. We may not believe others but we cannot ignore what Maharaj had seen. And Hari’s illness had proved this theory of ghost.¹¹

While staying at Puri, Hari Maharaj had a divine vision one night. At night about 2 a.m. he saw Swamiji come to him and told, “Haribhai, come with me now itself.” Hari Maharaj got up hurriedly and started following him. Swamiji was going so fast that neither he could catch him nor walk along with him. He was behind him. Then they reached seashore. Swamiji entered the sea until water reached above his knee and Hari Maharaj followed him. Suddenly one boat came from somewhere and Swamiji boarded the boat and disappeared. Hari Maharaj could not catch the boat. He came back sad and disappointed. He asked the attendant, “Did you not see Swamiji? He had just come.” Attendant said that he had not seen him. Hari Maharaj understood that it was his vision so he changed the topic of talk.¹²

He lived the life of a true Vedantist till the end of his life even on the deathbed he recited an Upanishadic mantram “Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma”. He left mortal coil on 21st July 1922.

Footnotes:

*F1: As per the life of Swami Brahmananda, he was in Puri from May to December 1915. And if we see the available letters of Swami Turiyananda written in 1915, they are either from Varanasi or from Almora. More so ever there is no letter available between 23rd March 1915 and 23rd May 1915. So only possibility of Turiyananda’s going to Puri in 1915 is in May 1915.

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SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

Swami Abhedananda popularly known as Kali Maharaj. He was born in Calcutta as Kalichandra Prasad. He was fond of reading books especially scriptures. When he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, the latter advised him to meditate on Kali, the Divine Mother. He began to practise spiritual discipline under the Master's guidance. He received ochre cloth and rosary from the Master. After the Master's passing away, he spent a number of years in travelling the places of pilgrimage until Swami Vivekananda called him to west in 1896. He visited Orissa twice in 1887 and 1906. During his first visit to Orissa in 1887, he visited Cuttack, Puri, Konark, Chilika Lake, Udaygiri-Khandagiri, Bhuvaneshwar and Kothar. During his second visit to Orissa in 1906, he visited Puri and Berhampur in Ganjam District.

Puri better known as Jagannathdham, had all along been one principal centre of Bhakti cult in India. It was the most sacred Puri, which Sri Chaitanya, the greatest incarnation of Divine Love, had made the centre of his unparalleled spiritualising mission during the last years of his bodily life. Sri Ramakrishna, who visited almost all the principal places of pilgrimage, did not however go to Puri for it is said that he had some sort of premonition that once he went there, he would never return to this world of differentiated existence.

The Baranagore monastery was there and the zeal of the monks was ever waxing. Perhaps that was the only thing that sustained them in those days; for otherwise we cannot explain the unthinkable hardship that they willingly faced in their pursuit of God-realization. But as days went by, some of them began to feel within themselves the call of the Beyond- an intense urge to go on pilgrimage to fulfil their monastic life, for monasticism in India since time immemorial enjoins upon its adherents to undertake pilgrimage to the holy places without which the life of a Sannyasin is never complete. So after some time the young monks started on their journey, one after another, to different places, excepting Shashi (Ramakrishnananda) who found his life's fulfilment in the worship of the Master. So he chose to stay on at Baranagore with the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna. He never went anywhere. Thus the time came when we find the sons of Sri Ramakrishna going to different places of pilgrimage which meant for them not merely sight-seeing but gathering experiences of a new life and also practising spiritual austerities. And thus began the first phase of the wandering life of our subject. Before appearing on the world stage, it may be pointed out here, Swami Abhedananda "travelled throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthan, from the Himalayas down to Rameshwaram and from Jagannath to Dwarka, barefooted, without touching money, without thinking of the morrow and with one blanket as his bed and garment." Of all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, none perhaps travelled so extensively, both in India and abroad, as Swami Abhedananda, as the subsequent accounts of his life will show. The tendency to travel was inborn with him just as it was with Swami Vivekananda. Modern India has seldom witnessed Parivrajakas like them. It is a fascinating as well as a rewarding exercise trying to reconstruct Kali Tapasvi's itinerary in almost all the holy regions of India since the time he first went to Puri in 1887, shortly after the birthday celebration of the Master at the Baranagore Math was over.

We can easily conjecture the mind of the young and ardent Kali Tapasvi when he started from Baranagore Monastery for his destination to Puri. His mind was now concentrated on the Beloved Lord of the universe, whom he was going to meet. He was sometimes immersed in deep meditation and sometime he looked hither and thither with strange delight. He saw all things with the eyes of love. He listened to every sound with the ears of love, his tongue poured love upon all around him. The whole world was to him full of beauty and new life. It was almost the same state of ecstasy he experienced in Vrindavan. He enjoyed the natural scenery on either side of the canal through which the

steamer cut its way and his whole being was suffused with joy and ecstasy which can hardly be expressed in words.

“In the year 1887 (March)”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “I along with Sarat and Baburam started for Puri. In those days the steamer would go only upto Chandbali and thence one had to go to Cuttack by bullock cart. We did so, and at Cuttack we met with the two brothers of Balaram Babu. They were pleased to learn that we were bound for Puri, and one of them, Harivallabha Babu gave us letter of introduction in the name of the Mohanta of the Emmar Math, Puri. This monastery belongs to the Achari Vaishnavas belonging to Sri Ramanuja Sect. The Mohanta was very hospitable to us and it was due to him that we had no difficulty in finding accommodation there. We stayed at the Emmar Math for six months. In that year we were fortunate to witness the famous car festival from the beginning to the last and also to participate in it.”

We gather from Abhedananda's own account that after four days' journey in the steamer, he along with his other two companions reached Cuttack via Chandbali whence the party went to Puri by a cart. The place at once reminded them of the days of Sri Chaitanya whose spiritual influence was still palpable through the corridors of centuries and which still sanctified the atmosphere of the holy place. Here they used to get the prasada of the Lord Jagannath, and spend their time mostly in worship and meditation. Sometimes Kali Tapasvi would retire to the small gumfas (place of meditation of the Vaishnava saints) which stood on the sands on the sea-side, to devote the whole afternoon hours in uninterrupted meditation. “We used to bathe in the sea, observing how the fishermen engaged themselves in catching various sorts of sea-fish. We felt delighted as we observed this. One day it so happened that myself and Sarat felt an irresistible desire to know how the sea-fish tasted and we began to devise ways and means to have our desire fulfilled. Baburam was a strict vegetarian, so we thought not to speak to him anything about it. But somehow he came to know of our motive, but he did not prevent us from fulfilling our desire. We then began to find out a lonely place for the purpose and at last we found out one. One day as we all three-myself, Baburam and Sarat- were proceeding along the sea-coast towards Konarak to see there the ruins of the great Sun Temple, and as we looked hither and thither, we discovered the ruins of a wall that seemed to be the part of an old haunted house. The spot behind that dilapidated wall appeared to be really lonely. There we decided to fulfil our desire to taste the fried fish. We had already procured some fish at Puri which we carried in our earthen pot. We had also a match box with us. We gathered some dry leaves and plants with which we lit the fire. The fish was duly fried in the earthen pot. While Baburam kept aloof, myself and Sarat tasted some of the fried fish which seemed to us quite palatable and oily, and it smelt like the hilsa fish. Thus ended our desire to taste the sea-fish.”

One day all of them went to see the Chilka lake, walking over the sandy beach of the Bay of Bengal. The journey to Chilka was done partly by a cart and partly on foot and they were very much fascinated at the sight of the mirage on the lake. “On both the banks of the lake there were sandunes which appeared like desert. There at a little distance the phenomenon of a mirage suddenly arrested our gaze. We saw, as it were, a tank with shades of trees around it, but as we got nearer to it, the mirage vanished and all that remained there were nothing but sandunes.”

They spent six months at Puri and, during this period, two of his companions Baburam and Sarat were laid down with typhoid and dysentery, and as soon as they recovered, the party left Puri for Bhuvaneshwar where they put up at the house of a Panda (a class of people who guide and help the pilgrims). “After spending a few days here”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “we felt a strong desire to visit the ancient Buddhist caves at Khandagiri and Udayagiri and so we proceeded towards that place.” From the description of this journey as given by Swami Abhedananda we learn that his love for places of historical interest was as genuine as his love for the Divine; the account he has left behind bears ample testimony to it. The whole of the journey lay through thick forest

and they had to take the help of a local guide. Soon they reached the foot of the hillocks and what struck them at the first glance were the caves where they arrived after crossing the track that lay through the slopes of Khandagiri and Udayagiri. "We were simply struck with wonder with the beauty of the inside of the caves. Although most of the glorious achievements of the Buddhist era were in ruins, yet they were silently proclaiming the past history. Here in the Elephant cave, the Serpent cave and also in other caves, the Buddhist monks used to live peacefully spending their time in meditation and study. I also noticed some Ashoka inscriptions on the Dhauli rock as also inside the walls of some caves in Pali language, some of which we could read. The guide accompanying us informed me that even today there are some Buddhist monks living in this abandoned place, but we could not find out a single one even though we searched very minutely."

Evidently here we find in Abhedananda not only a wandering monk but also an acute observer of historical relics in which he read the past glorious history of India. If he was a philosopher par excellence, he was no less a historian and his famous Brooklyn lectures on Indian culture and civilization bear ample testimony to it. Not only this, we even notice some adventurous spirit in him as well as an inquisitive mind which is clearly reflected in the following interesting account recorded by the Swami himself. When they failed to find out a single Buddhist monk anywhere there, the guide informed them of one hermit who lived inside the deep forest on the top of the hill. This aroused their curiosity and they wanted to look out for the hermit. Baburam, however, did not want to accompany them this time and he remained at the foot of this hill waiting for the return of His brother-monks. "Sarat and myself then started for the destination being escorted by our guide. As we reached the hill top, we looked around the jungle and all on a sudden we found ourselves standing before a large cave. We felt a strong desire to enter inside it, but as soon as we reached the entrance, we found much to our awe and wonder the footprints of a tiger on the sand instead of those of a man. The discovery of it sent a shivering shock in our heart, and after advancing a little more we retraced our steps. As we did so, we found at a distance a boy, an inhabitant of this hilly place, gathering something that lay on a piece of stone. Slowly we approached the boy and found him gathering something like frozen milk, which was on the stone, on a leaf held in the palm of his hand. On being asked, he told us that it was the milk of a tigress which was very useful in preparing some kind of medicine and this was why he was collecting it., We also learnt from the boy that there in the very cave inside which we wanted to enter, lived a pair of tiger and tigress and of late the tigress had given birth to cubs whom she fed with her breast milk while lying on this stone slab. And the few drops that fell on the slab got frozen. He himself had seen many a time from a distance as the tigress fed her cubs in this way and this is why he came to collect the frozen milk."

The account as given by the boy aroused their curiosity and both of them, Kali Tapasvi and Sarat wanted to taste the milk of the tigress and they then requested the collector to part with some of it. The boy at once put a cube or two of the milk collected by him on the palm of each of the monks which they tasted and found it emanating a strong and stinking odour of the body of a tigress. Then they came down, collecting a bit of the frozen milk on a leaf to show it to Baburam who was waiting for them anxiously. As he got sight of his brother monks, Baburam was very much relieved of his anxiety and at the same time he was very much surprised as well as glad to find the rare specimen with them. Thereafter they returned to Bhuvaneshwar in company of their guide. Years after when a disciple wanted to know from Swami Abhedananda as to the mystery of hermits retiring to caves and jungles, living happily in close company of such ferocious animals as tigers and lions- a legendary phenomena in the lives of the Sannyasins in India-he is reported to have told him thus: "Such sights are not uncommon or rare in India and there is no mystery in it. The fact is that to men of religion all life is sacred. When Truth and Love emanates from a genuine spiritual personality, the entire

atmosphere around him undergoes a subtle psychological change. Where there is no feeling of hatred or violence or cruelty to the lowest species of living creatures such things are not uncommon. Where the element of sympathy is strong in the nature of a saintly person, it could be easily experienced by a man of tender heart. A true spiritual life such as we witnessed in the life of the Master, is a life of Love, infinite and universal, Love which unites each with all, Love which opens the spiritual eyes of the individual and exhibits the identity of his self with that of the universe. This is the culmination of Dharma.” The whole nature of Swami Abhedananda, as we all know, was suffused with such kind of love and sympathy for all.

Then they went to Kothar to meet Nimaibabu, nephew of Balarambabu and returned to Calcutta from Cuttack by launch. The three monks when returned to Baranagore after six months (August 1887), they were cordially received by their brother-monks. “Who did the cooking all the time?” asked Shashi, and Sharat at once replied: “Kali; where can one find a better cook than he?” As we study the man, we find that Abhedananda really possessed a many-sided genius which revealed itself not only in his spiritual attainments but also in the daily routine of his mundane life. If he was a great Yogin, practising all sorts of austerity and renunciation, he was no less skilled in various arts such as cooking, mending, dressing, playing musical instruments and even painting pictures. This finer aspect of his nature affords us a study which is worth pursuing, and we shall touch on this point more elaborately afterwards.¹

Swami Abhedananda travelled extensively through out India during the year between 1887 and 1896 till Swami Vivekananda called him to West to help him in his work on Vedanta. On his return from America in 1906, Swami Abhedananda visited Puri for the second time. From his return from America, he first landed at Colombo on 16th June 1906. After visiting many places in South India, he arrived at Madras on 15th July 1906. Then he proceeded to visit Bangalore, Mysore and Sringeri Math and return to Madras. He then left Madras on 21st August 1906 by train along with Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Paramananda. *F1

FROM BANGALORE TO PURI

The journey from Bangalore to Puri by way of Madras is a long and tedious one, the distance being nearly eleven hundred miles. At several stations, en route, people who had heard about the Swami’s tour and were eager to see him, brought fruits, flowers, and other offerings, as tokens of love and esteem to the honoured visitor.

On 23rd August 1906, Swami Brahmananda accompanied by other Swamis of the Brotherhood and Atal Babu, the Deputy Magistrate of the place, came to the Railway station at Puri to receive Swami Abhedananda, and at once took him to the Holy Temple of Jagannath, where he offered worship with all devotion.

FROM PURI TO CALCUTTA

A week of complete rest and retirement at Puri came as a delightful break after the ten week’s arduous work and journey from Colombo. A group of disciples of Sri Ramakrishna met there and lived as they had done in the early years of their Sannyasin life, just after their Blessed Master had left them; this reunion was a truly happy one for Swami Abhedananda. It was not until the 31st of August, that public duties were once more remembered and Swami Abhedananda accompanied by Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Paramananda set out for Berhampur, Ganjam District where he delivered a lecture in the Town Hall^{*F2} before a very large gathering, on *Vedanta in America*. Before leaving, Berhampur the swami delivered another lecture, on *What is Vedanta*.

LECTURE AT BERHAMPUR

The Swami Abhedananda delivered a lecture to the following effect:

The ideal of a universal religion as realized in Vedanta, was made familiar to the world by the late- Swami Vivekananda, who indicated how its teachings should be practically applied to daily life: Universal toleration is the key-note of the creed of the Ramakrishna Mission. In all the

various religious creeds which have for, centuries distracted the world with their conflicting claims, the disciples of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa see nothing but truth and harmony. There is but one supreme existence. Various people give it various appellations. Different intellects comprehend it in different degrees. Christianity, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, each looks at it from a different point of view, and represents a different phase of the same eternal truth. Vedanta alone has seen and comprehended it in all its aspects and hence nothing in any religion appears to it strange or untrue. All religions are like paths leading to the same goal, each from a different direction. The religion of the Vedanta recognises them all and gives to each its proper place either as a dualistic, or qualified non-dualistic, or monistic faith. But the foal of all is the same- the realization of the Supreme Being in us and all around us. Everyone, whatever his creed may be has to attain to this state of God consciousness. Absolute purity, absolute chastity, and absolute goodness, and absolute renunciation are the means by which we reach perfection: But one need not actually give up the world and become a Sannyasin in order to attain salvation. He can realise God in any condition. It is possible for him to be in the world and yet be not of it. Ultimate salvation is the birth right of every soul, if such a word as birth right can be applied in connection with the soul, which has neither a beginning nor an end. Each soul is as much an eternal existence as God Himself. In fact it is a part of Himself, a tiny spark thrown out from the same divine flame, an *angsa* of the same divine glory.

Then comes the application of this knowledge to practical life. "Love thy neighbour as thyself," commands the Bible. It is the Vedanta that tells us the reason why. When man learns to realise God in himself and all around him, when he learns to see the same Divinity shining through all living: creatures, how can he help not loving them as himself? How can he any more affect to distrust or despise the rest of mankind? Is not the soul of the Pariah as great and glorious as that of the learned Brahmin who gives himself airs and fancies himself polluted by the touch of the formers shadow? The Pariah lies downtrodden today, because of the intolerance of the priest craft. Lend a helping hand to him and lift him up. A Brahmin should not scruple to take food even at his hands. One should only be afraid of mixing with men of evil ways, however high their caste be, lest they should retard one's salvation. But otherwise, shall we not rise superior to the petty prejudices of caste and sect, and taking the lessons of the Vedanta to heart, recognise our brother, nay our own Self, in every man? Let not the apparent differences between Dvaita, Advaita, and Vishishtadvaita beguile your hearts. Let the *Vadagalais* and *Tengalais* no more look on each other as natural enemies. Practise true religion, and realize your oneness. Learn to unite and that is your primary need. Politics alone cannot make a nation great; it is but a secondary thing. Educate your masses, drive away superstition and ignorance and become united, and then you will achieve greatness in every field.

Go out to foreign countries, and see things for yourselves, and learn by comparison. You will, then, know your strength and realise your weakness. You have a good deal to learn from the Western nations, although on the spiritual plane you have much to teach them. They are all freedom loving people, these Western nations, The Americans are especially so. They keep their minds open to truth from whatever direction it may come. It does not prejudice their mind if it sometimes comes from Asia. They permit no consideration to trammel their action, to hinder them from practising what is right and what is true. They never sit quiet expecting others to help them, for they know the secret of self-help. That is their greatest virtue. And India has need to learn it. Obstacles do not discourage them, opposition does not cow them down; they know how to dare and do. What one man cannot singly achieve, they accomplish by mutual co-operation. In every branch of human activity that is the secret of their greatness. When several Americans or Germans meet for a common purpose they all act like one body. But under similar circumstances, ten Hindus would be as irreconcilable, as ten different nations. That is the reason of our fall.

Education is universal among the Americans, and they are the most civilised and enlightened people in the world. No Europeans can be compared with them, they are the nation of the future. The higher education and greater liberty given to the American woman, instead of being prejudicial to her morality as some are apt to think, have made her more cultured, more moral, more self-reliant, more self-respecting and more respected than her sisters elsewhere. One of the most prominent virtues of the Americans is the honour paid to the fair sex. Theoretically the Hindus are supposed to worship the Divine Shakti. Not however, until they honour their women as the earthly manifestations of the Divine Motherhood, will they be entitled to the name

of Sakti-worshippers. In practice, the Americans are the truest worshippers of Shakti and national greatness has been their reward.

In America, a woman is in no hurry to marry before she is thirty. Some women never want to marry at all. A man considers himself to have attained the marriageable age between thirty and forty. And yet their lives are chaste and pure. The married state is not the highest ideal of life. Absolute purity, absolute chastity and absolute renunciation are the highest ideals. But these high ideals cannot be universally practised, and marriage as an institution is necessary to keep the world going. But every man and woman should be given a chance of choosing or refusing it, and of rising superior to it, if possible. But what do we find in India at the present day? Every little girl and practically every boy is forced into marriage before either can realise what it is all about. And what is the result? A lad of sixteen or eighteen and his little wife of twelve or fourteen begin forthwith to fill the world with their weakly progeny. That is how the country is being filled with a race of moustached babies with no backbone. Whereas in the West, men and women marry when their physical and mental vigour is at its best, and, consequently, give birth to a race of heroes.

Yet, I am not a social reformer. The so called social reform will not bring our salvation. Go back to the Vedic Age for the ideals of life. Caste has existed and will exist in all societies. Caste in the Vedic Age was no rigid system but was based on individual merit as it is now in the West, and was never determined by birth. You may take your food even from the hands of a Sudra. His birth should make no difference. But do not associate with an unworthy person even if he is a Brahman.

Why are you so anxious to have your widows remarried? Why do you not train them in pious and devotional ways? Marriage is after all not the highest ideal of life. Widow remarriage is permissible under certain conditions. The lower the class to which the widow belongs, the more is it permissible for her to re-marry. Marriage, with the Hindu, is not as in the West a matter of contract. It is on the other hand, based on a spiritual ideal. The wife is the *Sahadharmini* of the husband. The relation of husband and wife started in this life will, not cease at death but will continue even after the gross earthly body is dissolved. And applying this doctrine logically and impartially to man and woman alike, a man should not take a second wife on the demise of the first.

Custom is not religion. What laws man has made, he may unmake at any moment. Do what is right and make that your custom. Cultivate your muscles, and build up your bodies, so as to make them fit temples for your souls. An unhealthy body is a drag on the soul. A diseased person cannot attain salvation, say the scriptures. Therefore, perfect your physique. Acquire knowledge. Educate your women equally with yourselves and honour them. Educate the masses, and uplift the downtrodden classes. Practise self-help. Learn to live independent of Government service and Government support. Be united, and learn to co-operate among yourselves. Build up your character and be pure and chaste in thought, word, and deed. Offer both morning and evening at the feet of the Lord, the fruit of your good deeds, and you will yet be great.

After forty-eight hours' sojourn at Berhampur the Swami returned to Puri, where the leading citizens presented an Address of Welcome to him at the school-house on the evening of 7th September 2006, when Atal Babu, the Deputy Magistrate, presided. The following is the Welcome Address-

To
SREEMAT SWAMI ABHEDANANDA
OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
Reverend Sir,

We the Hindu inhabitants of Srikshetra beg to avail ourselves of this opportunity to approach you with a hearty welcome to our midst on your return from America after ten years of unremitting labour in the cause of Sanatana Dharma. We never expected that you would favour us, with a visit to this most backward part of the province, but by the consideration you have shown, you have laid us under an eternal debt of gratitude.

We cannot adequately express our whole-hearted joy and thankfulness to you for the invaluable services which you as the head of the Ramakrishna Mission in America rendered to this *punya-bhumi* in so vigorously carrying on, with unique zeal and single-hearted devotion, the

noble and holy Mission started by Sri Ramakrishna Deva and continued by the late venerable Swami Vivekananda.

You have proclaimed to the nations of Europe and America the Hindu ideal of universal religion, harmonizing all creeds, and providing spiritual food for each soul according to its needs. You have preached the Truth and the way taught from remote ages by a succession of Masters whose blessed feet have sanctified the soil of India and whose gracious presence and inspiration have made her through all vicissitudes the Light of the World.

Thus, you have laid humanity under obligation difficult to repay. May God, Who has hitherto crowned your noble work with conspicuous success spare you long, giving you vigour and strength to continue your noble Mission.

Srikshetra,
September 7, 1906.

We beg to remain,
Reverend Sir,
Yours Obediently,
Inhabitants of Srikshetra

The Swami in reply spoke for an hour explaining the spiritual ideal underlying all rituals and ceremonies practised at the Holy Temple. He dwelt on *bhakti* and renunciation showing that the Hindus are not idol-worshippers, but ideal worshippers- and that no one can become a leader without renunciation. India is always guided by leaders like Bhagavan Sri Chaitanya and Bhagavan Sri Shankaracharya who led the life of absolute renunciation.

This public meeting marked the close of their pleasant stay in Puri. Atal Babu entertained the Swami at dinner on the evening of 8th September 1906. Swami Abhedananda, accompanied by Swamis Brahmananda, Ramakrishnananda and Paramananda left for Calcutta by the night-train. ²

This was the summum bonum of Abhedananda's advice to the younger generation of India during the first decade of this century. Each and every word that fell from his lips during his short visit to India seemed to remind everyone of Swami Vivekananda's speeches in this regard. The educated class of India noticed the same fire and the same glow in every utterance of his spiritual rather Swami Abhedananda. It was surcharged all through with the same warmth of heart and also the same feeling, And this perhaps was one of the reasons why Abhedananda on his return to India was so enthusiastically received by the people all over India. It was not for nothing that Swami Brahmananda had told to Swami Abhedananda at Puri: "Kali, it is all the play of the Master. When Naren left us, we thought that our work in the West will suffer a set-back. But your whole-hearted performance had convinced us that Naren is very much alive in you." Could a more befitting compliment be paid than this- and this from no other person than Swami Brahmananda, the magnificent pillar of the Ramakrishna Order! ³

Swami Abhedananda had played his part in the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna. Gradually, the great yogi made himself ready to return to his beloved guru. He passed away on 8th September 1939.

Foot Note:

*F1: As per the book Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika by Swami Gambhirananda Vol-1 Marathi Page-78 & 231, Swami Abhedananda arrived at Puri on 23rd August 1906 and two days later, Swami Ramakrishnananda joined the party.

*F2: Town Hall of Berhampur known as Prakasam Hall is located on Giri Road Giri market area. Sri Dharma Teja, a businessman of Madras, who had his houses in Madras as well as in Berhampur and was a devotee of Swami Ramakrishnananda, invited Swamis Abhedananda, Ramakrishnananda and Paramananda to Berhampur. In 1906 Sri Indramani Palit, a School Inspector, arranged Abhedananda's lecture in Town Hall and took the Swamis to Khalikot, Ganjam, Chatrapur and Brahmapur in Orissa. He also received Holy Mother at Berhampur railway station on her way to south in 1911. His two sons still tell about these visits which they had heard from him.

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2. Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda Vol-7 Page-573-579
3. Swami Abhedananda: A Spiritual Biography by Moni Bagchi Page-353, Holy Mother Swamiji & direct disciples at Madras by Sri Ramakrishna Math Chennai Page-249

SWAMI AKHANDANANDA

Swami Akhandananda was born in Calcutta. His premonastic name was Gangadhar Gangopadhyay. He met Sri Ramakrishna in 1883 when he was only 19. Slowly the Master guided him through his teachings which were simple and natural. After Master's passing away he took vows of renunciation and in February 1887 took the ochre clothes that the Master had given him. Then he left Calcutta on pilgrimage and visited Gaya, Varanasi, Haridwar, Kedarnath, Badrinath and then travelled to Tibet. He is best remembered for his relief work in villages of Murshidabad district of the then Bengal. He opened an orphanage and a school in Sargacchi in Murshidabad district.

Swami Akhandananda visited Orissa twice. In 1906 he visited Puri and most probably Kothar as well. In second visit in 1924, he visited Puri and Bhuvaneshwar and stayed there for more than two months.

In 1906 Swami Akhandananda went from Shivanagar Ashrama to Belur Math and then along with Swami Shivananda he went to Puri. In the meanwhile Swami Brahmananda and Swami Premananda reached Puri via Bhadrak and stayed at Shashi Niketan. Soon after came Swamis Abhedananda and Ramakrishnananda from Madras, making a joyful company of six spiritual brothers; at this time, Swami Akhandananda had a vision of Sri Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, at the Jagannath temple. When Swami Brahmananda heard of it, he said to him: "Through the Mother's grace, your Ashrama will no more suffer from any wants." After ten long years of preaching the Vedanta in America, Swami Abhedananda had returned to India. One day, he said to Swami Brahmananda, the Head of the Ramakrishna Mission: "The devotees in America would like to have another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna among them. With your permission, I would like to take Gangadhar with me. The clothes are ready." Swami Brahmananda gladly acquiesced, and added: "If he goes, I'm ready with a thousand rupees to take charge of his Ashrama. Swami Akhandananda replied immediately: "Jananim Janma Bhumichha Swargadapi Gariasi. Mother and motherland are superior to heaven itself. I would like to serve the Master by serving my motherland." His brother disciples appreciated his feelings, and Swami Paramananda was sent to America instead. Before returning to the Ashrama, Swami Akhandananda spent a few days in Belur Math and in Calcutta.¹

'It is good to laugh everyday', Swami Brahmananda used to say, 'it relaxes the body and the mind.' There are many stories of his fondness for practical jokes. Probably in 1906, Akhandananda was staying with Brahmananda at Kothar. Akhandananda said that he must leave next morning and return to his own mission centre at Sargachhi. Brahmananda pleaded with him to stay a little longer, but the Swami insisted; so a palanquin was hired to take him to the railway station, several miles away. As the train left very early, it was necessary to start in the small hours of the night. Akhandananda did not notice that Brahmananda had whispered some instructions to the palanquin bearers. Having said goodbye to Maharaj, he settled down to doze in the darkness, with the curtains of the palanquin drawn. The journey seemed very long and the stops were frequent. The Swami called anxiously to the bearers from behind the curtains; he was afraid that he would miss the train. They reassured him, saying that there was plenty of time. At last they put down the palanquin and asked him to alight. When he parted the curtains to do so, there stood Brahmananda, as if ready to welcome him back after months of absence. Then Akhandananda realised that he had simply been carried round and round the compound in the dark. Brahmananda embraced him and the two of them laughed like children. Later Akhandananda left one day without saying anything to Maharaj.²

After months stay at Allahabad in 1924, Swami Akhandananda returned with the Putia family to their home in Calcutta. From there, they all went to Puri for two months, where the Swami used to take a walk to Chakratirtha everyday. He also stayed at Ramakrishna Math at Bhuvaneshwar for few days. While there he wrote in a letter:

“After the continuous roar of the ocean and the howling of winds, it seems I have come to a lonely and silent forest.” He returned to Calcutta in July after the Ratha Yatra.³

Tarasundari was a famous actress of the Bengali stage. Until 1921 Tarasundari continued her acting with tremendous enthusiasm and passion. But when her guru, Swami Brahmananda, died in 1922, she felt renunciation within. She built a house at Bhuvaneshwar and planned to retire there. She then lost all interest in acting and went into a deep depression. Swami Shivananda heard about her condition and summoned her to Belur Math. She cried for Maharaj, and Shivananda consoled her. He asked her to build a temple on her property in the name of Maharaj. Tara followed the swami’s advice. Aparesh named the temple “Rakhal Kunja.” (Rakhal was Brahmananda’s premonastic name and kunja means “garden temple.”)

Swami Shivananda went to Bhuvaneshwar to inaugurate Rakhal Kunja and install the pictures of Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda on the altar. Later, Swami Subodhananda installed some of the relics of Swami Brahmananda under the altar of Rakhal Kunja with a special ceremony and a homa fire. Tara’s dream was fulfilled. She was excited about her place of sadhana, and she spent hours in worship and meditation there. However, she had a desire to offer cooked food to the Master but felt herself unworthy. One day Swami Akhandananda visited Rakhal Kunja and remarked: “Mother Tara, what is this? The Master looks emaciated. Don’t you offer cooked food?” Ashamed of her sinful life, Tara replied, “No, swami.” Swami Akhandananda advised her to offer cooked food and milk to the Master every day. As Tara listened to the advice of a disciple of Ramakrishna, tears came to her eyes.⁴

Right from 1897 he was reluctant to leave Sargacchi except for few occasions. He left his mortal coil on 7th February 1937 at Belur Math. A few years before his passing away, the swami told a monk, “The more you disseminate yourself among the people, the more you will attend bliss and that will lead you to self-realisation.”

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3. Swami Akhandananda by Swami Annadananda Page-240-241
4. Girish Chandra Ghosh by Swami Chetananda Page-203-204

SWAMI PREMANANDA

Swami Premananda's pre-monastic name was Baburam Ghosh. When he came to Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, Sri Ramakrishna subjected him to certain physical tests as he often did this saying that the examination of a man's physical characteristics revealed his spiritual character. He weighed Baburam's forearm and also gazed into his face and examined his limbs. The verdict was evidently satisfactory. Baburam was to become one of his close attendants. His love for monks and devotees seemed inexhaustible and it justified the name 'Premananda' given to him. He was a marvellous teacher and a trainer of the young, during the period when, as Swami Premananda, he virtually presided over the Ramakrishna Math monastery at Belur from 1902 to 1916, till two years before his death.

He visited many places of pilgrimage in North India such as Varanasi, Vrindavan, Amarnath, and Haridwar etc. Swami Vivekananda once said to Premananda, "I have left East Bengal (now Bangladesh) for you." As a result Premananda visited East Bengal every year from 1913 to 1917. He visited Orissa many times. He visited Bhadrak, Kothar, Puri, Bhuvaneshwar, Chilika Lake, Konark and Udayagiri-Khandagiri. He went to Puri itself eight times in his life. In 1887 he went to Puri with Swamis Saradananda and Abhedananda. When Holy Mother went for the second time to Puri in 1904 he was included in her party. In 1906 he went to Puri twice via Bhadrak. In 1907 he had visited Puri twice, as is known from his two letters to Shashi Maharaj. In 1915, he went to Puri and stayed with Swami Brahmananda. In 1916, he again went to Puri.¹

On 21st February 1887 at Baranagore Math, Shivaratri Puja was celebrated the whole night. After two days there was birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna. After the celebration, Swami Premananda accompanied by Swamis Abhedananda and Saradananda, went to Puri for pilgrimage and stayed there for six months in Emmar Monastery. They lived on the prasada of Jagannath, practised spiritual disciplines most of the times, and attended Chariot Festival of Jagannath. Although during his student days Baburam had done physical exercises to strengthen his body and to withstand hardships, but his delicate body could not stand excessive austerities. After undergoing the strain of severe tapasya for more than a month at Puri, Swami Premananda had an attack of typhoid and became bedridden. His brother disciples took him to Balaram Basu's Kshetrabasir Math. He recovered quickly by the service and care of brother disciples.

On their return journey they visited the Sun Temple of Konark, Lake Chilka, the Lingaraj Shiv Temple in Bhuvaneshwar, the Buddhist caves of Udayagiri-Khandagiri, Ashoka's stone edict at Dhauli Mountain. Apart from these places, they went to Sakshi Gopal near Puri. Then they went to Kothar to meet Nimaibabu, nephew of Balarambabu and returned to Calcutta from Cuttack by launch. They returned to Baranagore at the end of August 1887.²

After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda in 1902, Swami Premananda mostly stayed in Belur Math.³ In 1904, Baburam Maharaj and also Rakhil Maharaj were included in Holy Mother's party to Puri; and in June 1906 Baburam Maharaj went twice to Puri via Bhadrak.⁴

Towards the end of November 1904 the proposal for Holy Mother's visit to Puri took shape. The Bengal Nagpur Railway had by this time been completed. The Mother travelled in a reserved second-class compartment with Nilmadhav, the mad aunt, Golap-Ma, Sister Laxmi, Radhu, Master Mahashaya's wife, Chunilalbabu's wife and Kusumkumari. Swami Premananda and two devotees travelled in an inter class compartment. The train reached Puri in the morning and the Mother with her relatives and women companions took up residence in Kshetra-basir Math of the Basus, while Swami Premananda and others went to their second house near the sea called Shashi Niketan. The Mother's first duty at Puri was to go to the Jagannath temple to have a look at the Lord. On subsequent days it was her daily task to visit the temple with others early morning and evening.

At Puri, the Mother had a boil on her foot, which gave her intense pain, and yet she did not allow it to be operated on. One day in the temple somebody's foot touched the boil thereby causing excruciating pain to her. When Swami Premananda heard on this, he came the next day with a young doctor ostensibly to pay their obeisance to the Mother. She, as was her habit on such occasions, sat covering herself completely with a cotton sheet. The doctor now brought out his knife and in the act of saluting by touching the feet opened the boil and then begged her pardon saying, 'Mother, please don't be offended.' This unexpected move irritated the Mother a little at first. But when through proper dressings the pain subsided and the wound healed up in a trice, she heartily blessed her sons despite their dare devilry.

After spending sometime thus in the salubrious, joyous, and holy atmosphere of Puri, they returned at the end of January 1905 to Calcutta.⁵

On 5th June 1906, Swami Premananda went to Puri again along with Maharaj from Calcutta via Bhadrak. They stayed at Puri in Shashi Niketan and regularly visited Jagannath Temple and took prasada with Maharaj. Before the holy Ratha Yatra celebration in 1906, Swamis Shivananda and Akhandananda joined them in Puri and all the four brother disciples went to the Puri station to welcome Swami Abhedananda who had just returned (23rd August 1906) from America. After two days Swami Ramakrishnananda also came to Puri along with Swami Paramananda, and thus six brother disciples met each other at Shashi Niketan in Puri. (As per another version, Ramakrishnananda arrived at Puri along with Abhedananda.) Soon after this, Baburam Maharaj accompanied his mother to Setubandha Rameshwaram.

Swami Ramakrishnananda made all arrangements of Swami Premananda and his mother outside the Math then located at Ice House. He passed the night outside the Math to give him a company. He also made all arrangements for them to complete the pilgrimage and even travelled with them.

We learn from two letters written by Baburam Maharaj to Shashi Maharaj from Puri that the following year (in 1907) he went twice to Puri: "I shall be highly obliged if you ask the devotee Alasinga to send a few books by Swamiji. I feel like reading as I am now staying alone." (Letter from Puri, 5th May 1907)

"At the request of Maharaj, I came here last Saturday. I believe that by next Sunday, Maharaj and others will have to proceed to Calcutta. In between there is a proposal to stay at Bhuvaneshwar and Bhadrak for a few days. This house has been given on rent to Maharaja of Jaipur for three months from 1st December. You may please write at the address of Kothar in care of Ram." (Letter from Puri, 27th November 1907)⁶

One day he visited the Ashrama of Vijaykrishna Goswami at Narendra Sarovar along with some devotees. After going there, he paid his obeisance at the Samadhi Mandir of Goswamiji. After getting the news of Premananda's arrival, the aged mother-in-law of Goswamiji came and tried to offer pranams to him but he did not allow her to do that and told her, "Mother, you are the relative of Goswamiji." But still the old lady offered her pranams to him and said, "Son we know by whose grace Vijaykrishna Goswami is respected and worshiped today. You are the disciple of the same Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna by whose blessings so many people of different types became Mahatmas, great men. How can I desist myself from offering pranams?"⁷

During his stay at Puri in 1906, an interesting incident happened there. One day he happened to notice a Christian Missionary standing before the Jagannath temple, strongly upbraiding Hinduism. The Swami's ire became aroused. He began to chant loudly, "Hari bol, Hari bol!" and soon had a crowd of more than a hundred people chanting along with him. The missionary could not make himself heard above the insistent rhythm of the chant and was forced to leave. The temple priests immediately approached the Swami and expressed their gratitude, telling him they had been powerless to stop the missionaries. But Premananda quickly left the temple grounds, abashed and sad at heart over his impulsive action. That night he had a dream of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to him: "Why did you break up that gathering? He too was spreading my

name and teachings. Tomorrow you must find out the missionary and beg to be forgiven.” The next day early in the morning Premananda set out in search of him. After considerable difficulty, he found the man and humbly entreated his forgiveness.⁸

In 1915 Baburam Maharaj had a severe attack of cholera. When everyone had given up hope for his life, he slowly opened his eyes and in a faint voice told them not to worry. He would not die because his mother was still alive. Thakur had given a boon to his mother that she would not have to suffer from the death of any of her children. After recovering from this illness, he went to Puri for change of climate. His health improved there. He stayed in Puri for about three to four months and returned to the Math on 16th September 1915.^{9*}F1

On 15th August 1915, he wrote from Shashi Niketan at Puri to Abhedananda, “I was almost at death’s door suffering from cholera. Now I am well, as our Lord willed. Maharaj is at Bhadrak (District Orissa), doing well. ...”¹⁰

He visited Puri again in 1916. It is known from a letter of Swami Subodhananda from Belur Math dated 9th September 1916 to a devotee in which he wrote that Swami Premananda had not returned from Puri yet and expected to return in a few days.¹¹

While talking about Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s sadhana at Puri, Swami Premananda said, “Sometimes dispassion arises suddenly in a man, due to frustration. Sense objects become like bitter poison to him. But such dispassion is like the fire kindled in a heap of straw. It soon burns itself out. In order to become stabilized in renunciation and dispassion one must try to become absorbed while repeating with single-minded devotion the name of God. Sri Chaitanya used to pass the whole night practising Japam. Practise! Struggle! Struggle hard. Nothing is ever achieved without a struggle.”¹²

When he was a Manager of Belur Math, he used to serve not only the monks but also the devotees. He believed in the divinity of Prasad. He used to offer food to the Master and then serve the prasad to the devotees because he believed that he who eats the Master’s prasad would get devotion. Many times, he had seen the Master inserting the prasad of Lord Jagannath of Puri inside the sandesh and feeding it to young Narendranath so that he may develop devotion.¹³

This is how Swami Premananda is connected with the holy land of Orissa. The vision and guidance of Sri Ramakrishna to him at Puri, going there to recoup his health and his marvellous time in the company of his brother disciples there; such incidents of Puri left permanent mark in his life.

Footnotes:

*F1: As per the book by Swami Prabhananda in Bengali Saradananda Charit Page-213, Swamis Saradananda, Premananda and some others went to Puri on 9 Bhadra 1322 (24th August 1915) before Ratha Yatra and returned to Calcutta on 20 Bhadra 1322 (4th September 1915). Swami Brahmananda was already staying in Puri at Shashi Niketan. (Swami Brahmananda Charit by Swami Prabhananda Hindi Page-375-376)

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1. Bengali Premananda Premkatha by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-43-44 and Bengali Sri Sri Swami Subodhanander Jibani O Patra by Ramakrishna Math Dhaka Letter No.12 Page-34
2. God lived with them by Swami Chetanananda Page-459, Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika by Swami Gambhirananda Vol-1 Marathi Page-124, Swami Premananda: Love incarnate by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-48-49, Swami Premananda: Teachings and Reminiscences by Swami Prabhavananda Page-17-18, Bengali Premananda Jibancharit by Swami Onkareshwarananda Page-131-132, My Life Story by Swami Abhedananda Page-125-128, Bengali Saradananda Charit by Swami Prabhananda Page-72-74
3. Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika by Swami Gambhirananda Vol-1 Marathi Page-136
4. Swami Premananda: Love incarnate by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-55
5. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda Page 200-202
6. Swami Premananda: Love incarnate by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-55, Bengali Premananda Jibancharit by Swami Onkareshwarananda Page-182-183, Bengali Swami Premanander Patravali Udbodhan Page-178, Holy Mother Swamiji & Direct Disciples at Madras Page-277
7. Bengali Premananda Jibancharit by Swami Onkareshwarananda Page-182-183
8. Swami Premananda: Teachings and Reminiscences by Swami Prabhavananda Page-17-18, Bengali Swami Premanander Jiban O Smriti Katha by Swami Chetanananda Page-241
9. Swami Premananda: Love incarnate by Br.Akshaychaitanya Page-56& 176, Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika by Swami Gambhirananda Vol-1 Marathi Page-137
10. Swami Premananda: Teachings and Reminiscences by Swami Prabhavananda Page-193-194
11. Bengali Sri Sri Swami Subodhanander Jibani O Patra by Ramakrishna Math Dhaka Letter No.12 Page-34
12. Swami Premananda: Teachings and Reminiscences by Swami Prabhavananda Page-161
13. Lecture by Swami Chetanananda on Life of a Mystic- Swami Premananda 28.15 to 28.40 minutes

SWAMI ADBHUTANANDA

Swami Adbhutananda's premonastic name was Rakturam. He was born in Chapra district of Bihar in a poor family and lost his parents in childhood. He did not receive any formal education. He came to Calcutta with his uncle and worked in the house of Dr. Ramachandra Dutta, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, who brought him to the Master. Seeing Rakturam, Master said, "I see some holy signs in him." Master used to call him Latu or Leto or Neto affectionately. Later Latu started living with the Master at Dakshineswar and stayed with him till his last. After the passing away of the Master, Latu Maharaj accompanied Holy Mother to Vrindavan. Between 1886 and 1912, he almost stayed in Calcutta except on few occasions when he visited the places of pilgrimage. He spent the last eight years of his mortal life in the holy city of Varanasi. He visited Orissa on two different occasions in 1895 and in 1903.

Swami Adbhutananda visited several places of pilgrimages in different parts of India. Sometime in the year 1895, Swami Adbhutananda went to Puri by Steamer accompanied by a devotee. They went to Shashi Niketan at Puri. Harivallabha Babu who was there at that time became very happy and received them very cordially. He made all the arrangements of their stay and visit to temples. He then visited Bhuvaneshwar and went to Harivallabha Babu's house at Cuttack. He stayed there for a long time and afterwards returned to Calcutta. Sri Upen Mukherjee, the owner of Basumati Magazine had paid the fare of the steamer.¹

In 1903 he paid another visit to Puri. This time he went there by train accompanied by one devotee on the occasion of Zulan Yatra. He stayed there for about a month. In later years he talked about the time he spent in Puri: Lord Jagannath in Puri is a living presence in the form of a simple wooden image. He appears to each person according to his particular spiritual mood and level of attainment. I prayed to him: "Lord, please show me that beautiful form of yours which you showed to Chaitanya that made him shed profuse tears in ecstasy. What do I know of you? Please bestow your grace on me." Surrendering in this way, I stayed there and waited. Then one day he answered my prayers.

When I went to take leave of Lord Jagannath, I asked for two blessings: First, that I would not have to wander here and there but could settle in one place and plunge into meditation on the Lord; and second, that whatever I ate I would be able to digest. A devotee asked the reason for the second request and Latu Maharaj answered: "Don't you understand? A monk lives on alms and thus he must maintain his body on all kinds of food taken at regular hours. If his digestion is not good, his health will break down, and his spiritual practices will suffer a set back. That is why I asked for such a boon."²

At another time he spoke of the greatness of Jagannath Temple: "Where else will you find such a place of pilgrimage? All are equal there. There are no distinctions of class, caste or sect. Is this a small thing! And there are lots of conveniences. With a few paise you can get cooked food for yourself and all your guests and friends. You will not have to bother about a cook or cooking. If you pay a little more they will send the prasad right to the place where you are staying. You are left completely free to devote yourself to spiritual practices. Moreover, the temple is so big that you can have a quiet corner for yourself anywhere inside it. No one will care or will dare to disturb you. If you want a quieter place, you can go to the beach nearby. Many holy men are quietly practising sadhana there. Shankara, Ramanuja and Chaitanya practised sadhana in Puri. It is a very holy place."³

When I first saw Balaram Babu, I did not recognize him to be a Bengali. He wore a turban (as is customary with Punjabi Sikhs) and carried a staff, and he wore a long gown with an extra cloth over that. He also had a long beard. Now and then we went to his house. The Master used to say, "Balaram's house is my Calcutta fort, my parlour."

Balaram Babu arranged for the daily worship of Lord Jagannath in his home. The Master said that the food there was very pure. I have heard that the Master visited his

home a hundred times and that Balaram Babu maintained a record of these visits. Balaram Babu also visited Dakshineswar very often. The Master once saw him in a vision as a member of a kirtan party led by Sri Chaitanya.

Balaram Babu would escort the Master to the inner apartments (the women's quarters) of his home. However, his elder brother, Harivallabha Babu, did not approve. Girish Babu and Harivallabha Babu were close friends, and so Girish Babu heard about it. One day when the Master had come to Balaram Babu's home, Girish Babu called Harivallabha Babu to come and see the Master. Both of them (the Master and Harivallabha Babu) started to weep. I could not understand why. Afterwards, I went to see Harivallabha Babu in Cuttack in order to learn the reason, but he did not disclose it.⁴

Though unlettered, so called highly educated people used to seat before him and listen to his highly spiritual talks. In his last days he was suffering from diabetes and had to be operated on his leg several times. But his health deteriorated and he left his mortal coil on 24th April 1920 in a meditative state. Once Swami Vivekananda said about him, "Latu is Sri Ramakrishna's greatest miracle. Having absolutely no education, he has attained the highest wisdom simply by the virtue of the Master's touch."

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2. God lived with them by Swami Chetanananda Page-419-420, Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika by Swami Gambhirananda Vol-1 Marathi Page-278, Bengali Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti Katha by Sri Chandrashekhar Chattopadhyay Page 304-306
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SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

Swami Ramakrishnananda was born in Ichhapur village near Calcutta. His premonastic name was Shashibhushan Chakravarty. He was brought up in spiritual surroundings by his orthodox parents. Shashi learnt ritualistic worship from his saintly father. He met Sri Ramakrishna in the 1883 along with his cousin Sharat later Swami Saradananda. After the Master's passing away, all other disciples left on pilgrimage, while Shashi stayed back. He had no desire to go on pilgrimage rather he would prefer to stay in the Math and worship the Master because he firmly believed that the Master is always present in the Math in subtle form. He had not even gone to Varanasi, a greatest place of pilgrimage. After the Swami Vivekananda's return from the West in 1897 at Madras, a great enthusiasm was created among the people. They asked him to send one of his brother monks to Madras to start a monastery there. Swamiji told them, "I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox Brahmins of the South and who is at the same time incomparable in performing worship, scriptural knowledge, and meditation on God." So as per the wish of Swamiji, he started a monastery in Madras and arranged the pilgrimage of Holy Mother and other brother monks to South India.

Swami Ramakrishnananda visited Orissa twice, in 1906 with Swami Abhedananda to Puri, Berhampur and other places and in 1908 he went to Puri to bring Swami Brahmananda to Madras.

In 1906 Swami Abhedananda returned from America for the first time. Swami Ramakrishnananda accompanied by Swami Paramananda went to Colombo to receive him. On 23rd August 1906 Swami Abhedananda arrived at Puri to meet Swami Brahmananda. Swamis Shivananda, Premananda, and Akhandananda had also come there. After two days Swami Ramakrishnananda also joined them. After a long time, six brother disciples came together and they were very happy to see each other and enjoyed their stay there. After staying at Puri for a few days Swami Ramakrishnananda returned to Madras.¹

After the installation of Master's photograph in the own house of Math, Swami Ramakrishnananda was eager to take Swami Brahmananda to Madras. For that he requested him many times. At last in the beginning of February 1908, Maharaj wrote to Ramakrishnananda that he would go to Madras for six months. As soon as he received the letter, he made all arrangements to bring him to Madras from Puri. Before leaving for Puri, he cleaned, furnished and decorated his own room for Maharaj and kept it locked. He shifted himself to kitchen store. Addressing the inmates of the Math, he said, "Always remember that Swami Brahmananda is Master's own son. When you see him, you will get some idea of the Master. His personality has been merged into the Master's; whatever he says, whatever he does, it is all by the inspiration of the Master. We revered him as the son of the Master. He used to sleep in Master's room- sometimes even on the same bed. Master used to cry if he saw Rakhhal wearing torn cloths. If somebody offered him sweets and fruits, he used to keep it for Rakhhal. Master used to say, "I will eat through his mouth." Once the Master was thirsty. He asked Rakhhal for water, as he was feeling sleepy he refused to give it. Listening to the reply of Rakhhal, Master became very happy and told the devotees next day: "Now I understand, Rakhhal regards me as his own father." To bring Swami Brahmananda to Madras, Swami Ramakrishna went to Puri as per schedule.

Seeing Swami Ramakrishnananda in Puri, Maharaj became extremely happy. There was a sweet and loving relation between the two. There was regular correspondence between them. In the letters Maharaj used to address Ramakrishnananda as 'Mahanta', 'Mahantaji', 'Mahant Maharaj' or sometime as 'His Holiness'. After staying at Puri for few days, they started for to Madras on 27th October 1908.²

On 21st June 1908 Rakhhal Maharaj went to Puri before Ratha Yatra and then left for Madras on 27th October 1908 with Swami Ramakrishnananda. He visited Rameshwaram, Madurai, Bangalore and Madras.

Sister Devmata narrates- One day in early autumn of 1908 Swami Ramakrishnananda said to me, "Swami Brahmananda is coming to Madras for six months, and I am going to Puri to bring him". A week later, he set out on his northward journey. At the station, on leaving, an incident occurred which revealed anew his surrender to God. Through a misunderstanding no berth had been reserved for him in the train. With great difficulty an upper berth was made available in a compartment which had already two Englishmen in it.

A person of Swami Ramakrishnananda's size and weight in a lightly built upper berth meant no little peril for the one who slept beneath and the English travellers did not hesitate to talk of it with rude frankness. Swami Ramakrishnananda paying no heed to their words sat cross-legged on the long seat of the railway carriage, rocking slowly back and forth, a smile of calm unconcern on his face. In reply to an indignant comment from one of the many who had come to see him off, he said quietly: "Do not mind. Divine Mother will take care of me."

The hour for departure arrived but the train didn't move. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, still the train remained motionless. Then the stationmaster came running down the platform calling: "Engine derailed! All out! Go to track number five." He stopped to say to Swami Ramakrishnananda: "I have a place for you. Wait a moment." When he returned he led the Swami to a single first class compartment with washroom attached. As Swami Ramakrishnananda slept into it he said to me with same quiet smile: "I told you Sister, that Divine Mother would look after me."³

Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Puri from Madras to see Swami Brahmananda. One day he took a Brahmacharin with him to the temple of Lord Jagannath for darshan. After the darshan he said to Brahmacharin, "Look here. One should buy some prasada from the 'Anand Bazaar' and partake of it. Saying this, he went to the bazaar and brought the prasada rice and dal in a pot-sherd and then stretched out his hand to the Brahmacharin and said, "Take it and eat." He held the pot-sherd in the left hand and eating from it with the right. The Brahmacharin hesitated saying, "You take it now. I shall take it afterward." But the Swami insisted saying, "In this place of Jagannath it is the custom for all to sit together and eat the prasada from the same pot. Some people feed others with their own hands." So the Brahmacharin had to eat from his hand there. Another day he gave a little dry Mahaprasada of Lord Jagannath to a devotee at Madras and said, "From very ancient times Puri is considered a sacred place. It is a Jnana-bhumi. In the sacred shrine at Puri there is no difference between man and man. Brahmins and pariahs eat prasada there sitting together. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna used to give his prasada along with sweets to Swami Vivekananda with the blessing, "May this prasada give you Bhakti." The Master said that this prasada should be considered as sacred as Brahman." Swami Ramakrishnananda gave a little of the prasada to the devotee to be taken home. The devotee treasured this for many years with devotion and daily took a grain of it."⁴

Swami Ramakrishnananda had wholeheartedly wished that the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda should sanctify the main field of his activity and bless the devotees there by their visits to the South. The fulfillment of his pious wish gave him profound satisfaction. One day he was heard saying to himself, "My work is over." In the middle of 1910 shortly after the Holy Mother's departure from Madras to Calcutta, Swami Ramakrishnananda was taken seriously ill. It was decided to take him to Calcutta. Swami Brahmananda was then at Puri. It was middle of June 1911. Receiving a wire from Madras about Swami Ramakrishnananda's departure, he hastened to the railway station at Khurda Road to meet his sick brother. When the Madras Mail arrived at the station at mid night, Swami Brahmananda got into the compartment. Swami Ramakrishnananda prostrated himself before him. The Latter then exclaimed, "Shashi, what is all this? Shake it off!" Shashi replied, "Raja, that is possible only through your blessings." Swami Brahmananda repeated his query and received the same reply. He then gave him the

necessary instruction for treatment and came out of the compartment. It was their last meeting.⁵

On his arrival at Calcutta, while staying at Udbodhan his health deteriorated inspite of medical treatment and the service from the brother monks. On the day of Chariot Festival, he gave some money to his attendant and asked him to go and see the Chariot nearby and purchase something from there. The attendant hesitated to go leaving him alone. Seeing this he said, "Master had also told me to do the same thing on the day of Chariot Festival when he was on his sick bed at Cossipore. I too did not agree to go leaving him alone. When he insisted on my going, I went to see the local Chariot Festival and purchased a knife for him. He became very pleased and said, 'Poor people open shops in the fare, so one should purchase something to benefit them.'" After hearing this, the attendant of Shashi Maharaj went to Chariot Festival of Bagbazar and purchased a hand fan for him. Shashi Maharaj became very happy to see this.⁶

Towards the end of his life Swami Ramakrishnananda desired to see Holy Mother- unfortunately she could not come. However the swami was visited with a vision of Holy Mother on his last night of earthly life. He left his mortal coil on 21st August 1911. At that time Maharaj was at Puri. After getting this news, Maharaj said in somber voice: "One pillar has gone, Southern side has become dark." During one of his visit to Madras, Maharaj referring about Ramakrishnananda had said: "Influence of Shashi Maharaj in south is shining similar to that of world-conquering Shankaracharya."⁷

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SWAMI TRIGUNATITANANDA

Sarada Prasanna Mitra who later became Swami Trigunatitananda was born in a small village of 24 Parganas district on 30th January 1865. His family was shifted to Calcutta when he was three years old. The atmosphere in his house was spiritual and so had a religious leaning from the very beginning. At the age of 19, he met Sri Ramakrishna and the course of his life changed. His frequent visits to the Master alarmed his parents.

His parents were planning for his marriage. Somehow he got the news. Several months later when the matter became more pressing, Sri Ramakrishna advised Sarada to run away from home lest his marriage indeed takes place. "Take the money; steal it from your father if need be and run away!" The Master urged him. He wrote a short note: "My respected parents, I will not marry. I have no desire to be trapped in the meshes of maya. In whatever direction my eyes go, I am going." He put the note on his desk and left home. His ultimate destination was Puri. On 3rd January 1886 he left home at 11.30 a.m. and after taking the blessing of Sri Ramakrishna and started for Puri by walk. He had not told the Master that he had run away from home.

Meanwhile Sarada's parents discovered that he was missing and began to search for him. Finally they went to the Master and learned what had happened. After a few days Sarada wrote to them from Panshkura, Midnapore: "Respected parents, I am your ungrateful son and have caused you so much pain. Please forgive me. I am fine. Million people in our country are suffering- under such circumstances that it is hard for me to live idly at home. Don't worry about me. I am fine. Please don't come here to get me because I shall leave this place as soon as I mail this letter."

Sarada had no idea where Puri was or that it was several hundred miles away. He avoided the public roads, lest he be found. Thus he travelled much of the way through dense forest infested with wild animals- tigers and the like. There were no villages or huts where he might ask for shelter and food. On the first day, when it became dark he climbed a tree and sat in the crook of the branch for safety. The story goes that soon in the darkness he heard a voice saying, "Come down sadhu. I have some sweets for you." He was sitting in the dark in a tree! How could anyone know he was there? After a while he came down. There he found some sweets and a pot of water. Of course he ate and drank. He called for the man; there was no response, so again he climbed the tree and there spent the night. In the morning he searched far and wide for human habitation but found not the slightest sign of one. That incident impressed him deeply. He felt that God was watching him and he was convinced that he had chosen the right path in running away from home, avoiding marriage. It took three weeks for him to reach Puri. His parents came to know from Sarada's letters written on the way that he was going to Puri. As per the instructions of his parents, one known person who was a Munsiff in Puri kept watch on him and on 24th January 1886 informed his parents about his stay at Puri. His parents arrived at Puri on 31st January 1886. Sarada used to visit Lord Jagannath Temple daily. His parents waited on the roadside in the car and when their son passed by, sprang out and grabbed him, one on each side. The combination of shock and emotion left Sarada speechless. Literally. For more than fifteen minutes he could not utter a word. Later, tears shed on all sides, everyone rejoiced, and all of them stayed at the Munsiff's house for about a week, visiting the temples of Puri. Sarada willingly returned to Calcutta and promised that he would not run away again. He kept his promise for four month.

When Sarada had left Cossipore, Tarak (Shivananda) gave him five rupees, knowing he was penniless. But in spite of all hardships, Sarada didn't spend the money. Such was his spirit of renunciation! He wanted to experience the divine promise, "Lo, I am with you always." ¹

After returned from Puri, Sarada continued to visit Sri Ramakrishna. After the passing away of the Master, Sarada joined the Baranagore Monastery. He did intense

sadhana there. In January 1887, Sarada and other brother disciples took the monastic vows. Later he left for Navadweep on pilgrimage.

His father again tried to bring him back home, and asked him to finish his B.A. degree. He refused, and instead left for Puri on 26th February 1887, along with some brother disciples. Such was his renunciation that he was not perturbed by getting the news about his the death of his father. In Puri he practised Vaishnava sadhana with all the traditional face and body marks; he wore a tulsi rosary around his neck and also carried a picture of his chosen deity. Wearing the same Vaishnava dress he came to meet Narendranath at his residence (3 Gaurmohan Mukherjee Lane) who persuaded him to return to Baranagore Math. ²

As per the available records, Swami Trigunatitananda visited Orissa twice, in 1886 and 1887. Further in 1891, he went on pilgrimage to Varanasi, Kanpur, Agra, Mathura, Vrindavan, Pushkar, Dwarka, Porbandar and return to Baranagore. In 1895, he visited Tibet and Kailash Manasarovar. After Swami Vivekananda's return from the West in 1897, Swamiji asked him to start a Bengali Magazine Udbodhan. In addition to the editing work, after the death of Swami Yogananda, he served the Holy Mother. As per the wish of Swamiji, he went to America in 1903 and stayed there till his untimely death in 1915. He built a Hindu Temple in Sans Francisco and preached the Vedanta to young Americans. He also started a Magazine named Voice of freedom.

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SWAMI VIJNANANANDA

Swami Vijnanananda, before he took orders, was known by the name of Hariprasanna Chattopadhyaya. He was born on 30th October 1868 in Etawah. As his father had a transferable job, the family shifted to Belgharia, Calcutta. He took undergraduate education in Calcutta where he met with Sharat (later Swami Saradananda). He saw Sri Ramakrishna in Belgharia at some devotee's house. One day he went to Dakshineswar and stayed with the Master. That night the Master blessed him. Once when after a long gap he visited the Master, he asked him the reason for his absence. When he told the Master that he tried to meditate but could not succeed, the Master wrote something on his tongue and asked him to go and meditate in Panchavati. That day he had a very deep meditation and Master gave him many spiritual instructions and made him fit to do the Divine Mother's work in future. The Master passed away when he was studying in Patna and was doing his B.A. After graduating from Patna, he went to Pune for study of Civil Engineering. After getting his engineering degree, he was appointed as district engineer at Gazipur. Though he was transferred from place to place he was in touch with his brother disciples and used to help them financially.

In 1896, he left his job and joined Alambazar Monastery. After Swami Vivekananda's return from America, Swamiji went on pilgrimage to Northern and Western India. Swamiji took Hariprasanna with him and showed him temples and palaces and discussed with him architecture of future Ramakrishna Temple. In 1899, Hariprasanna formally took monastic vows and became known as Swami Vijnanananda. As per the wish of Swami Vivekananda, he went to Allahabad and started the monastery there in 1910.

As per records available, Swami Vijnanananda visited Orissa twice, in 1925 and 1935. In Orissa he visited Bhuvaneshwar, Konark and Puri.

In 1925 Swami Vijnanananda went on a pilgrimage to Orissa. By that time, the first centre of Ramakrishna Math in Orissa had been started at Bhuvaneshwar by Swami Brahmananda. It was December 1925 when Swami Vijnanananda visited Bhuvaneshwar Math.¹

In 1931, he visited many pilgrimages places of South India like Kanchipuram, Madurai, Rameshwaram, Kanyakumari, Mysore, Bangalore and Ooty. In 1932 he visited Chittrakoot, Dwarka, Rajkot and Bombay. In 1933 he visited Sri Lanka and Delhi, Lahore, Peshawar, Shillong.

In 1935 Swami Vijnanananda went to see the famous Lingaraj Temple in Bhuvaneshwar. He then visited Sun Temple at Konark. On another occasion he visited the Jagannath Temple of Puri. He later spoke of his experience there: "On entering the temple, I embraced Lord Jagannath. He seemed to be soft like a doll of butter." While narrating this unique experience he observed, "If one visits a sacred place with sincere devotion, and sees the image in the temple with a pure mind leaving outside one's worldly thoughts he is sure to be illumined."²

Swami Vijnanananda started for Bhuvaneshwar Math from Belur Math on 14th March 1935 along with Swamis Shankarananda and Satyatmananda by Puri Express. They reached Bhuvaneshwar next day in the morning. Swami Vijnanananda was very happy to see Bhuvaneshwar Math. He said that Raja Maharaj liked this place very much. He stayed in a guesthouse which was built by a lady devotee, Queen of Balangir Patna (Princess of Mayurbhanj) who was initiated by Swami Shivananda. One day he visited Konark Sun Temple by her car. After visiting the temple he said, "The idol Sun god and other idols were 700 to 800 years old. But it seems that they were made quite recently. Carvings on the temple are marvellous." At that time, Governor of Bengal had gone on a visit to Konark and so road to Puri was closed for the public. After the Governor's visit, Maharaj could travel by that road. As the road was repaired due to the Governor's visit, Maharaj's car could go very near to Konark temple. He was in Bhuvaneshwar for three

days. He started for Belur Math on 21st March 1935. And after having stayed there for some days he left for Allahabad and reached there on 30th March 1935. On the evening of the same day, he was narrating his visit to Konark. Swami Adishwarananda asked the Maharaj, “Did you not visit Puri this time?” In reply Maharaj told, “Now a days body has become weak and infirm, though devotion is still there but there is no strength in the body. So I could not visit Puri this time.”³

One day a certain devotee asked Swami Vijnanananda, “What is the significance of the disgusting, erotic carvings that you find in the walls of Jagannath temple? A sight of these gives rise only to evil thoughts.” In reply Maharaj said: “What you see on the wall is only an expression of worldly affairs. That is the sort of things in which the world is engrossed. You have got to transcend all these and enter the temple; and only if you can see and touch Him with a pure and sincere heart, can you hope for God’s everlasting peace. Outside the temple, it is worldliness; inside it, it is God.”⁴

The Spiritual significance of Ratha Yatra is that- the human body is like a chariot. Those who find divine joy in installing the Lord in this chariot like body are able to really enjoy the Ratha Yatra. The Spiritual significance Snan Yatra is to immerse oneself in higher and sacred thoughts.⁵

Though he had a very retiring disposition, he was not insensitive to the misery and suffering around. In Orissa some poor people who took initiation from him brought some presents to the Guru. That upset him immensely, and he declared he would not give initiation if such people brought any offerings. His renunciation was very great and spontaneous. There was a delightful naturalness about it. A rich disciple once gave him a purse as a humble offering. “You have no place to keep that, I suppose? And so you are thrusting the responsibility of keeping the money on me!” said the Swami jokingly but unawares giving out his attitude towards worldly things.⁶

In March 1898 the land for the Belur Monastery was purchased. As some buildings were already existing, Swami entrusted him with the task of remodelling the existing building and constructing another building including the shrine for the monastery. The shrine was consecrated on 9th December 1898. He then built a ghat and embankment on the Ganges for Belur Monastery. From 1919 to 1920, he supervised the construction of Swami Vivekananda temple in Belur Math. In 1934 he became the Vice President of Ramakrishna Order. Actual construction work of Main temple of Sri Ramakrishna was started in 1935 as per the plan approved by Swami Vivekananda under the supervision of Swami Vijnanananda. It took three years to complete the construction work. After the passing away of Swami Akhandananda, he became the President of Ramakrishna Order. As he was not keeping good health, he insisted that the work of the new temple of Sri Ramakrishna be finished early as the task was entrusted to him by Swamiji himself and it was to be his last and foremost work. He consecrated the new temple on 14th January 1938 and within a few months left his mortal coil on 25th April 1938.

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SWAMI YOGANANDA

Swami Yogananda was born in 1861 at Dakshineswar. His premonastic name was Yogindranath Roy Chaudhury. He developed liking for spiritual life in his early age. During his final year at school, he met Sri Ramakrishna and began to visit him frequently. During the Master's illness at Cossipore, Yogin served him with heart and soul. He received the ochre cloth from the Master.

A few weeks after the Master's passing away, Yogin left for pilgrimage to Vrindavan with Holy Mother and party. He got formal initiation from Holy Mother at Vrindavan. Later they visited Haridwar, Jaipur, Pushkar and then Allahabad. After returning to Baranagore Math he took formal monastic vows and given the name Swami Yogananda. He loved to be in solitude and practice japam and meditation. He went to Puri in 1888 with Holy Mother and party. He went to Varanasi in 1891 spending most of his time in meditation. In 1892 he returned to Alambazar Math.

He was among the few who got the free access to Holy Mother. Holy Mother once said that Yogin and Sharat belonged to her inner circle. When Ramakrishna Mission was founded Swami Vivekananda made him Vice President of the Order. Swami Yogananda led an ideal life and he taught by his example. He did not give lectures or do any spectacular work. He was an uncompromising monk; he shunned everything that took his mind away from the Master.

As per the records available, Swami Yogananda visited Orissa once.

In 1888 Swami Yogananda went to Puri with Holy Mother along with Swamis Brahmananda, Saradananda as also Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma's Mother and Laxmidivi. The coastal railroad had not yet been constructed; hence they went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandbali on 7th November 1888 from where they proceeded by a launch to Cuttack, and by a cart to Puri. Swami Yogananda stayed here with Holy Mother for a little more than two months, returning to Calcutta in the middle of January 1889.

Then in February 1889, he went to Kamarpukur with Holy Mother; she stayed there for a year. During that time Yogananda visited Deoghar, Gaya, Prayag, Chittrakut, and Omkarnath. After returning to Prayag, Yogananda fell ill with chicken pox. When this news reached Baranagore Monastery, Vivekananda and some other disciples rushed to Prayag and took care of Yogananda until he recovered.¹

When his health began to fail Swamiji took him to Darjeeling and Almora and arranged for medical his treatment, but he returned to Calcutta.

Just before Swami Yogananda's death, Swami Shivananda had asked him, "Yogin, do you remember the Master?" Yogananda replied, "Yes, I remember the Master more- even more- much more."

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SWAMI NIRANJANANANDA

Nityaranjan Ghosh was the premonastic name of Swami Niranjanananda though popularly known as Niranjan. He was born in 1862 at Rajarhat Vishnupur suburb Calcutta. He was tall and handsome; his nature was fearless and heroic. He was sent to his uncle's house for higher education to Ahiritola in West Calcutta. His uncle was heading a group of spiritualist and he got involved with them. They made Niranjan their medium. Once he along with his uncle visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. In that visit the Master asked Niranjan to visit him often. In his next visit, Master told him to stop mixing with spiritualist and Niranjan agreed to it. The Master recognised him as one of his inner circle. One day the Master wrote mantra on his tongue and initiated him. Thus the training of young disciple started under the supervision of the Master.

Niranjan served the Master sincerely during his last illness. After the passing away of the Master, Niranjan joined the Baranagore Monastery and took vows of Sannyasa in early part of 1887. Swami Vivekananda gave him a name Swami Niranjanananda. After taking the vows of sannyasa, Niranjanananda went to Puri on a pilgrimage in the beginning of 1887 and returned to the Baranagore Monastery on 8th April 1887. This was his only visit to Orissa as per the records.¹

Swami Niranjanananda was well known for his service attitude. Whenever someone fell sick or had any problem, he would serve him taking full responsibility of it. After the death of Girish Babu's son, he was in depression. Swami Niranjanananda took Girish Babu to Holy Mother at Jayrambati in 1981. Girish Babu was benefited by it.

In November 1889, Swami Niranjanananda visited Deoghar, a famous Baidyanath Dham and then proceeded to Varanasi. He lived there on alms. He travelled various pilgrimages places of India and then went to Sri Lanka. There he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and returned to Baranagore Math. When Swamiji returned from America, he received him at Colombo in 1897. Swamiji took him to Almora in 1898. He stayed there and engaged himself in intense spiritual sadhana. He returned to Varanasi and encouraged and inspired the group of young men. He preached them the ideal of service and renunciation. These young men started the organisation to help the poor and needy patients in small way which later became known as the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service. After staying at Varanasi for few months, he went to Kankhal Haridwar. As he felt ill, he returned to Calcutta.

After second visit to the West, Swamiji returned to India in December 1900. He went to Varanasi in 1902 where Swami Niranjanananda was staying who arranged for his accommodation. Japanese Artist Okakura had come to India that time. Swamiji gave the responsibility to Swami Niranjanananda to show the guest old historical places like Bodha Gaya, Agra, Gwalior, Ajanta etc. Okakura was very much pleased by the pleasant company of Niranjanananda. While staying at Varanasi, Swamiji fell seriously ill, so Swamis Shivananda and Niranjanananda escorted him to Belur Math. In Belur Math also Swami Niranjanananda took the responsibility of serving ailing Swamiji.

After Swamiji's passing away, he was mostly staying at Belur Math or at Calcutta. His health was failing; he decided to go to Haridwar for better climate. Before leaving for Haridwar, he went to see Holy Mother. Swami Niranjanananda wanted to have motherly affection from Holy Mother. Mother fulfilled his desire. Before leaving, he prostrated before her and breast into tears. Then he silently went away.

At Haridwar his health further deteriorated. Towards the end he suffered from cholera. He passed away on 9th May 1904. Though he outwardly appeared strict and hard but from inside he was very soft. It is he who understood the divinity of Holy Mother and propagated it among the devotees.

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SWAMI SUBODHANANDA

Subodh Chandra Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1867 in religious family. He met Sri Ramakrishna in August 1885. He started visiting Master on weekdays secretly and learnt from him various aspects of spiritual life. After Master's passing away one day he ran away from home and went to Varanasi but his parents brought him back. However he joined Baranagore Monastery soon and after taking the vows of sannyasa he became known as Swami Subodhananda. As he was youngest among his brother monks, he was commonly known as Khoka Maharaj. He travelled to the pilgrimage places like, Onkarnath, Panchavati, Bombay, Dwarka, Girnar, Pushkar, Vrindavan, Kedarnath and Badriath. He also visited important places in South India. Swami Vivekananda made a trust deed of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math on 30th January 1901 and nominated eleven brother monks as trustees, Swami Subodhananda was one among them. He visited East Bengal many times and gave initiation to the devotees.

He went to Orissa, in 1897 to Puri on the way to south, in 1908 to Chilka region, in 1915 to Kothar, in 1921, 1924, 1926, 1929 and 1932 to Bhuvaneshwar.

In later part of 1897, Swami Subodhananda went to Puri and then to South India on pilgrimage. This is learnt from the letter dated 24th October 1897 of Swami Turiyananda from Alambazar Math.¹

In the year 1908 there was a famine in Chilika area. There was an utter wail among the people because of famine. Swami Subodhananda was sent for relief work accompanied by Swami Shankarananda. Subodhananda threw himself heart and soul into the relief work. He collected and distributed rice, lentils, and clothes among the famine stricken people. He worked day and night without caring for his own food or rest, and became sick as a result. Sri Ramakrishna appeared before him and said, "You will not have to do this work anymore." However, Subodhananda continued the relief work until the condition of the people improved. During that period Chilka area was very hot. There was not much to eat for these people except *Chide* (flatten rice) and jaggery. Water was also not good; it was salty. But they never cared for their own welfare. One day Shankarananda became unconscious due to sun stroke. He was in that state for six days. Swami Subodhananda was very much worried about him. After taking some rest in a nearby village he recovered his health and joined his duty again. Seeing his sincere and expertise work style, Swami Subodhananda became very happy.²

A few incidents of this period will be worth mentioning here. A certain young Irish local government officer used to come often and enquire about the progress of relief work. Once clothes were sent from Calcutta for distribution but delivery of goods was not possible due to the lack of receipt. The officer himself went to the railway station and brought the clothes which made timely distribution possible. Some clothes sent from Calcutta by rail were found stolen on the way. Many people advised Subodhananda to demand for compensation from the railways; but he was not in favour of filing a claim for the same.

The people of that area were harassed by a certain police officer. Khoka Maharaj tried his best to correct him by his sweet words. But the devil would not listen to the scripture. And officer was very arrogant. At last Khoka Maharaj took the help of the Irish officer. As a result that police officer was transferred and was demoted.³

Swami Subodhananda used to say, "God helps a person who helps the poor and needy." Once he brought a certain poor boy named Satish from Orissa to Calcutta for his study. When the question of Satish's lodging and board arose, he wrote a letter to his younger brother from Kothar, "I have received your postcard. My stomach was slightly upset, I am better now. Satish is also keeping well. He comes for study to me everyday. ... Let me know what you have decided about Satish. I will keep him here for a few days and then take him to Calcutta. Make his arrangement at least for a few years. In the meantime, I will make some other arrangement." After coming to Calcutta, Satish was doing well but unfortunately he suffered from small pox. Khoka Maharaj nursed him till

his last. At the time of his death, Khoka Maharaj saw a terrible shadowy figure standing next to his bed. He threw a stone at it. Other people thought that he was driving out a dog or a cat from the house. Satish died the same night.⁴

Later while staying at Kothar, once he was sitting in the evening in the drawing room of Basu's house. Suddenly he could see the spirit of Satish standing and with folded hands requested Khoka Maharaj, "Please go to my house and console my parents. I am quite happy." Next day Khoka Maharaj consoled his parents due to which they got peace of mind. There are many such incidents in his life.⁵

Khoka Maharaj was in Kothar, estate house of Balaram Basu in 1915. This is known from his letter. On 18th October 1915 he wrote from Kothar that Maharaj was keeping well in Bhadrak and Amulya Maharaj and Vishvaranjan Maharaj were with him.⁶

While staying at Kothar, he used to do Japam and Meditation in the small temple of Kothareshwari Devi situated in a jungle, a little distance away from the village. One day when he was doing Japam there, he saw two cobras passing nearby him. Without getting perturbed he kept on doing Japam. He thought, "One has to die today or tomorrow, so let it be now. I have not done any harm to them." Those two cobras came near him and stood beside him quietly with raised hood. They stopped there for sometime and went away.

One another day as he was doing Japam there, he had the vision of Goddess Jagadamba in the form of an old woman like his grandmother. He once narrated, "I was sitting there and was doing Japam. At that time an old woman came and asked me, "Why have you come here?" I replied, "Why have you brought me here? I was quite comfortable in the city! Mother, since you have come, fan me a little." The Mother started fanning him and said, "Bring me betel roll with tobacco tomorrow." Next day he offered the same to Goddess Jagadamba.⁷

Sri Jitendra Mohan Chaudhari in his reminiscences has recalled Khoka Maharaj saying, "The exterior of Jagannath Temple only depicts the mundane world but real thing is Lord Jagannath who is inside the temple. The idols in the temple are the outcome of the meditation of the artisan on his Ishta. While making the idols he went into ecstasy and could not finish it. The idols remained incomplete."⁸

Sri Rajendra Nath Mukhopadhyay in his reminiscences narrates the following incident told by Khoka Maharaj while talking in Ranchi. Once he went to the estate of Balaram Basu at Kothar. He stayed in the courtyard of the temple of the Goddess. His food was arranged from Balaram Basu's house. In front of the temple there was a pond with a ghat. Sometime he used to sleep on the steps of the ghat and two dogs coming from somewhere used to guard him. One day as he was sleeping on the steps of the ghat, suddenly in the dead hours of the night two dogs started barking vehemently. The barking of the dogs awakened him. When he searched carefully all around, he found a crocodile approaching him. Seeing this he took shelter in the temple of the Goddess.

One night as he was sitting in the portico of the temple, he saw a huge cobra coming towards him from the gap in the old wall of the temple. He didn't get frightened. He sat quietly watching the cobra. It came near him and started watching him. After sometimes cobra returned to the place where it had come.

Sometimes he used to meditate in the cremation ground near the temple of the Goddess at night. One day two large snakes came and started circling around him. Without getting disturbed he continued his meditation. After the meditation was over, he could not find the snakes.

In Kothar there was a nuisance of mosquitoes, which used to bite him when he would sit for meditation. His whole body used to be covered with the mosquitoes. Initially his meditation was disturbed but after some time when the meditation got deepened, he had no outer consciousness. One day, late at night, after the meditation was over, he felt as if somebody was fanning him to drive out the mosquitoes. Opening the eyes he found the Goddess herself fanning him by her cloth. Goddess ordered him,

“Bring me betel roll with tobacco.” Next day he offered the same to the Goddess.⁹ He went to Bhuvaneshwar in 1921. It is known from his letter written from Bhuvaneshwar Math dated 19th August 1921 to a devotee.¹⁰ Swami Subodhananda visited Bhuvaneshwar first in August 1924.¹¹

Swami Sambuddhananda narrates the reminiscences while he was at Belur Math. On 20th March 1924, in the course of a conversation, Khoka Maharaj told Mahapurush Maharaj about an incident told by Durgapada at Bhuvaneshwar: “A devotee who was a Deputy Magistrate used to worship till 11 o’clock in the morning. One day the Magistrate had come to inspect his office while the deputy was engaged in the worship at his house. All the necessary documents were presented to the Magistrate by someone looking exactly like the deputy. The Magistrate was satisfied and gave favourable comments. When this was happening, the deputy was still engaged in worship. After finishing the worship, the deputy rushed to the office. Seeing him the orderly said, “Sir, you had come earlier to show the necessary papers to the Magistrate. Why then have you come again?” Then the deputy went to meet the Magistrate. He also asked the deputy why he had come again. He returned to his house. He was surprised that though he had not gone to the office, then who else had gone and done his work while he was worshipping? He realised that it was his chosen deity who went to the office to save him by doing his duty. Contemplating on this, he resigned from the job on the very day.

Hearing about this incident Mahapurush Maharaj said, “Similar incident happened in the life of Raghunathdas. Whenever there was any programme of Ramayana, he would go there to listen to it leaving all his work. He used to work in the Military. One day he went to listen to the Ramayana. He was so much absorbed in it that he forgot about his duty. Returning to the office after the Ramayana was over, he found that his duty hours were already over. At once he went to his officer to beg apology. The officer said, “I myself saw you doing your duty.” Raghunathdas understood that it was Raghuvir who had performed his duty. Thinking this, he quit his job that very day.”¹²

Tarasundari was a famous actress of the Bengali stage. Until 1921 Tarasundari continued her acting with tremendous enthusiasm and passion. But when her guru, Swami Brahmananda, died in 1922, she felt renunciation within. She built a house at Bhuvaneshwar and planned to retire there. She then lost all interest in acting and went into a deep depression. Swami Shivananda heard about her condition and summoned her to Belur Math. She cried for Maharaj, and Shivananda consoled her. He asked her to build a temple on her property in the name of Maharaj. Tara followed the swami’s advice. Aparesh named the temple “Rakhal Kunja.” (Rakhal was Brahmananda’s premonastic name and kunja means “garden temple.”)

Swami Shivananda went to Bhuvaneshwar to inaugurate Rakhal Kunja and install the pictures of Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda on the altar. Later, Swami Subodhananda installed some of the relics of Swami Brahmananda under the altar of Rakhal Kunja with a special ceremony and a homa fire. Tara’s dream was fulfilled. She was excited about her place of sadhana, and she spent hours in worship and meditation there. However, she had a desire to offer cooked food to the Master but felt herself unworthy. One day Swami Akhandananda visited Rakhal Kunja and remarked: “Mother Tara, what is this? The Master looks emaciated. Don’t you offer cooked food?” Ashamed of her sinful life, Tara replied, “No, swami.” Swami Akhandananda advised her to offer cooked food and milk to the Master every day. As Tara listened to the advice of a disciple of Ramakrishna, tears came to her eyes.

Tara spent hours in her shrine, and her method of worship was unique. She had such deep concentration that one day she didn’t even notice that there was a fire in her cowshed. The neighbours tried to extinguish the fire, but when they called her they could not break her meditation. Another day at noon Swami Subodhananda went to Rakhal Kunja and found no one around. The doors and windows of the temple seemed to be closed and the whole area was quiet. He then observed that a window was partially open. When he peeped through it, he saw Tara dancing in front of Sri Ramakrishna’s picture.

She was completely oblivious to the world. As she had always given joy to the audience in the theatre by her acting, she was worshipping the Master with her acting and dancing in the same way. Without disturbing her sadhana, Swami Subodhananda returned to the monastery.¹³

He went to Bhuvaneshwar in 1926. It is known from his two letters one written from Bhuvaneshwar Math dated 22nd July 1926 and second letter from Belur Math dated 28th August 1926 in which he wrote that he returned from Bhuvaneshwar Math a few days back.¹⁴

Swami Subodhananda visited many places at different times such as Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Choto Nagpur, and Uttar Pradesh. Wherever he went, he initiated devotees and inspired them with the message of Sri Ramakrishna. Towards the end of his life, as per the instruction of Swami Shivananda, he went to Bangladesh. There he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna for which he had to work extremely hard. His health broke down there. After returning to Belur Math, he suffered from dysentery. In 1929, a few days after the Car festival, he went to Bhuvaneshwar for a change of weather and treatment. After his health was improved, he returned to Belur Math in the year 1930-1931.¹⁵

Brahmachari Manindra (Swami Sadatmananda) in his reminiscences wrote: “When Khoka Maharaj was in Bhuvaneshwar, he used to go for a walk in a jungle. There used to grow a kind of fruit in a thorny tree. He used to pluck these fruits, and eat them like a small child and would give the fruits to us also. Sometime he used to suddenly sit inside the bush which would make small birds to fly out with noise. This was his daily routine... Once he was coming to Bhuvaneshwar from Puri in the hot afternoon. There was neither any porter nor any vehicle at the station. So he came to the Math from the railway station by walk with his bedding. Such was his simplicity that he would never let us feel that he was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. We were afraid of Mahapurush Maharaj and Sharat Maharaj, but we were very comfortable with Khoka Maharaj as he used to mix freely with us. He used to take food with us. He had very little bedding. He used to use hand as his pillow. Sometimes he used to enjoy arm wrestling with me...”¹⁶

He had great love and affection for the poor people. In Bhuvaneshwar market a certain Bengali young man used to sell small items. When Khoka Maharaj used to go for a walk, he would meet him and lovingly enquire about his business. In this way he got acquainted with him. He wanted that more and more new saleable products should be produced in the country so that it will help to alleviate the poverty of the masses. He himself tried to prepare a drink like tea from tender bel leaves.¹⁷

Khoka Maharaj was in Bhuvaneshwar in 1932 as is learnt from his letter dated 7th January 1932 written from Bhuvaneshwar.¹⁸

He liked Belur Math most that is why he was reluctant to go anywhere else in later years except for health reasons. In old age though he was not keeping well but he would visit Swamiji's temple daily. This shows his love and respect for Swamiji. Towards the end he suffered from Tuberculosis. Till his end on 2nd December 1932, he was fully conscious and cheerful.

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VIJAYKRISHNA GOSWAMI IN PURI

Vijaykrishna Goswami was born in 1841 in Dahakul village of Nadia district of Bengal in the family of Advaitacharya, an associate of Sri Chaitanya. He was adopted by uncle Anand Kishore Goswami who was a famous Bhagavat pathak, and regarded the Srimad Bhagavatam as non-different from Sri Krishna. Once Sri Ramakrishna said to Vijaykrishna, "I have heard about a Goswami who while giving Bhagavat path displayed such bodily symptoms as blood oozing from the pores of his body, and roared so loudly that it could be heard from far off." Vijaykrishna told Sri Ramakrishna that the same Goswami was his father. Upon hearing this Ramakrishna replied, "It is only a father like him that could give birth to a son like you."

Right from his childhood he was fond of visiting the monks. After finishing his education at Shantipur he came to Calcutta and got admitted in Sanskrit College there. He got married while studying there. He had also studied medicines but left it just before the final examination. He got attracted towards Brahma Samaj and was initiated by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore. He got acquainted with Keshav Chandra Sen in 1860. When Brahma Samaj was divided, he joined the section headed by Keshav. He was engaged in preaching Brahma religion and had gone to Punjab, Mathura, Lucknow, Dhaka etc and then returned to Calcutta in 1875. He was informed by Keshav about Sri Ramakrishna and he met him several times including a boat ride on the Ganges with Keshav. Later he left the Keshav led Brahma Samaj and joined Sadharan Brahma Samaj. He was not satisfied with his present spiritual state which compelled him to travel in search of a guru. At last he was initiated by a Yogi near Gaya which gave him a new turn in Bhakti cult. His guru's name was Yogi Brahmananda Paramahansa who asked him to go to Varanasi for taking formal sannyasa. He continued to guide Vijay from time to time. He received the sannyasa from Swami Hariharananda Saraswati in Varanasi and got the name Swami Achyatananda Saraswati. He then returned to Calcutta.

After his return, he met Sri Ramakrishna on 26th November 1883 during the annual festival of Brahma Samaj. The Master could see the changes in Vijay- his ochre robe and exalted state of mind. Master commented, "The spring in Vijay's heart has been covered all these days- now it is opened. ... Surrender yourself completely to God and set aside all such things as fear and shame. ..."

On 19th September 1884, the Master was in Dakshineswar and speaking to some devotees. Speaking about Vijaykrishna he said, "Vijay is in a wonderful state of mind now a days. He falls to the ground while chanting the name of Hari. He devotes himself to kirtan, meditation and other spiritual practices till four in the morning. He now puts on an ochre robe and prostrates himself before the images of God. He respects me very much. But it is difficult to reach him- one day he is called to Dhaka, the next day to some other place. His presence has created great trouble in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Brahmos tell him, "You mix with people who worship God with forms. You are an idolater." Vijay is liberal and straightforward. Unless a man is guileless, he does not receive the grace of God. ... Vijay is a salaried preacher of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. ..." Though not a disciple of the Master, Vijay had great respect for him and the Master also had high regards for Vijay's spiritual attainment.

Vijaykrishna Goswami mostly stayed at his Dhaka Gandariya Ashrama and had a large following. From time to time he would visit Calcutta. At this time he also visited places of pilgrimage like Varanasi, Vrindavan, Haridwar. Later he attended Kumbha-Mela at Allhabad and returned to Calcutta. His Guru advised him to proceed to Puri for further spiritual practice.

As per his guru's advice, Vijaykrishna Goswami went to Puri along with 50 devotees on 8th March 1898 by a steamer from Calcutta. They reached Cuttack via Chandbali on the 5th day and next day they reached old Puri Station. He along with his devotees started walking towards the Jagannath temple. Soon they reached Atharanala from where the dome of the temple became visible. Goswami prostrated on seeing the dome and started marching towards the temple singing and dancing. Thus they reached

Narendra Sarovar. He sprinkled the water from it on the faces of all and proceeded towards the temple. He entered the temple in the evening and got emotional with tears in his eyes and started talking to the image as if conversing with the living Lord. He stayed at the house of Nilmani Burman and he stayed there till his last.

Now he engaged himself in Puja, reading of scriptures, kirtan, spiritual talk, service to the guests, giving alms to beggars, giving food to insects and birds and watering the plants. He visited Markandeya Sarovar, Sweta Ganga, Chakratirtha, Indradyumna Sarovar, Gundicha temple, Gambhira, house of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Siddha Bakul, Samadhi of Haridas Thakur, Govardhan Math etc. Later he also participated in Snan Yatra, Ratha Yatra and Chandan Yatra of Lord Jagannath.

After coming to Puri, he realised the importance of Mahaprasad of Lord Jagannath and he started propagating this idea among the devotees. He used to say, "Just as nam and nami, devotee and God are but the same, so also Lord Jagannath and the Mahaprasad are identical. One gets the same benefit by taking Mahaprasad as by the darshan of Lord Jagannath."

Shortly after his coming to Puri, a devotee presented him a small wooden temple with idols of Lord Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra to which he offered puja daily. These idols are still worshipped daily at his Samadhi Mandir at Puri even today. He was pained to see the Pandas were not performing the rituals as prescribed in the scriptures in Jagannath temple and neglecting their ritualistic duties. He started an agitation in this matter and as a result Government took necessary steps to rectify the situation. By his efforts he managed to stop the killing of monkeys which was started by Municipal official due to nuisance caused by them. He also got the toilets adjacent to the temple demolished. His third important work was opening a charity house where there was no discrimination about the recipients. He donated as per the need of the people and as asked for by the recipients. He did charity even by taking loan. In those days, after coming to Puri, he donated about Rs.30,000 in three months. In spite of knowing his economical condition, people gave him loan. When asked about this charity, he used to say that he was not doing this charity of his own but by the command of Lord Jagannath.

Someone tried to kill him by poisoning but by the grace of the Lord, he survived. His health was slowly becoming worse. In his later life he did not sleep for many years as he used to spend the night in meditation. He had a heart problem also. When the devotees got worried, he told them, "Lord Jagannath is showering his grace on me thrice a day by giving me His darshan, then why to worry? The purpose for which I have come to Puri has been fulfilled. If God commands, I am ready to leave this place. I will not leave this place until I pay back the debt." Listening to these words, his disciples started collecting the fund for paying back the debt. Within a few months the debt of Rs.20,000 was cleared and the remaining was cleared on 4th June 1899. Next day, he was to start his return journey to Calcutta but who knew that it was his final departure from this world.

He passed away on 5th June 1899, the very next day after repaying his debt. Many years before his passing away he had said that he should be buried after his death. Astonishingly a huge land adjoining Narendra Sarovar was available and purchased within a short time after his death and he was buried there. Later a beautiful temple was constructed at that burial spot.

Once Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra: "See what a change has come over Vijay's mind. He is an altogether different person. He is like thick milk from which all the water has been boiled off. You see, I can recognise a paramahansa by his neck and forehead. Yes, I can recognise a paramahansa." ... Vijay said, "... It is difficult to understand him (meaning the Master) unless he reveals himself. ... Here alone is the one hundred percent manifestation of God." Vijay (to the Master, with folded hands): "I have now realised who you are. You don't have to tell me." Master (in a state of ecstasy): "If so, then so be it." Saying "Yes, I have understood", Vijay fell prostrate before the Master. He held the Master's feet on his chest and clung to them. The Master was in deep samadhi, motionless as a picture.

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Bhuvaneshwar- Tapovan of Brahmananda **(A Short History of Ramakrishna Math, Bhuvaneshwar)**

1. Swami Brahmananda used to say about Bhuvaneshwar that it is *Gupta Kashi* and *Shaiva Tirtha*, a holy place of Lord Shiva. Lingaraj Shiva is the presiding deity of Bhuvaneshwar.
2. Bhuvaneshwar Math is the 1st centre of Ramakrishna Order in Orissa.
3. Math is located towards the north of Lingaraj Temple.
4. Once when Holy Mother was speaking about the glory of Bhuvaneshwar, it occurred to Swami Brahmananda's mind to start a centre there.
5. In May 1917, when he came to Bhuvaneshwar and was staying near Lingaraj Temple, he had an experience of the spiritual environment and healthy climate of that place.
6. Once in the course of conversation he said that when he meditated there at the dead of night, he could meditate as deeply as he did when he was young. So he was eager to start a centre there.
7. He sent Swami Shankarananda to Bhuvaneshwar for finding out a suitable plot of land for the centre.
8. On 17th July 1917, Maharaj gave his approval to the land chosen by Swami Shankarananda.
9. A plot of land measuring 4.816 acres was purchased and registered on 25th July 1917 from Kripasindhu Panda, son of Dinabandhu Panda for Rs.400. (Area Khas Mahal Khurda, Mauza Badgad No.139.)
10. Swami Brahmananda came to Bhuvaneshwar where he stayed in Sanatorium from 4th to 6th November 1917 and guided Swami Shankarananda about the construction work.
11. Swami Shankarananda completed the construction work of the Ashrama in two years.
12. There was a mason named Sri Bhagavan Maharana. He was not only an expert mason but also a skilled carpenter. He stayed near Lingaraj temple. Seeing his faith and devotion, Raja Maharaj was very pleased and awarded him with a Silver medal. A pious man, he had a great desire to lead the life of a monk. His desire was fulfilled in 1924 and he received the Sannyasa in 1936. His monastic name was Swami Nityasiddhananda. He stayed in Bhuvaneshwar Math till his death in 1945.
13. In 1919, the news came to Belur Math that the construction of Bhuvaneshwar Math was over and so Raja Maharaj accompanied by Swamis Shuddhananda and Ambikananda went to Bhuvaneshwar on 29th October 1919. The consecration ceremony took place on 31st October 1919 with Puja, Homa and Patha after the installation of the images of Holy Trio. On 1st November 1919, a sumptuous feast was given to the poor people.
14. It was a single storied building which consisted of four rooms and a hall in between with wide verandas on both North and South sides. There was no guesthouse. Raja Maharaj stayed in a room that was in the west side of Southern veranda. In front of his room there was a Shrine where daily worship and fruit offerings were made. With a view to helping the poor and needy people of nearby areas, he started a dispensary which was later regularised in 1920. He brought fruit and flower saplings for the garden from many places of India especially from Bangalore. The grand building, the huge gate and the high boundary walls of the Ashrama looked like a Palace when seen from outside.
15. During this period, Raja Maharaj used to be in divine mood often, apparently smoking hubble-bubble but oblivious of outside world. Once he said, "Bhuvaneshwar is a Yoga-Bhumi and Puri is Bhoga-Bhumi. I will be happy to see Sadhu-Brahmacharis practising spiritual discipline here at Bhuvaneshwar Math."
16. On 12 January 1920, Raja Maharaj gave Sannyasa to 9 aspirants and Brahmacharya to one aspirant. (Including Swamis Abhayananda, Vireshwarananda)

17. In April 1920, Maharaj accompanied by Ramlaldada went to see Pandav cave in Bhuvaneshwar.
18. On 21st July 1920 at 1 a.m., an attendant of Maharaj named Swami Nirvanananda saw him sitting in an easy-chair in a grave mood. Next day in the morning, the news of Holy Mother's passing away at Udbodhan on same night at 1.30 a.m. was received.
19. As desired by Maharaj, on 9th November 1920 Kali Puja was performed by Swami Ambikananda. The image was made by a sculptor from Cuttack named Natubabu. Maharaj became very happy and said that the image was just like that of Dakshineswar Bhavatarini.
20. While he was at Bhuvaneshwar, Kshirodbabu, Tarasundari and many other devotees and monks used to come to meet him.
21. In 1920, Swami Saradananda accompanied by Vaikunthanath Sanyal came to Bhuvaneshwar for some work and stayed there for 10 days and returned on 12th February 1920.
22. In 1921, as there was some problem in Varanasi Advaita Ashrama, Swami Saradananda wanted Swami Brahmananda's guidance in the matter and therefore he went to Bhuvaneshwar and took Maharaj to Varanasi on 20th January 1921.
23. On the way to Madras, Maharaj accompanied by Swamis Shivananda and Sharvananda came to Bhuvaneshwar on 1st April 1921 and stayed there for a few days. On 15th April 1921 there was Ratha Yatra of Lord Lingaraj. Maharaj, Shivananda and others went to the temple and attended the festival. The Maharaj and party came back to Bhuvaneshwar from Madras and stayed at Bhuvaneshwar Math from 21st November 1921 to 11th January 1922 for 2 months. During this period, in course of the conversation, Maharaj said to Mahapurush Maharaj, "Now onwards you people should look after the affairs of the Math as a I wish to stay peacefully in Bhuvaneshwar." On repeated requests of Swami Saradananda he returned to Belur Math.
24. The spring in the Math's big well is said to have its source in Kedar-Gauri pond.
25. Swami Subodhananda came to Bhuvaneshwar in August 1924 and in 1929 at the time Ratha Yatra.
26. In 1923, Swami Shivananda accompanied by 40 monks from Belur Math and nearby centres came to Bhuvaneshwar. On Saturday, 26th March 1923 *Shukra Saptami*, Vasanti Puja was performed in the hall by Swami Santoshananda (Br.Bharat). On the occasion of Mahaashtami a new temple was consecrated on the first floor and *Annabhoga* was started. On the day of Navami, aspirants were initiated. Around 7000 poor people and devotees took prasad. A benefit night was organised at Calcutta Star theatre for raising fund. During this period, Swami Shivananda visited Lingaraj Temple occasionally and Rameshwar Shiva temple which is situated at Mausai-Ma square almost daily. He returned to Belur Math in the beginning of May 1923.
27. In the middle of 1924, Swami Akhandananda went to Puri and from there to Bhuvaneshwar where he stayed for a few days.
28. There used to be a dense forest infested with wild animals and reptiles. Once a big bear fell into the Ashrama well and at another time a leopard took away a pet dog of the Ashrama. Many times people were bitten by snakes and scorpions.
29. In April 1924, Swami Shivananda accompanied by Swami Bodhananda came to Bhuvaneshwar for three days. He gave sannyasa to four aspirants namely, Megheshwarananda, Kapileshwarananda, Bhaskarshwarananda, Brahmeshwarananda. Swami Saradananda brought two brass images of Balgopal from Vrindavan, one was installed in Raja Maharaj's temple at Belur Math and the other one in Bhuvaneshwar Math. A bed for Raja Maharaj was arranged in the same bedroom of the Master. Raja Maharaj brought an image of Ganesh through Dr.Kanjilal for worship.
30. On 13th November 1924, Swami Saradananda accompanied by Swamis Nirmalananda, Shankarananda and Vaikunthanath Sanyal came to Bhuvaneshwar for

a change of climate. After staying there for about a month they left for Calcutta on 10th December 1924.

31. In September 1925 Swami Saradananda came to Bhuvaneshwar again for recouping his health and stayed there for two weeks.
32. In December 1925 Mahendranath Gupta came to Bhuvaneshwar and after visiting Lingaraj temple he went to the Math where he was welcomed by Swamis Nirvanananda and Shankarananda in a hall with roses and papaya from Math Garden. After spending sometime with them in a joyful mood he went to Puri.
33. During this period Swami Vijnanananda came to Bhuvaneshwar on a pilgrimage.
34. On 2nd May 1926 Swami Shivananda accompanied by Swamis Sharvananda, Yatishwarananda, Apurvananda came to Bhuvaneshwar on the way to South India for a few days. Swami Vishuddhananda was temporary incharge of Bhuvaneshwar Math at that time. On 5th May 1926 they went to Puri and returned to Bhuvaneshwar Math on the same day. On 6th May 1926 Swami Shivananda gave initiation to two persons at 10am. On 7th May 1926 they left for Madras.
35. In Bhuvaneshwar Math, one *Kutiya* was erected by Swami Nirvanananda for sadhana which is now called Bhajan-Kutir.
36. In May 1933 a primary school was started in the Math.
37. On 14th March 1935 Swami Vijnanananda accompanied by Swamis Shankarananda and Satyananda came to Bhuvaneshwar. He liked the Ashrama. Then they went to see the Sun temple at Konark. One day he gave initiation to aspirants in Master's Bedroom. He stayed in the guesthouse known as Shivananda Memorial Cottage. The Princess of Maurbhanj and the Queen of Balangir Patna who was a disciple of Swami Shivananda constructed this cottage with the request that she should be allowed to stay there till her last. There is a shrine in the cottage where she installed a marble statue of her guru Swami Shivananda.
38. On 10th April 1939 Swami Virajananda came to Bhuvaneshwar and gave initiation to the aspirants. Then he left for Puri on the way to south.
39. In 1956 a library was started which was later shifted to a new building in 1968.
40. On 3rd May 1996 the temple was renovated and a marble statue of Sri Ramakrishna was installed there.
41. On 26th January 2001 Vivekananda Hall was inaugurated.
42. As per the wish of Raja Maharaj, a publication department was started for publishing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature in Oriya language.