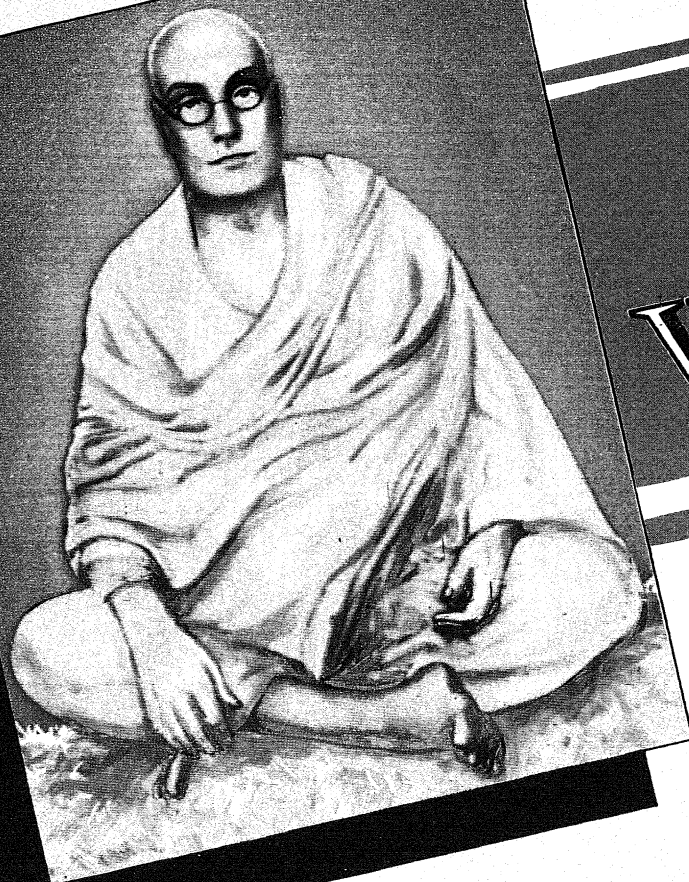


# SWAMI VIJNANANANDA



A Biography in Pictures

# SWAMI VIJNANANANDA— A BIOGRAPHY IN PICTURES

‘There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever.’

—Shankaracharya



**Ramakrishna Math**

Vijnanananda Marg  
Muthiganj  
Allahabad 211 003



**B5**





Published by:  
**Swami Harshananda**  
**President**  
**Ramakrishna Math**

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*WE HUMBLY OFFER  
THIS  
PICTORIAL BIOGRAPHY  
AT THE FEET OF  
REVERED  
SWAMI VIJNANANANDAJI  
MAHARAJ*

●



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## PREFACE

We are very happy to place before you a new book: 'Swami Vijnanananda — A Biography in Pictures'.

Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938) was one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the fourth president of the Ramakrishna Order.

An album of pictures on the Swami entitled 'Nava Nava Rupe Swami Vijnanananda' was brought out in 1968, the year of his birth centenary, by one of his devoted disciples, Sri Sureshchandra Das of Calcutta. It was published by the General Printers and Publishers Private Limited, of Calcutta. The book has since been out of print.

A few of the surviving disciples of the Swami as also the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad (which Math was founded by him in 1910) felt that a new biography of the Swami in pictures modelled on similar books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda (published by the Advaita

Ashrama, Calcutta) would do greater justice to that august personality. This of course is not to belittle the pioneering and deeply devoted work of the late Sri Sureshchandra Das in any way. It continues to hold its own even now, for sheer variety of collection.

The book has been planned in thirteen chapters, including the epilogue. Each chapter begins with a short account of the biography and is followed by a series of pictures having relevance to that part of the biography covered in that chapter, with appropriate write-ups. A chronological table has been added at the end.

The biographical material has been drawn almost exclusively from the following books: (1) The Apostles of Ramakrishna by Swami Gambhirananda (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta); (2) Swami Vijnanananda by Swami Apurvananda (Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad); (3) Swami Vijnanananda—His Life and Sayings by Swami Vishwashrayananda (Ramakrishna Math, Madras).

We hope that this new compilation will be welcomed by all the admirers of the Ramakrishna Movement in general and by the disciples and devotees of the Swami in particular, who had the good fortune of being inspired by their contact with him.

Publisher



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A venture of this type and magnitude would not have been a success but for the invaluable assistance, financial and otherwise, of a good number of people. It is our sacred duty to remember them gratefully at this juncture when the book is seeing the light of the day.

Our first and foremost grateful thanks go to Swami Swahanandaji Maharaj and Amrita Salm of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood (U.S.A.) who have kindly borne almost the entire cost of producing this book.

We are deeply indebted to Sri Sureshchandra Das (since deceased) of the General Printers and Publishers Private Limited, of Calcutta, for permitting us to utilize some of the photographs from the book 'Nava Nava Rupe Swami Vijnanananda' compiled by him in 1968.

We are very grateful to Sri Manmohan Mitra of the Mitra Prakashan Private Ltd., (Allahabad) who has done an excellent job of printing and production

at the celebrated Maya Press Pvt. Ltd. of Allahabad.

We heartily thank Sri Sisir Datta of Delhi for all the art work done as a labour of love.

Our respectful thanks to Rev. Swami Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj (General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur) and Rev. Swami Ananyanandaji Maharaj (President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati) for permitting us to reproduce some of the pictures from the pictorial biographies produced by Belur Math and Advaita Ashrama.

We are also grateful to the following revered Swamijis who helped us to secure some of the photographs as per our requirements: Swamis Bhaumanandaji (Pune), Chandranandaji (Patna), Nityasatyanandaji (Varanasi), Smarananandaji (Calcutta), Satyavratandaji (Calcutta) and to Sri S.K. Banerjee (Manendragarh).

Finally we thank the Archaeological Survey of India (Museum Branch) by whose courtesy we could produce the picture of the famous Sarnath Buddha.

Publisher



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## ONE

# THE ADVENT

When God incarnates Himself as man, it appears that He brings His own retinue, to assist Him in His work. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the avatar of the modern age, brought a galaxy of saints with him to this world. Swami Vijnanananda was one of them.

Hariprasanna Chattopadhyaya—that was his premonastic name—was born on the 30th October 1868, the auspicious day of Vaikuntha Chaturdashi, at Etawah (Uttar Pradesh) as the first child of the deeply religious couple, Taraknath Chattopadhyaya and Nakuleswari Devi.

He had his early schooling at Nasiram Sarkar's primary school at Bengalitola in Varanasi (also known as Kashi, in Uttar Pradesh). Later on, his parents shifted to Belgharia (now a suburb of Calcutta). Consequently he prosecuted his further studies at Calcutta, first at the Hare School

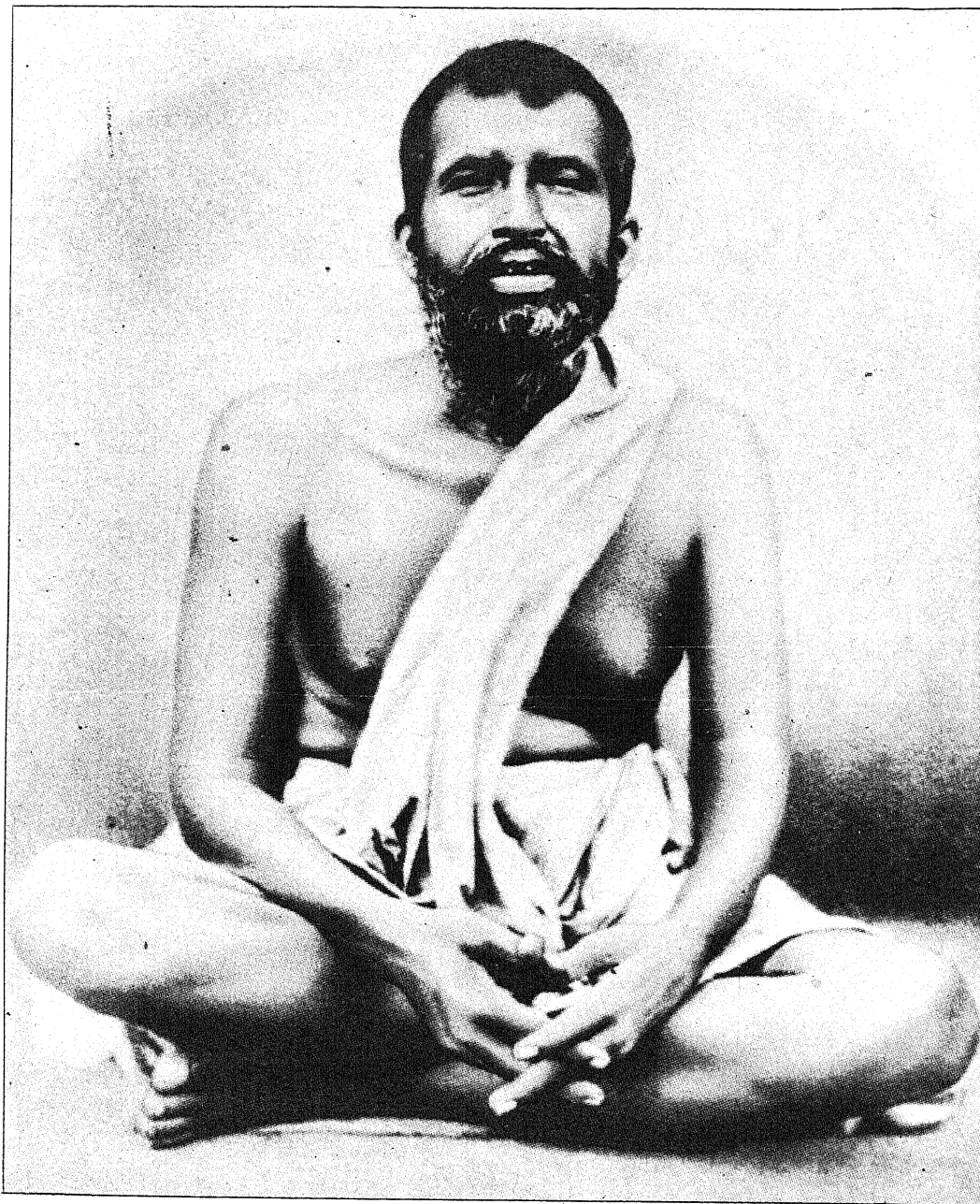
(1882) and then at the St. Xavier's College (1885). It was while studying in class 9 or 10 that he saw Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, in the house of Dewan Govinda Mukhyopadhyaya. He was wonderstruck to observe then, that the entire spine of Sri Ramakrishna had become inflated as it were and appeared like a thick rope. He also felt as if a snake had spread its hood and was swaying in joy over Sri Ramakrishna's head. This sight was imprinted on his memory for ever.



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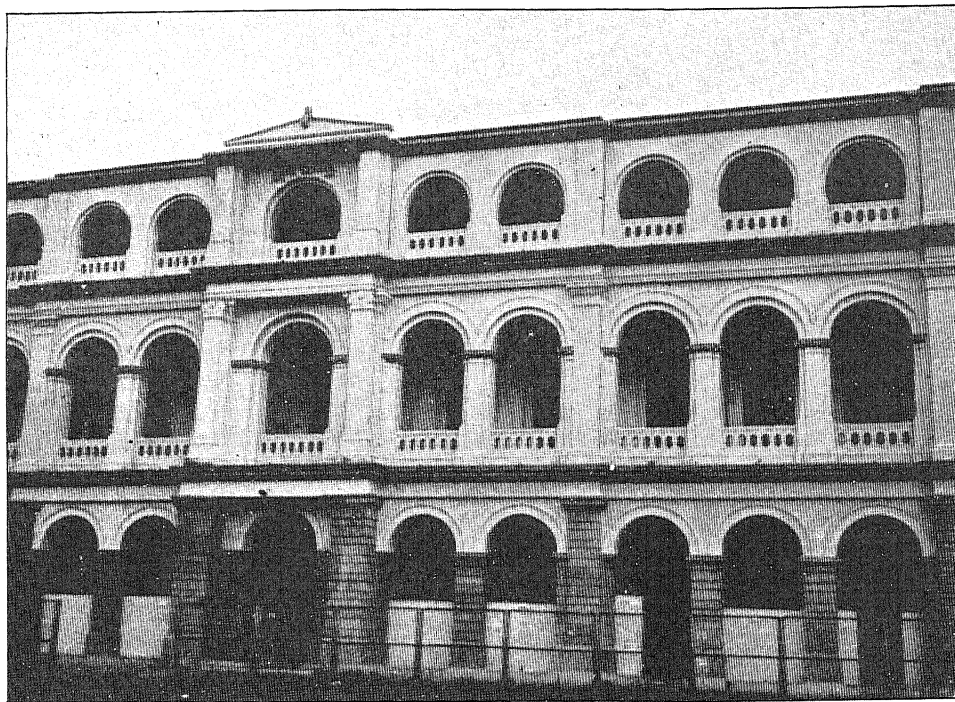




Sri Ramakrishna who is being worshipped by millions as an incarnation of God. Regarding this photograph of his Master, Swami Vijnanananda once said: 'The Master's photograph reveals an image of transcendence of all the six chakras (centres of consciousness) . . . I see many things in it and so I talk about them.'

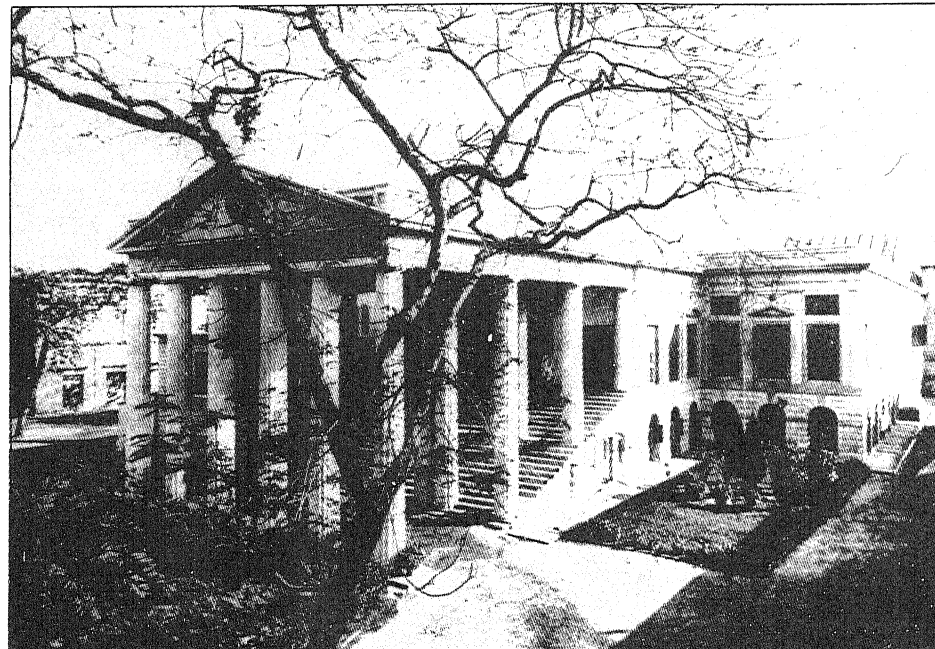


Parental home at Belgharia, where Hariprasanna lived during his childhood and boyhood days.



The Hare School at Calcutta from where Hariprasanna passed his entrance examination in 1882. Living in Belgharia which was then a village, he used to go to Calcutta daily for prosecuting his studies. It was probably during this period that he saw Sri Ramakrishna for the first time in the house of Dewan Govinda Mukhyopadhyaya.

St Xavier's College. Hariprasanna passed his F.A. examination in 1885 from here before shifting to Patna for higher studies.





## TWO

# THE GOLDEN TOUCH AND THE TRANSFORMATION

Though Hariprasanna saw Sri Ramakrishna once again at the house 'Tapovana' of Keshab Chandra Sen (the wellknown Brahmo Samaj leader) in Belgharia, it was really during his first visit to Dakshineswar in 1883 that a personal contact was established with him. Sarat (later, Swami Saradananda), his friend and classmate, was also with him. The Master received them with great love and affection. Though this visit was brief, it left an indelible impression upon his mind.

However, it was a subsequent visit that really transformed his life. During this visit, the Master spoke to him for a long time on spiritual life and gave him many practical instructions including a specific injunction to observe total celibacy. Hariprasanna spent that night in the room of the Master. At dead of night he woke up to discover the Master going round his bed muttering something which was unintelligible to him. The boy was blessed with initiation the same night.

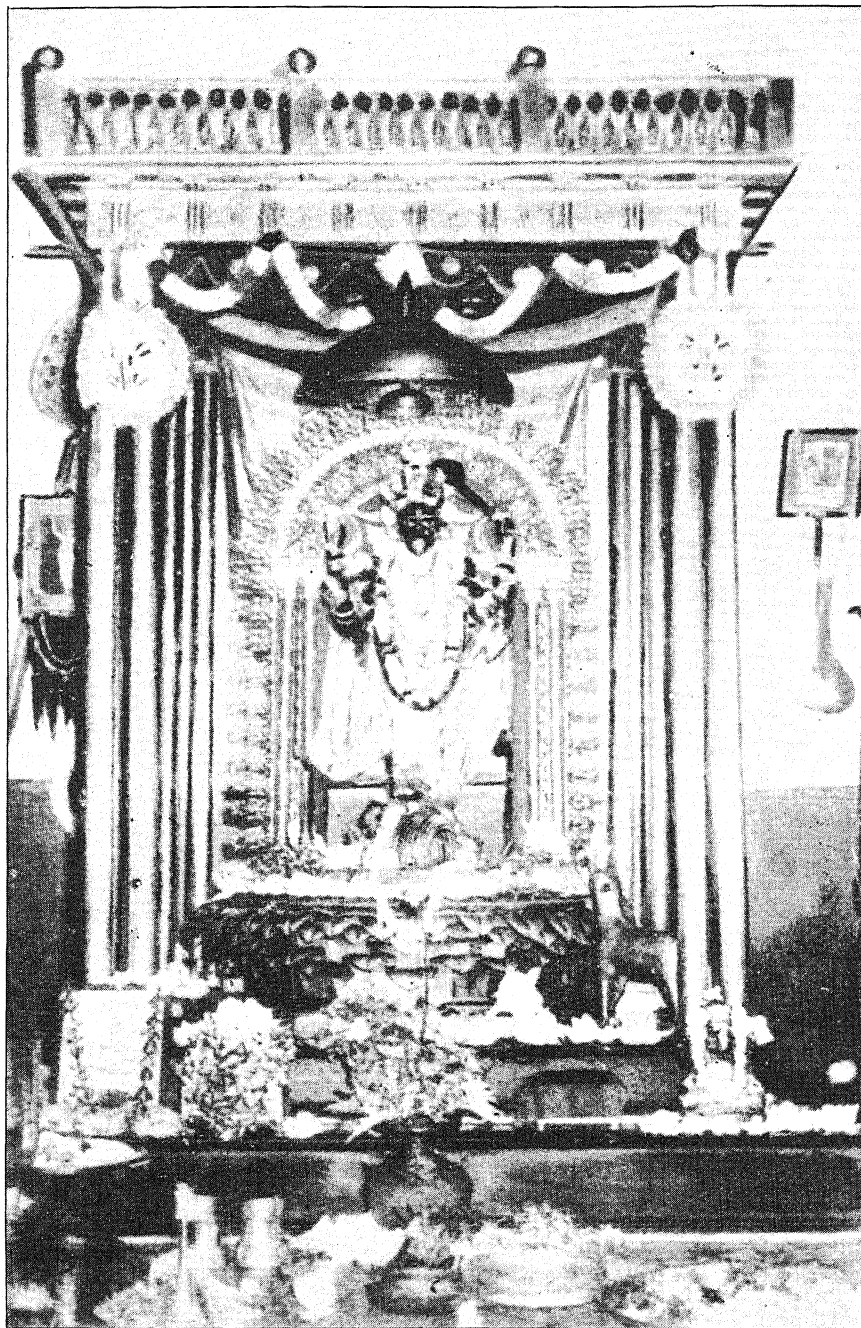
Since he did not go to Dakshineswar for a long time, the Master himself once sent for him and remonstrated with him for his neglect. The boy frankly admitted that he did not get

the mood to come and also disclosed his difficulty in having good meditation. At this, the Master wrote some mystic syllable on his tongue which had an immediate and miraculous effect and sent him to the Panchavati (a small grove of five trees in the temple garden of Dakshineswar) for meditation. From that day onwards, he had no difficulty whatsoever in getting good meditation.

Young Hariprasanna had a strong physique and was good at wrestling. Imagine his consternation when, one day, the Master rolled up his sleeves *ala* wrestler and challenged him for a bout! Not to be taken in, Hariprasanna responded vigorously. Of course, the Master being no match for him, was soon pinned against the wall. But in no time, the victor was vanquished by the flow of a strange current into his body, from that of the Master—who was all the while beaming with a bewitching smile—which awed him and rendered him powerless!

Thus the transformation at the golden touch of the Master was complete.

He visited his guru a few more times before he had to shift to Patna for higher education.



The image of Mother Kali at the Dakshineswar Temple built by Rani Rasamani and consecrated in 1855. This was the centre of the Master's spiritual sadhanas and realizations. Most naturally, it also became the centre of inspiration for his numerous disciples, both lay and monastic.



Sri Ramakrishna's room at  
Dakshineswar from outside.



Sri Ramakrishna's room—inside view'.  
It was here that Hariprasanna received  
detailed instructions for spiritual life as  
also initiation from the Master. Again,  
it was here that the Master enacted a  
'wrestling bout' with the young Hariprasanna.





'Panchavati'—the grove of five trees—in the garden of Dakshineswar, the scene of many a sadhana of the Master. He often used to send his disciples, especially the youth, to this place for meditation. Once Hariprasanna expressed his difficulty in getting good meditation. The Master at once wrote something on his tongue and sent him to the Panchavati. He not only had a good meditation that day, but ever afterwards, since the obstacles had been removed once for all.



That bewitching smile! When Hariprasanna was 'challenged' by the Master for a 'wrestling bout' and 'fought it out', he found that though he had succeeded in pinning his 'rival' to the corner, a strange current of power was flowing into his own body from that of the Master, rendering him completely powerless. The Master was all the while beaming with his bewitching smile!

Swami Saradananda (1865-1927). He was known as 'Sharat' in his premonastic days. He was a classmate of Hariprasanna at the St. Xavier's College. He was instrumental in taking him to Dakshineswar for the first time. Though this visit was rather short, Hariprasanna was charmed by the affectionate welcome he received from the Master. Swami Saradananda was the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Organizations for many years.





## THREE

# DISCHARGING THE DEBT

Hariprasanna had lost his father quite early in life. Being the eldest son, it was his duty to educate himself, seek an employment and care for his mother and other members of the family. So, after passing the F.A. examination in 1885 from the St. Xavier's College, he shifted to Bankipur in Bihar and joined the Patna College for higher education. Staying with his sister at Bankipur, he used to go to Patna everyday.

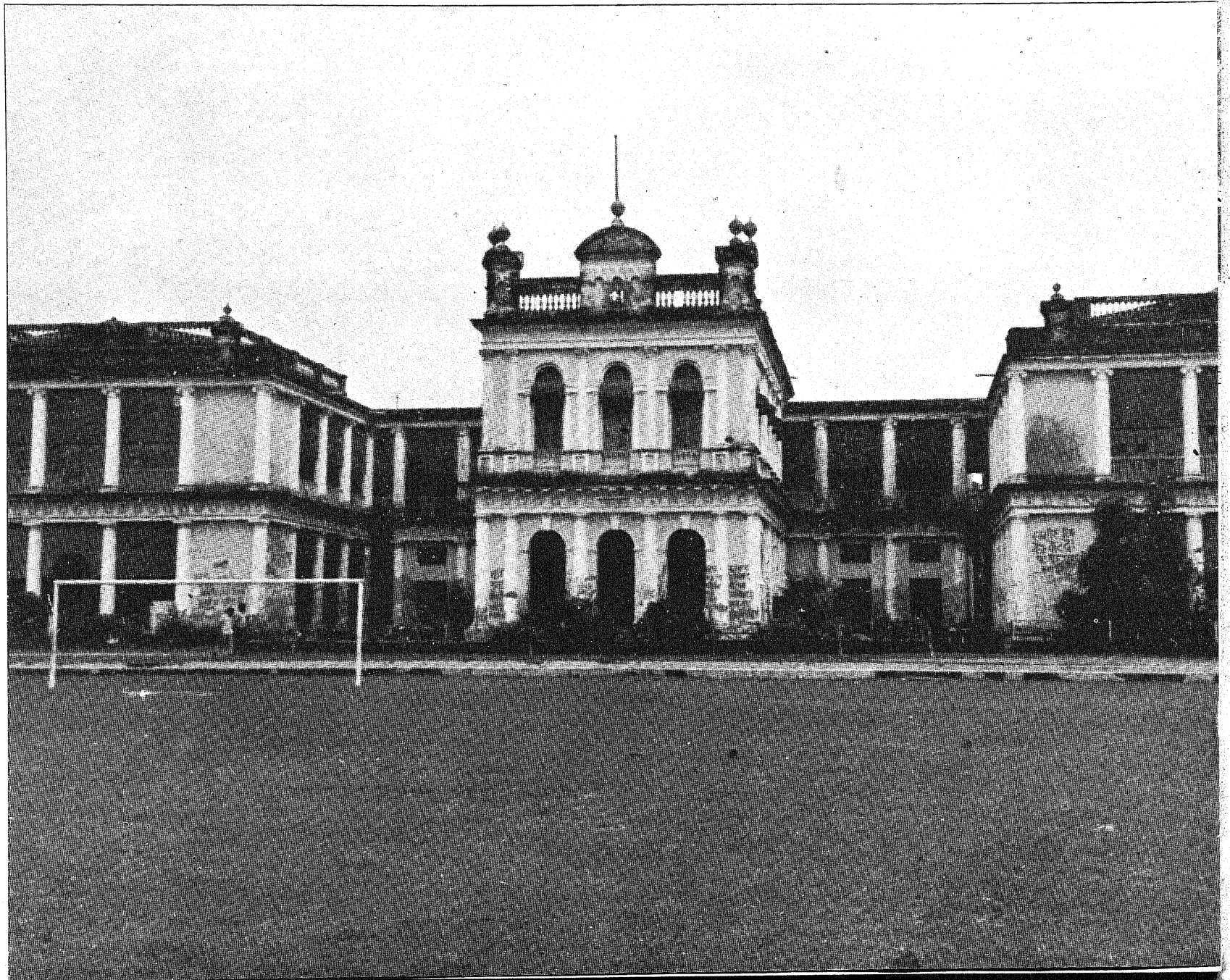
It was while at Bankipur that one night he saw Sri Ramakrishna, as if in flesh and blood, standing by the side of his bed. Hariprasanna was rather perplexed. However he was dismayed to learn the next day from the newspapers that the Master had left the mortal coil the previous night.

After graduating from the Patna College in 1887, Hariprasanna joined the Poona College of Science. He got his Civil Engineering Degree in 1892.

Since he stood second, he was offered the job of the District Engineer at Ghazipur (in Uttar Pradesh, then called the United Provinces). It was while at Ghazipur that he learnt that a monastery had been established by Swami Vivekananda and that it had been shifted to Alambazar from its original location in Baranagar. He also started sending some contribution every month for the maintenance of the Math. During this period, a few of the Sannyasin disciples of the Master visited Ghazipur as itinerant monks and stayed with him.

Apart from Ghazipur, he also served at Bundelshahar, Meerut and Etawah. It was from Etawah, at the behest of Swami Vivekananda, that he resigned his post (after making necessary arrangements for the maintenance of his mother) and joined the monastery at Alambazar. The debt had been discharged and now, nothing stood in the way of fulfilling the command of his Master.

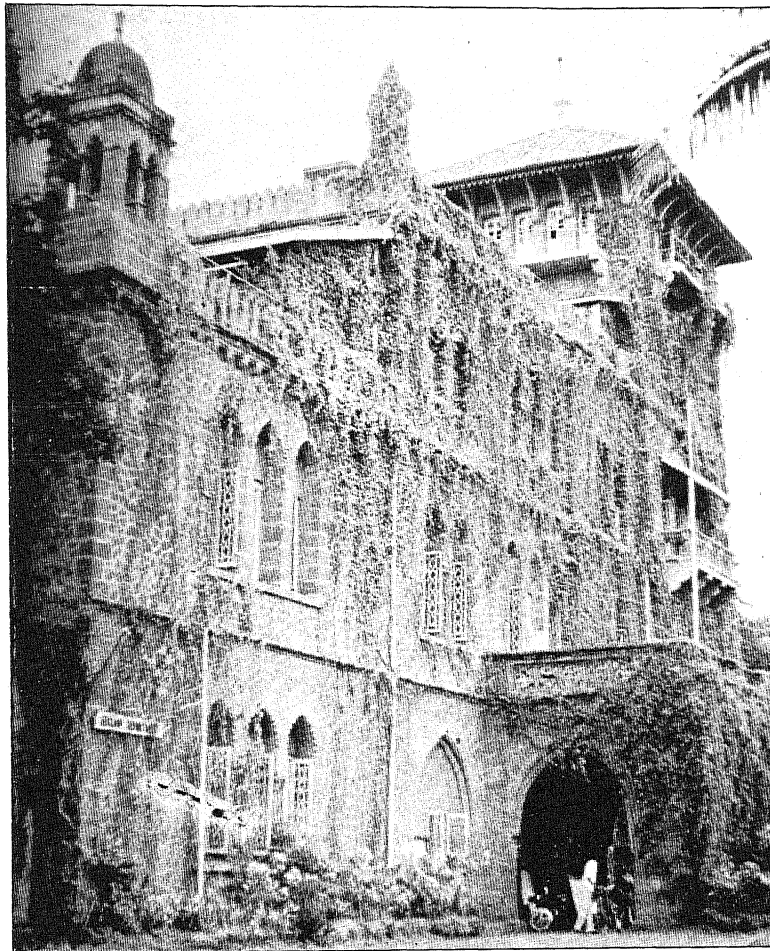
Patna College from where Hariprasanna graduated in 1887.  
During those days Bihar was part of Bengal. Students from Calcutta  
were eager to pursue their higher studies at this college which had a  
great name.







The house at Bankipur. While studying at the Patna College, Hariprasanna was staying in this house with his sister and brother-in-law. It was here, one day, that he suddenly saw Sri Ramakrishna in flesh and blood as it were, who later disappeared. This worried him much. The next day he learnt from the newspapers that the Master had passed away the previous night.



The Science College at Poona (now Pune, in Maharashtra) which offered engineering courses also. Hariprasanna took his L.C.E. from here in 1892. Since he secured the second rank, he was offered, as per the custom then, the post of the District Engineer by the Government of India. He joined duty at Ghazipur in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh).



A general view of the Varanasi-Ghazipur Road. This road was originally built under Hariprasanna's supervision.

## FOUR

# IN THE SERVICE OF THE MASTER

Introvert by nature, Hariprasanna was taciturn and serious even from his boyhood days. He was made for the monastic life as it were. Right from the first visit, the Master had discerned it and had earmarked him to be his future monastic disciple and a member of the monastic brotherhood under the leadership of Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda). Apart from Swami Vivekananda's call, two visions of Sri Ramakrishna which Hariprasanna had had, urging him to renounce, were also responsible for his resignation from the service and joining the monastery at Alambazar in 1896. The monastery was shifted in 1898 to the garden house of Nilambar Mukherjee, next to the site where Belur Math was built later.

Though he had been a government officer with some means and prestige, and had lived a comfortable life, he adjusted himself admirably to the difficult life at the Math. His brother monastics were astonished at his simplicity, humility, austerity and depth of devotion to the inner life.

When Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) decided to build the new Math campus, he naturally entrusted the task of preparing the plans and estimates, and supervising the construction to Hariprasanna Maharaj. With characteristic earnestness and vigour he plunged into the task and finished it singlehanded. Swamiji inaugurated the Belur Math on December 9, 1898. However, the construction work on the

embankment in front of the new Math premises continued for some more time.

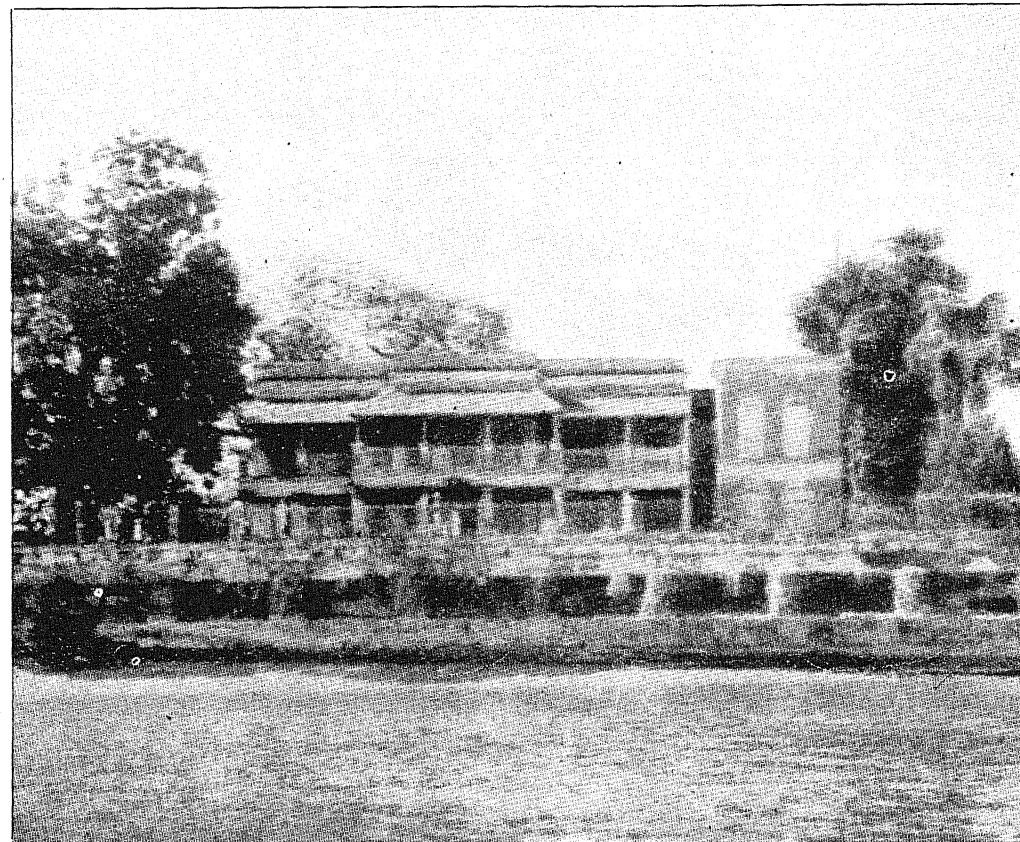
One day Hariprasanna Maharaj approached Swamiji to give him sannyas. Swamiji advised him to take it directly from the Master himself as he and others had done. So, on the 9th May 1899 he took formal sannyas and assumed the name 'Swami Vijnanananda'.

Some time earlier, when Swamiji left on a tour of Western India, he had taken Swami Vijnanananda also with him. They had keenly observed the styles of architecture of many famous temples they had visited then. After the various constructions at the new Belur Math campus were over, Swamiji one day convened a meeting of all the monastic brothers to thank Swami Vijnanananda for the fine work. In this meeting Swamiji expressed his desire to build a monumental temple for Sri Ramakrishna. He explained at some length, the unique features the temple should have and asked Swami Vijnanananda to draw up a suitable plan. The latter, with the help of the noted English architect, Mr. Guithar, prepared a plan which was approved by Swamiji, who however said, 'The temple will certainly come up; but I may not live to see it.' On another occasion Swamiji had remarked, 'Yes. I will see it. I will see it from above—Even the exact spot where the temple should be built, had been shown by Swamiji himself.'

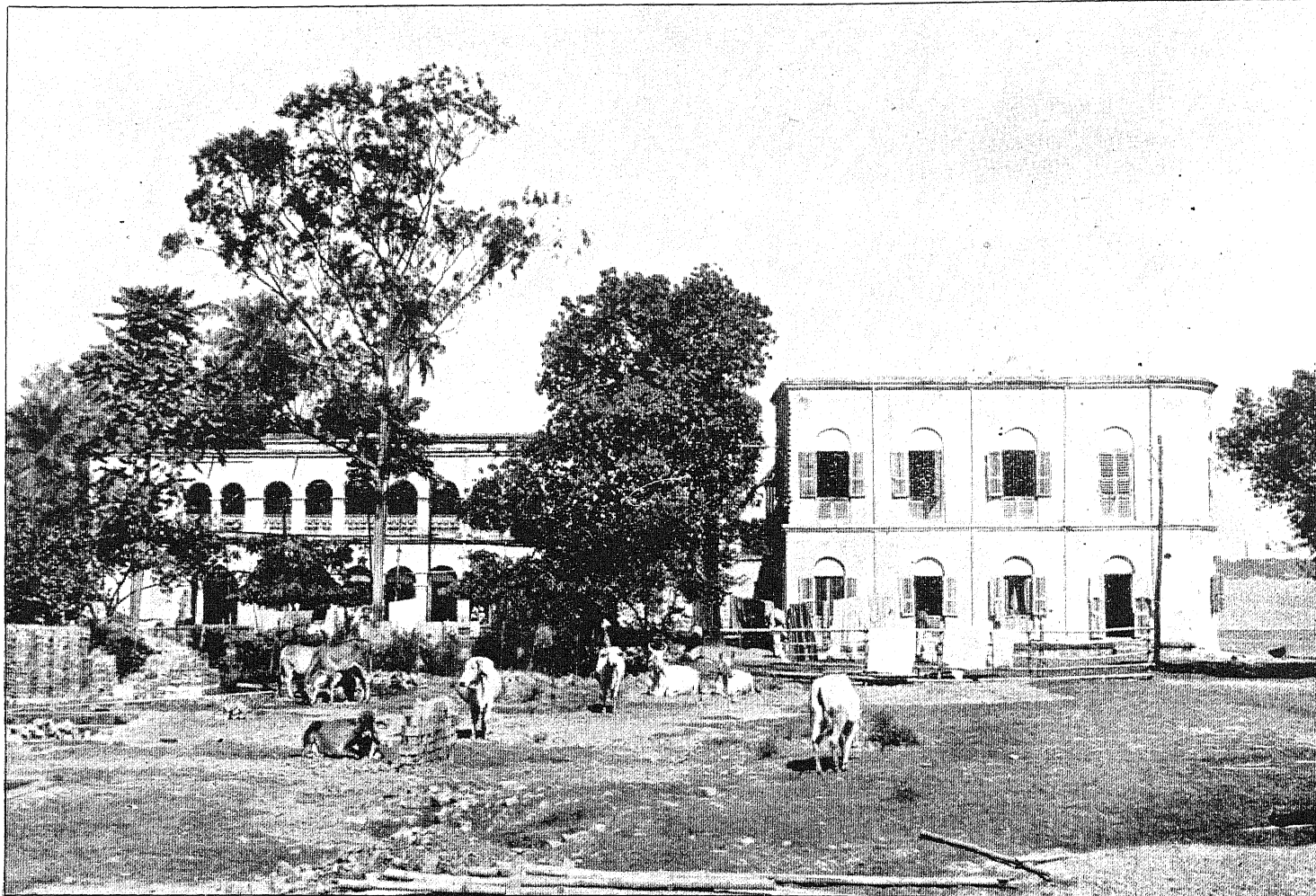


The monastery at Alambazar (Calcutta). The Ramakrishna Brotherhood of monks was formed soon after the demise of the Master with its first monastery at Baranagore in a highly dilapidated house in September 1886. It was shifted to Alambazar, most probably in 1892. It was here that Hariprasanna joined the brotherhood after resigning from his job. Before that, he used to contribute sixty rupees every month to the monastery for its maintenance.

Garden House of Sri Nilambar Mukherjee at Belur. The monastery was shifted from Alambazar to this place by Swami Vivekananda in Feb. 1898 to facilitate the construction and supervision of the new Belur Math campus in the site next to it, which had just been purchased. Swami Vijnanananda (who was a brahmacharin at that time) drew up the plans and estimates of all the buildings in the new campus and also supervised their construction.



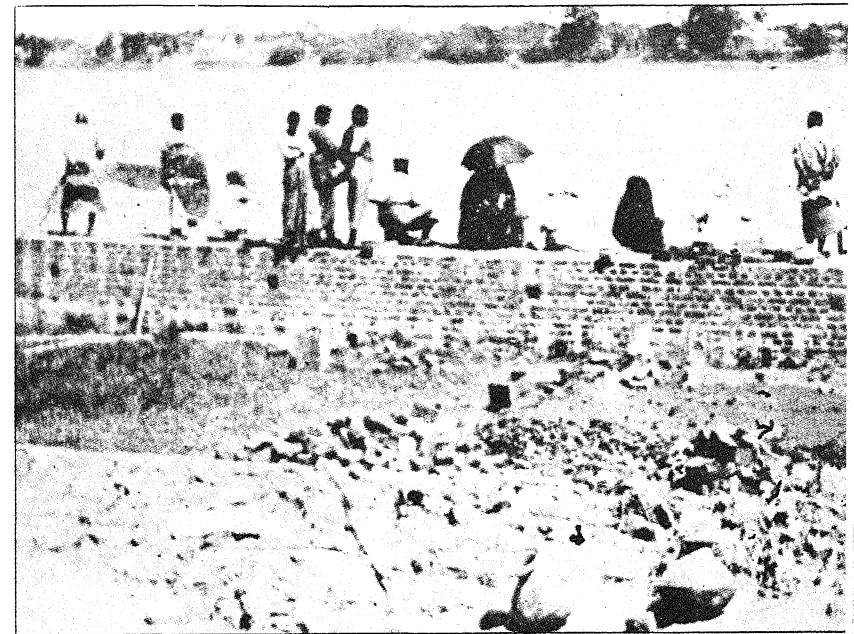




The Belur Math campus in the olden days. The shrine block is on the left and the residential building to the right. These were the original buildings built by Swami Vijnanananda in 1898. The new Math was consecrated on Dec., 9, 1898 and the monastery shifted on Jan. 2, 1899.

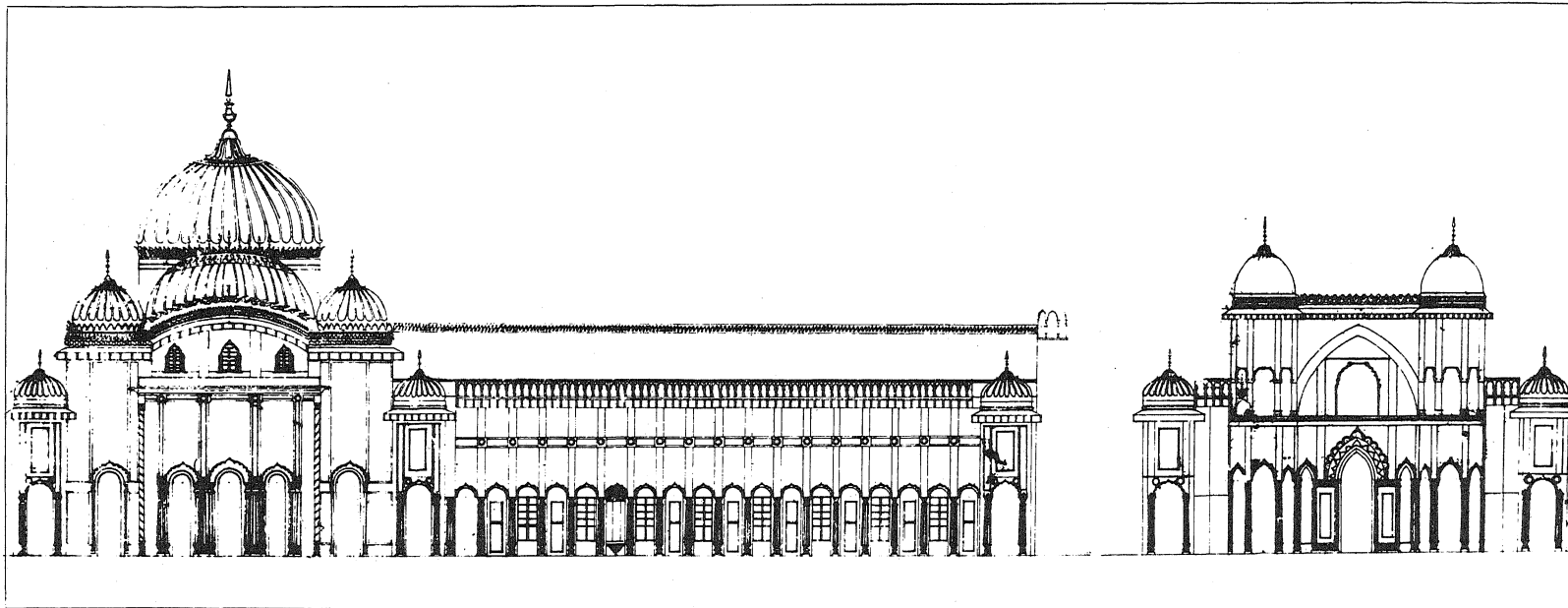


This picture of the Swami was taken just a few days after he took sannyasa (May, 1899). As per Swamiji's suggestion, Hariprasanna took sannyasa 'directly' from the Master and assumed the new name 'Swami Vijnanananda'.



A rare photograph of the Swami (back to the camera, with umbrella) supervising the construction of the embankment at Belur Math.

Original plan of the temple of Sri Ramakrishna preserved at Belur Math. One day, after his return from a tour of Western India, Swamiji expressed a desire that a unique temple, integrating in itself, the diverse styles of architecture of India, should be built as a memorial for Sri Ramakrishna. He even indicated the spot on which the new temple should be built. Keeping his instructions in mind, Swami Vijnanananda drew up this plan, with the help of a wellknown European architect of Calcutta. When it was shown to Swamiji, he liked it and approved it.



## FIVE

### 'THE ABBOT OF ALLAHABAD'

After completing all the work connected with the constructions at the new Math campus in Belur, Swami Vijnanananda left as an itinerant monk for a life exclusively devoted to spiritual pursuits. He first visited a few places of pilgrimage in North India and then arrived at Allahabad (Prayag, a hoary pilgrimage centre) some time during the autumn of 1900.

Once Swamiji had expressed a desire that he should stay at Allahabad and work for spreading the ideas of the Master among the local people. He had even nicknamed him as 'The Abbot of Allahabad'. Taking the cue and bowing to the wishes of his leader, Swami Vijnanananda decided to stay on at Allahabad. And, destiny was eagerly waiting to receive him!

A few young men of Allahabad, deeply influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, had formed themselves into a 'Brahmavadin Club' and were meeting regularly in a rented house. Just as their leader, an elderly gentleman and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, left

for Calcutta for good, and the young men were feeling leaderless, they were overjoyed to learn of the arrival in their city, of a direct (monastic) disciple of Sri Ramakrishna himself! They immediately seized this opportunity and requested the Swami to live in their club building and guide them. The Swami gladly agreed. He spent here a long and arduous period of ten years, in meditating, studying and performing severe austerities. In addition he had also to bear the burden of cooking and house-keeping.



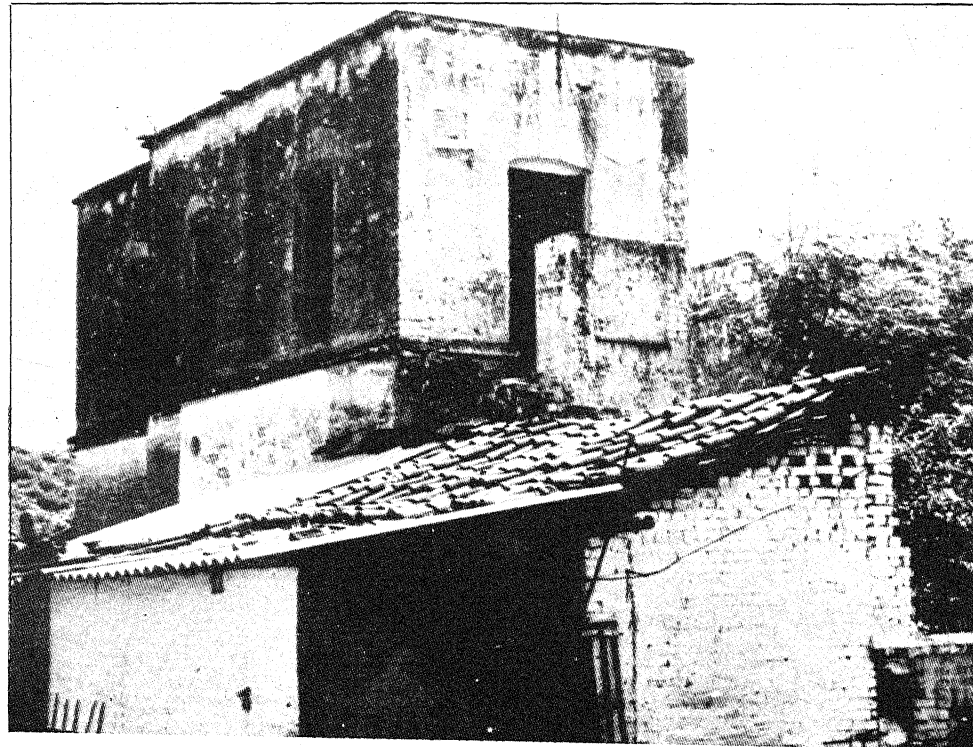


The Triveni Sangam, popularly called 'Sangam'. According to the Hindu mythological lore, the rivers Yamuna and Saraswati join the Ganga here. Saraswati, a river that existed during the Vedic period, later on disappeared. However, Hindu tradition believes that it joins the Ganga here, flowing underneath the earth. This confluence of the three rivers is considered as extremely sacred. Swami Vijnanananda used to bathe at the Sangam everyday before sunrise.



Road leading to the Sangam. The Swami used to walk all the way for taking his early morning bath in the Sangam.

The present Brahmavadin Club. Then housed in a rented building, where the Swami had lived from 1900 to 1910 before shifting to the Math which he established at Muthiganj, it existed in another locality.



## SIX

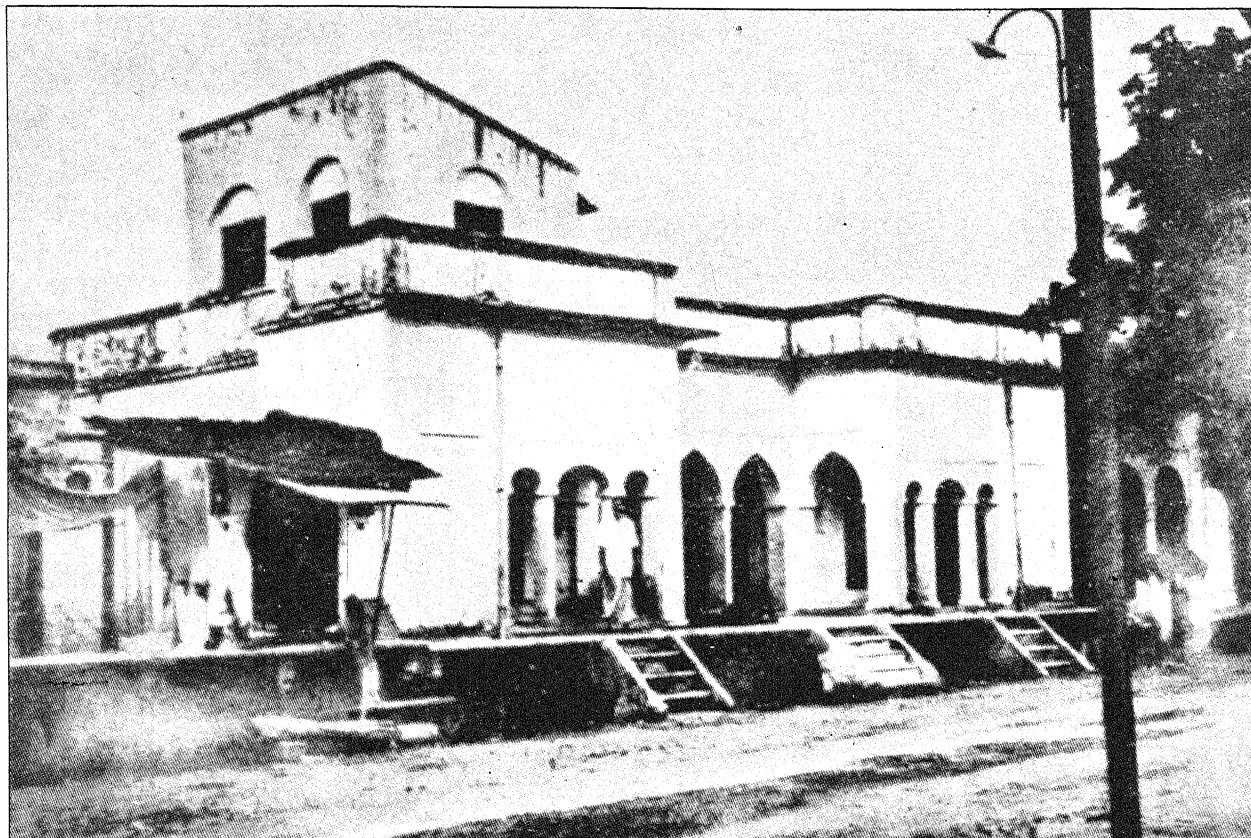
# THE ALLAHABAD MATH

The desire of the Swami to start a branch Math at Allahabad, in obedience to the command of his leader, came to fruition in 1910 when he succeeded in purchasing a small plot of land with an old building in the Muthiganj area near the river Jamuna and began living there. He also purchased another small plot of land on the other side of the road and started a free Homeopathy dispensary for the benefit of the poor people of the locality.

Hereafter this place and this building became his home for the next 28 years, which were spent mostly in meditation, study of the scriptures and guiding earnest spiritual seekers who would flock to him at the hour he had set apart for them.

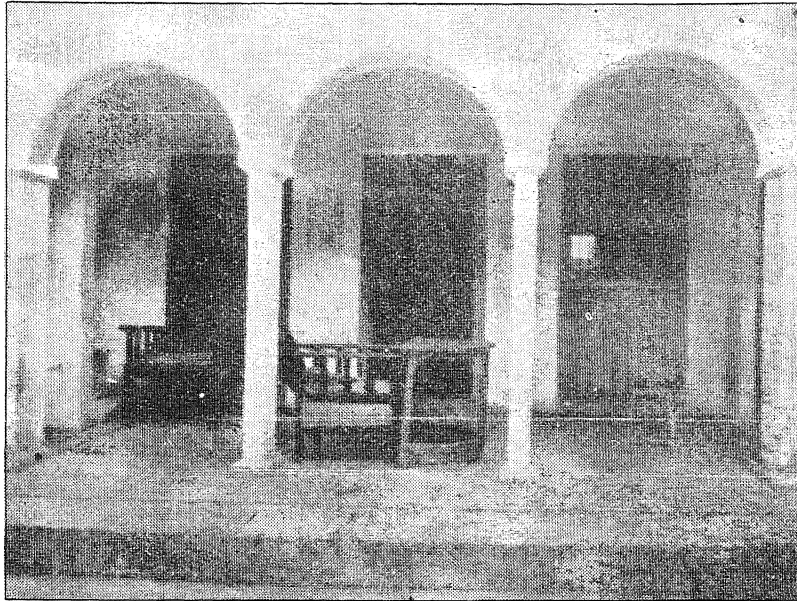
Since the authorities of the Ramakrishna Order could not afford to lose his expertise as an engineer and architect, he had to go out often to Belur Math, Varanasi and Kankhal (Hardwar) to supervise the building

activities there. However he would invariably return to Allahabad at the earliest opportunity.



The original Math building at Allahabad. Swami Vijnanananda purchased a small plot of land with this building in 1910. The first storey was dismantled since it was causing cracks on the walls all over. He lived here for a long period of 28 years.





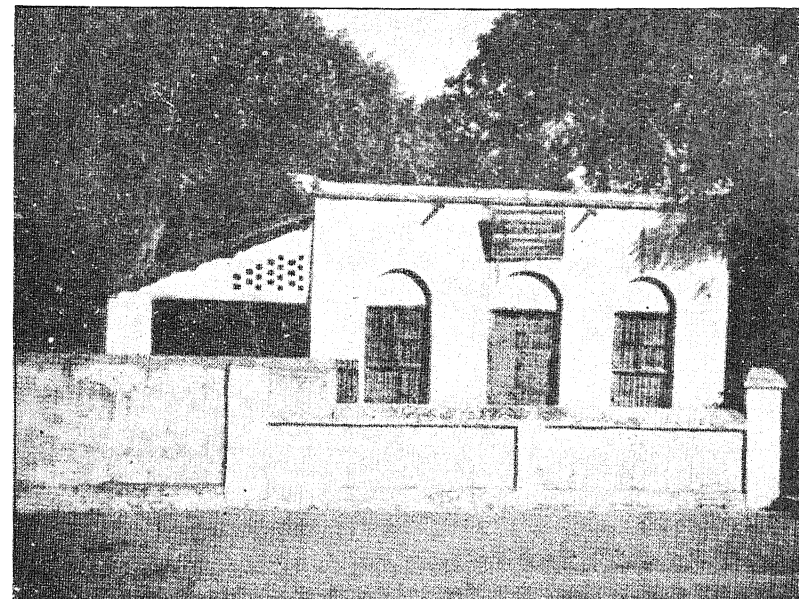
▲  
A view of the back verandah of the Math.

►  
Swami Brahmananda (popularly known as Maharaj), the first president of the Ramakrishna Order, sitting in the courtyard of the Allahabad Math. This photograph was taken sometime in 1914. Maharaj has spoken very highly about the Swami's spiritual attainments.

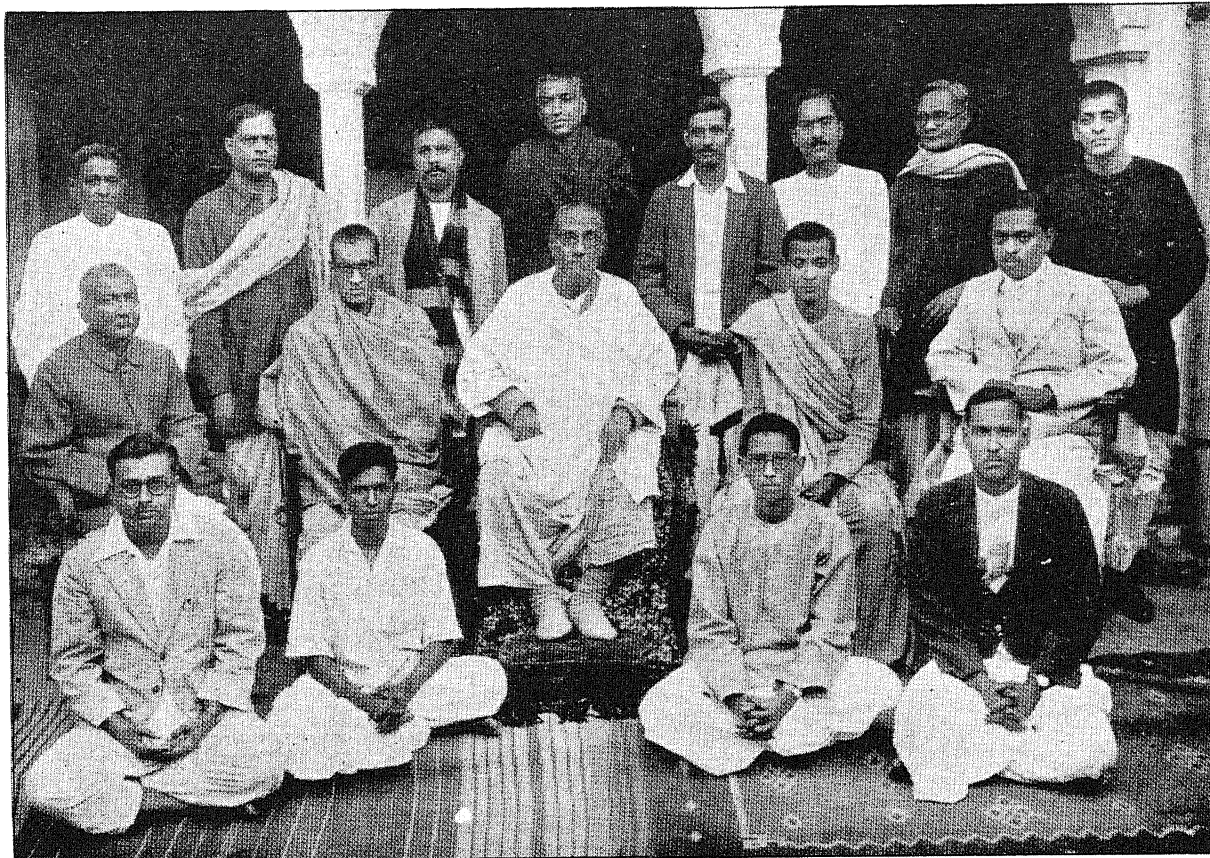




A rare photograph, where the Swami is seen with Sri Beni, the devoted disciple and servant who served him till the last.



The free homeopathy dispensary started by the Swami, as it looked in the early days. It became quite popular with the local poor people.



The Swami with a group of close devotees at the Allahabad Math.

## SEVEN

# ARCHITECT TURNED AUTHOR

Knowledge of the technical sciences and that of philosophy and literature, rarely go together. But Swami Vijnanananda was an exception. He had a good command over the Sanskrit language and had mastered not only religio-philosophical works but also wellknown works on Hindu Astronomy.

During his long tenure as the founder-president of the Ramakrishna Math at Allahabad, he authored many books. The first to see the light of the day was *Paramahansa-charit* (in Hindi) containing the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was the maiden book on the Master brought out in Hindi, the *lingua franca* of the region.

This was followed by *Jalasaravara her Karkhana*, a two-volume work in Bengali on water works; the *Surya Siddhanta*, an ancient work on Hindu Astronomy, translated into both Bengali and English; English rendering of the *Brihajjata* of Varahamihira (6th cent. A.D.), a work on Hindu Astrology; Bengali and English translations of *Narada Pancharatra*, a devotional work of the Vishnu cult; and English

translation of *Devi-Bhagavatam*, the ancient and voluminous work on the cult of the Divine Mother.

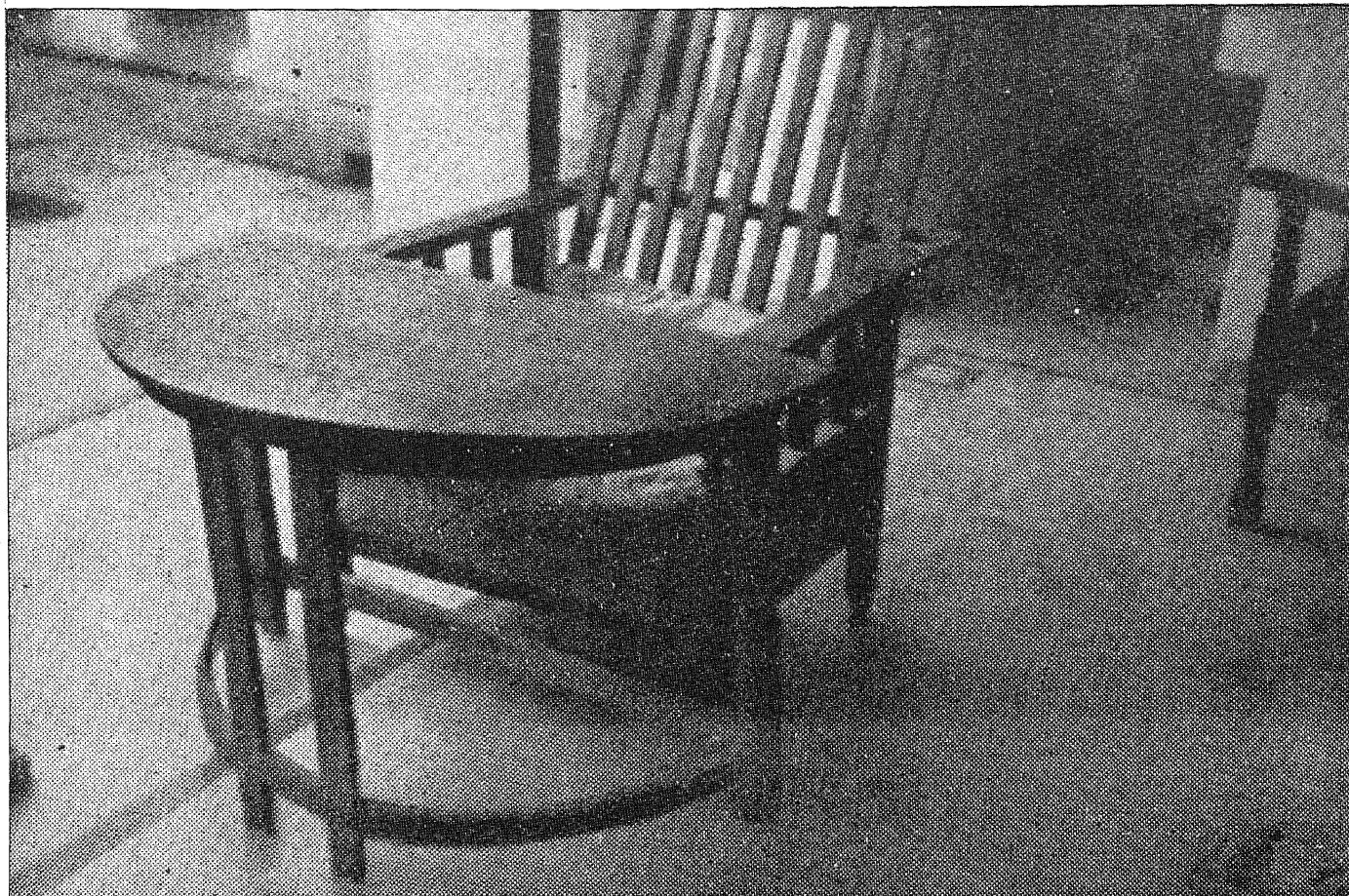
However, the English translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, is perhaps, his *magnum opus*. Though he could not complete it—it has stopped at the eleventh verse of the seventh canto of the sixth book 'Lanka-kanda' or 'Yuddha-kanda'—he worked upon it almost till the end. He used to be in high spiritual moods while engaged in this work and has confessed of his having had visions of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman during that period.

It was during the earlier part of his stay at Allahabad that the two noted scholars—Srish Chandra Vasu and Major B.D. Basu who published several important Sanskrit works translated into English, through their 'Panini Office'—came into close contact with him. It was at their instance that the Swami undertook the translation of the above-mentioned works, many of which were published by them.

One of the regular visitors to the Math at Allahabad was Pandit Madan

Mohan Malaviya, the founder of Banaras Hindu University. He cherished great respect for the Swami whom he considered as a living embodiment of Vedanta.





The table and the chair of Swami Vijnanananda in the back verandah of the Allahabad Math. The Swami who was a scholar and a prolific writer did all his writing work here.





While engaged in the translation of the Ramayana of Valmiki, into English, the Swami used to have visions of Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Mahavir (Hanuman). This picture was printed on the title page of the Ramayana published by him.

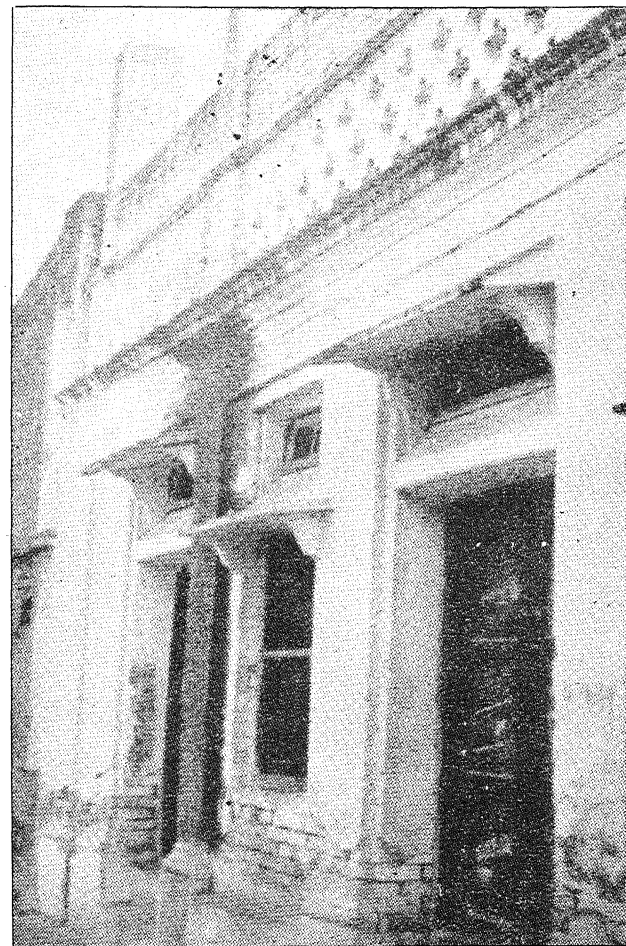


Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946) the famous national leader and founder of the Banaras Hindu University. He was a regular visitor at the Allahabad Math and cherished great respect for the Swami.





Panini Office building (centre) at Allahabad. Its proprietors, Srish Chandra Vasu and Maj. B.D. Basu, who were themselves scholars of repute, were devoted to the Swami and published most of his books.



The Rajpali Press at Muthiganj, The Valmiki Ramayana, with the English translation done by the Swami, was printed here.



## EIGHT

# STEWARDSHIP OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

Reticent by nature and given to the inner life through hard austerities, Swami Vijnanananda had kept himself rather aloof from the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. He had refused the trusteeship of the Ramakrishna Math more than once. But, he was always ready to serve the cause of the Holy Order, whenever the call came. He could not, however, escape from greater responsibilities for long and they had to be thrust upon him. On the demise of Swami Shivananda, the second president of the Ramakrishna Order, in 1934, he had to accept the trusteeship and was chosen the Vice-president. When Swami Akhandananda, the third president, passed away in March 1937, Swami Vijnanananda had to shoulder the burden of the august office of the president.

This opened a new chapter in his life. He now started accepting invitations and touring all over the country (undivided India) initiating earnest seekers into spiritual life. He visited Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Burma also.

It was during this period that the new temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math was completed and inaugurated by him on the 14th January, 1938.



The Swami was elected as the president of the Ramakrishna Order in March 1937. He had been the vice-president from 1934. During the period 1934-38, he travelled widely all over India, Burma and Ceylon, initiating a large number of people, bringing them spiritual solace.

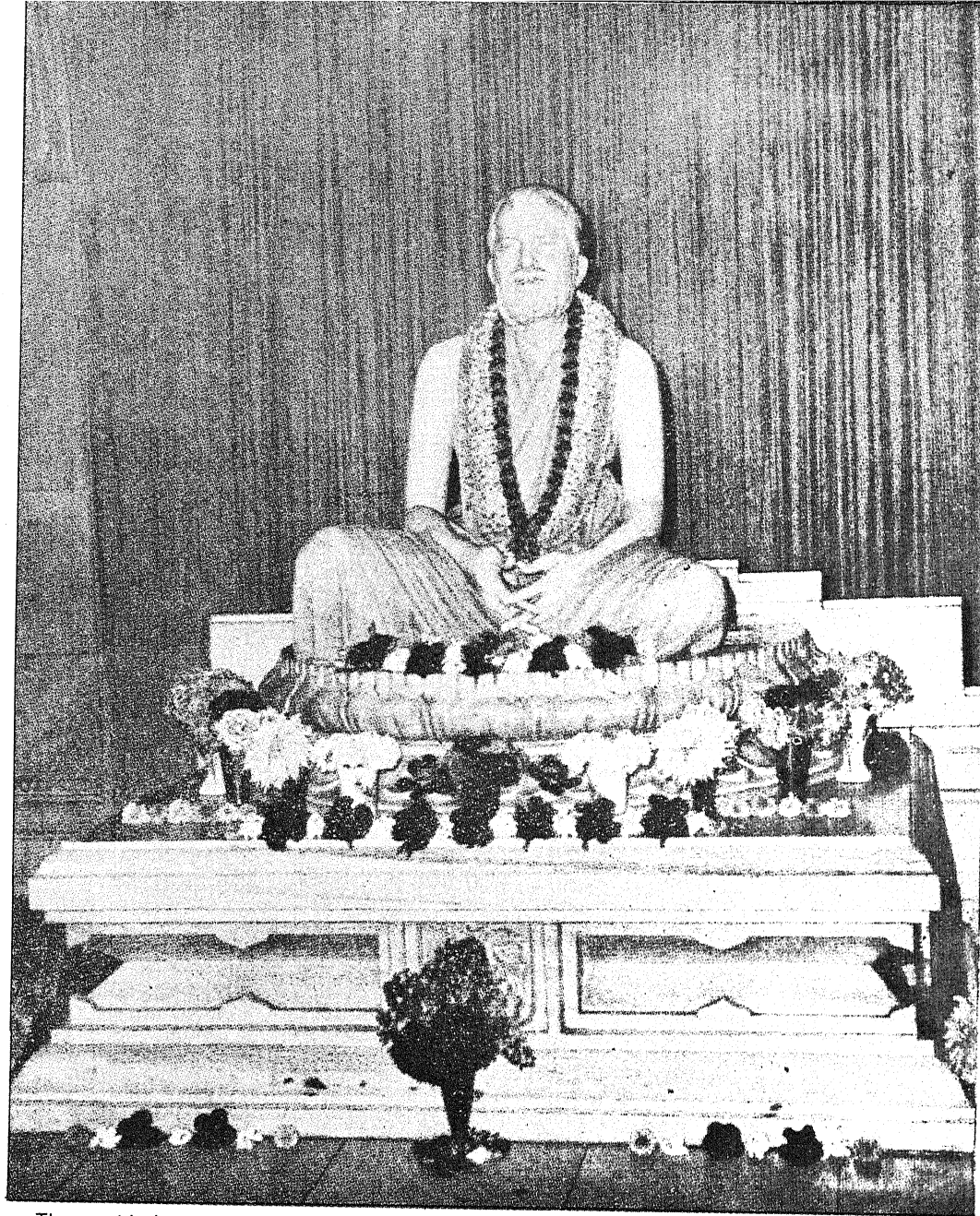


A group photo taken at the Kanpur railway station during his travels.



Giving initiation to a group of devotees at Dinajpur (now in Bangladesh).





The marble image of Sr Ramakrishna at the new temple in the Belur Math campus. The Swami performed the dedication ceremony of the temple and consecrated the image on January 14, 1938.

## NINE

# THE LAST PHASE

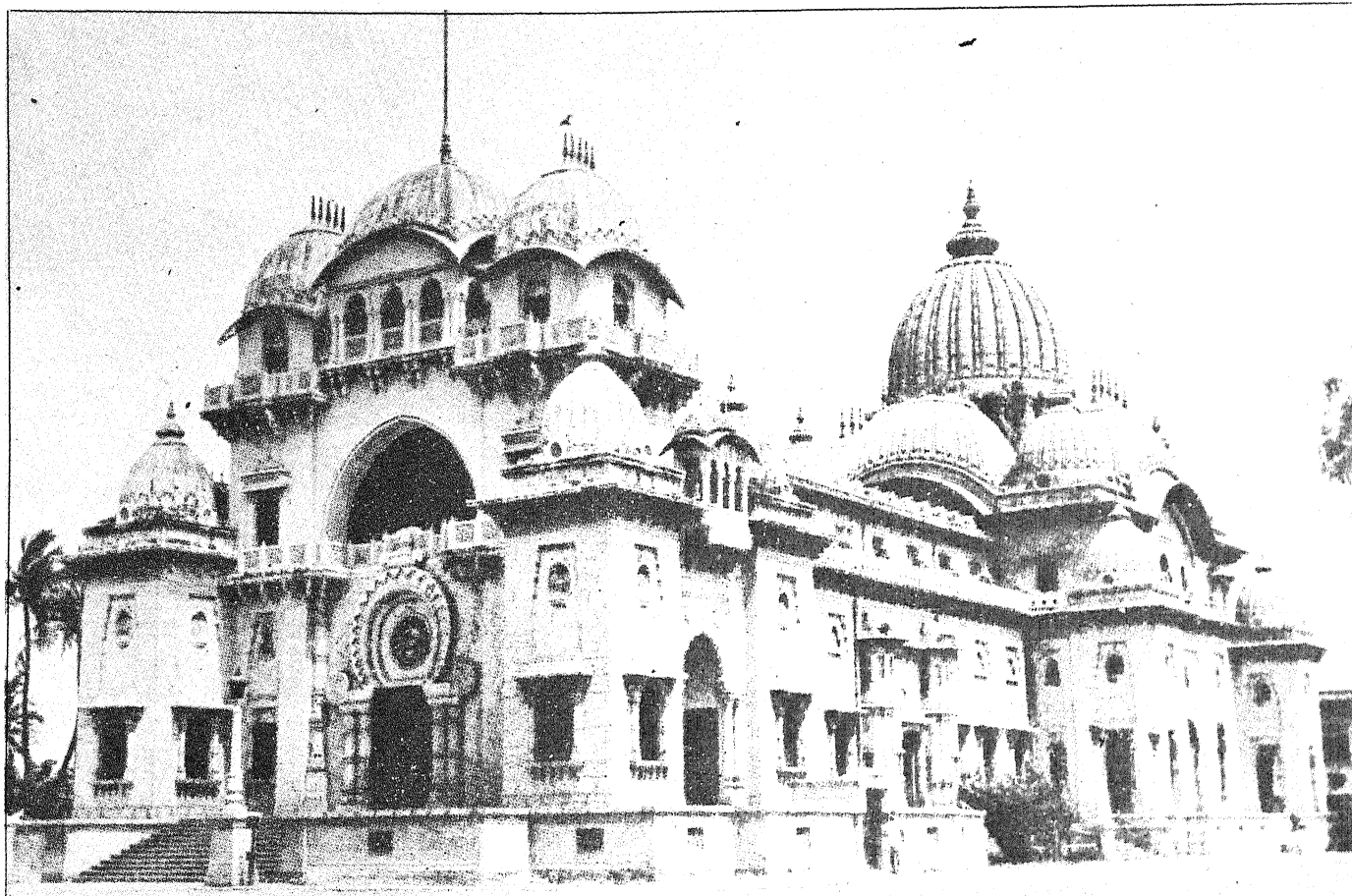
Quite some time before the inauguration of the new temple of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math the Swami had had a premonition of the approaching end. That is why, some time earlier, he had beseeched the trustees of the Belur Math, to hurry up the construction, which was somehow being delayed. He himself had fixed up the date for its inauguration also.

Once the inaugural ceremony was over and the new image of Sri Ramakrishna was installed, he felt relieved of a great burden that had been cast on his shoulders by Swamiji himself.

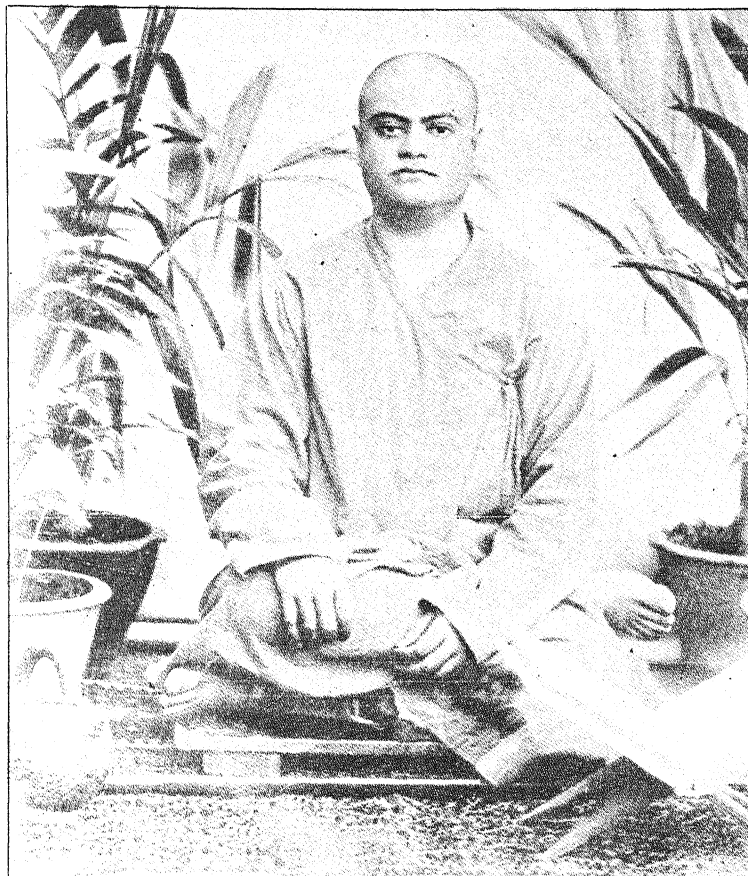
His once strong body had already been shaken by the severe austerities practised over long years. Now, old age also contributed its share to dismantling it. After intense suffering from epidemic dropsy which he bore with stoic equanimity, he left his mortal coil on Monday the 25th April, 1938 at 3.30 p.m.

The body was consigned to the waters of the Triveni Sangam which he had loved, and missed no opportunity to bathe in it, throughout his stay at Allahabad.

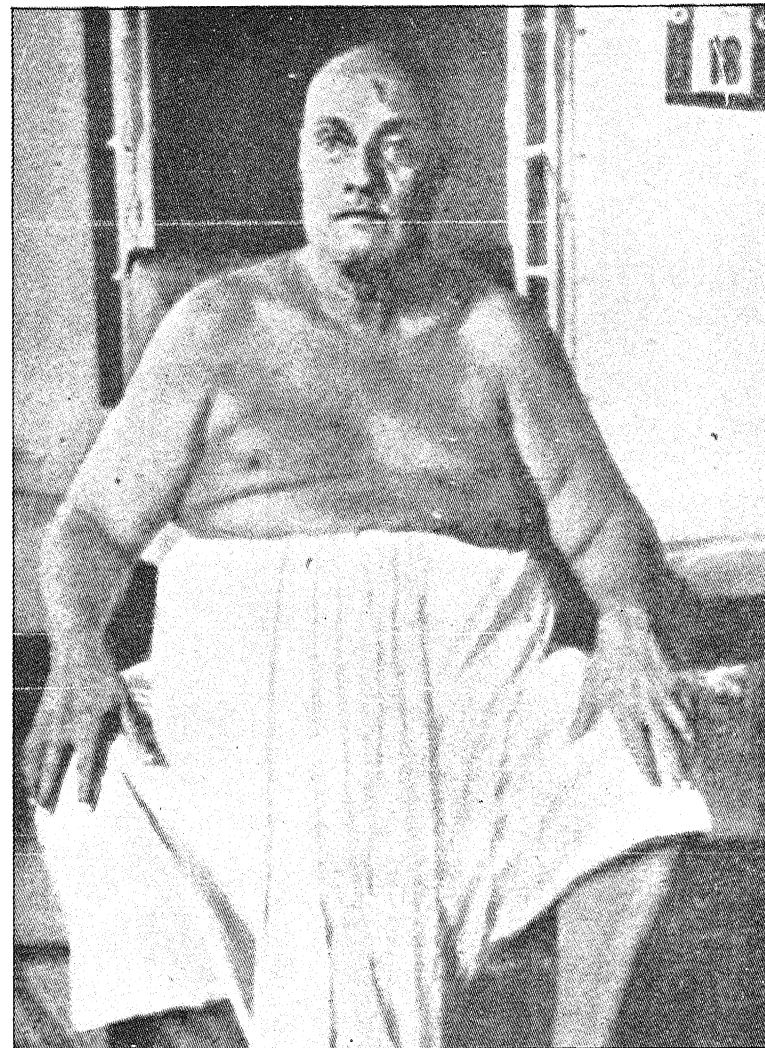
Thus ended a great life which was a model for all spiritual aspirants in general and for the sannyasins in particular.



The new temple of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math campus. It was conceived by Swami Vivekananda himself. Swami Vijnanananda prepared the original plans with the help of a noted Calcutta architect. The foundation stone laid in 1929 by Swami Shivananda, was shifted to its proper position in 1934 by Swami Vijnanananda who took active interest in its construction. It was consecrated on Jan. 14, 1938 by him, thus fulfilling the great desire of the Swamiji.

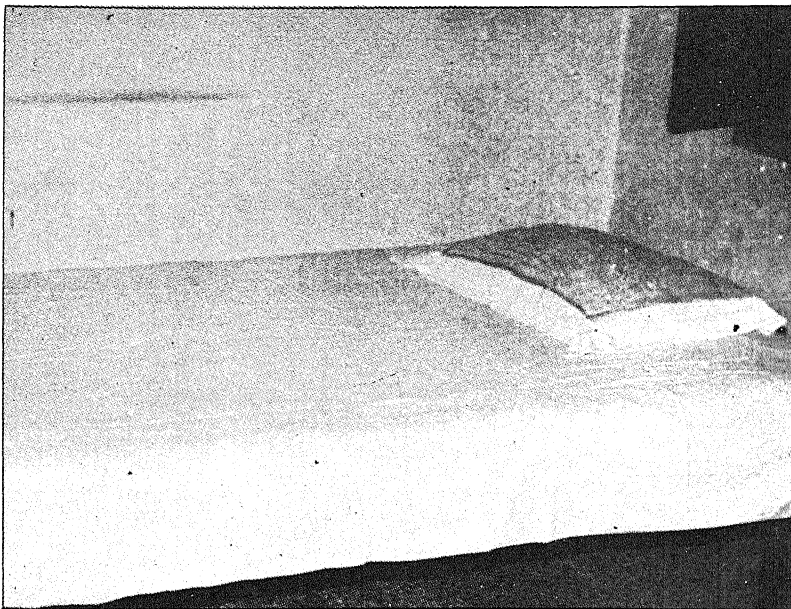


Swami Vivekananda (affectionately called "Swamiji"). He once remarked to Vijnanananda: 'I see distinctly that the Master has made his habitat well in you!' When Swamiji passed away, Swami Vijnanananda who was meditating in the shrine of the Brahmavadin Club at Allahabad, clearly saw him sitting on the lap of the Master.



Swami Vijnanananda. The photo was probably taken during the last days. The ravages wrought by dropsy are discernible on the body.





The room at Allahabad Math where the Swami lived for 28 years and passed away on April 25, 1938. Though this building was rebuilt in 1974 no structural alterations have been made except for very minor ones necessitated by the exigencies of the circumstances.



The Sangam. The Swami's mortal remains were consigned to the waters at the Sangam, of which he was very fond during his life time.

TEN

## VISIONS AND INNER LIFE

Holy people rarely reveal the depths of their inner achievements, like a majestic and deep river, save to a few chosen ones, worthy of their grace. Swami Vijnanananda was a typical example of this. His was a life of continuous living in God. As for visions, he had plenty of them. Once he himself confessed about them. Swami Vivekananda had once remarked: 'I see distinctly that the Master has made his habitat well in you.' Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and the first president of the Ramakrishna Order, once advised his disciples at Belur Math to hurry up and meet 'Hariprasanna Maharaj' who had come there, with these words: 'Go! Hasten

and meet that great soul immediately! He is a man who has realized Brahman, and eludes people. He is oozing atmanana (self-knowledge) all round. But it is very difficult to recognize him—he escapes the notice of men.' What greater tribute can there be than this, from another man of God of a very high order?

Apart from the visions he had had, at the time of the demise of the Master and Swamiji, he used to see them frequently. According to his experiences, Swamiji is still living in his room at the Belur Math, often moving about and even singing to himself! It is interesting to note here that he 'saw' all the late direct disciples of the Master including Swamiji, at the time of

installing the marble image in the new temple at Belur Math. They had 'assembled above' to witness this great event!

Once, while going to Varanasi for supervising the construction work there, the Swami met with an accident and was bed-ridden with high fever. At that time he had the unique experience of seeing Lord Shiva, white all over, who embraced him with his ice-cold body! The Swami recovered from his illness in no time! He had a similar experience of embracing Lord Jagannatha at Puri, the wellknown pilgrim centre of Orissa. His body, the Swami said, was soft like butter!

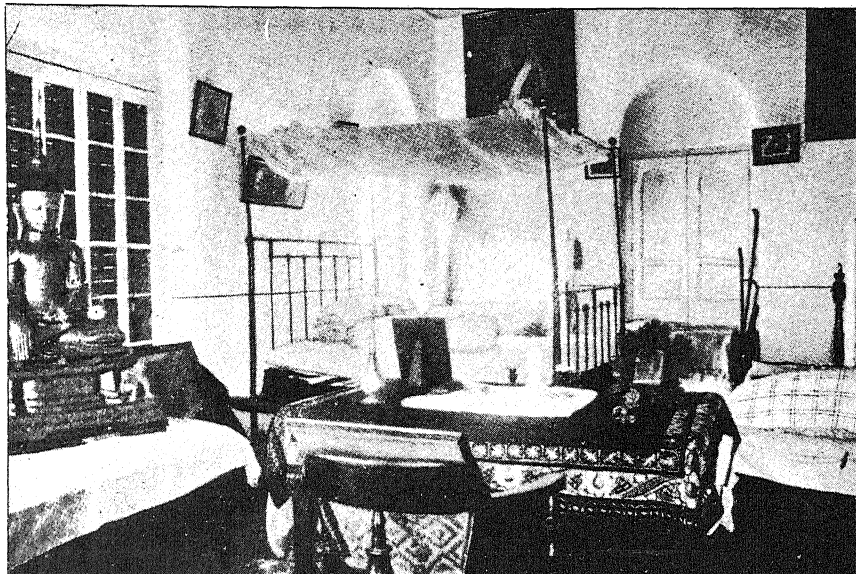
At another time, while looking at an image of Buddha in the museum at Sarnath (near Varanasi) he had a wonderful experience of all-pervading effulgence from which emerged the form of Buddha, infinitely sweet. He had an almost similar experience at Pegu in Burma.

While paying his respects one day, to the Mother Kali at the famous Kalighat Temple of Calcutta, he had a strange experience of the Kundalini (latent spiritual power inherent in everyone, compared to a coiled serpent by works on Yoga) being roused to its fullest.

As long as he lived in Allahabad, he was very particular to bathe in the Triveni Sangam (confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati) in the early hours of morning, before sunrise. At least on two occasions he clearly saw the river goddess as a young girl with three braids of hair.

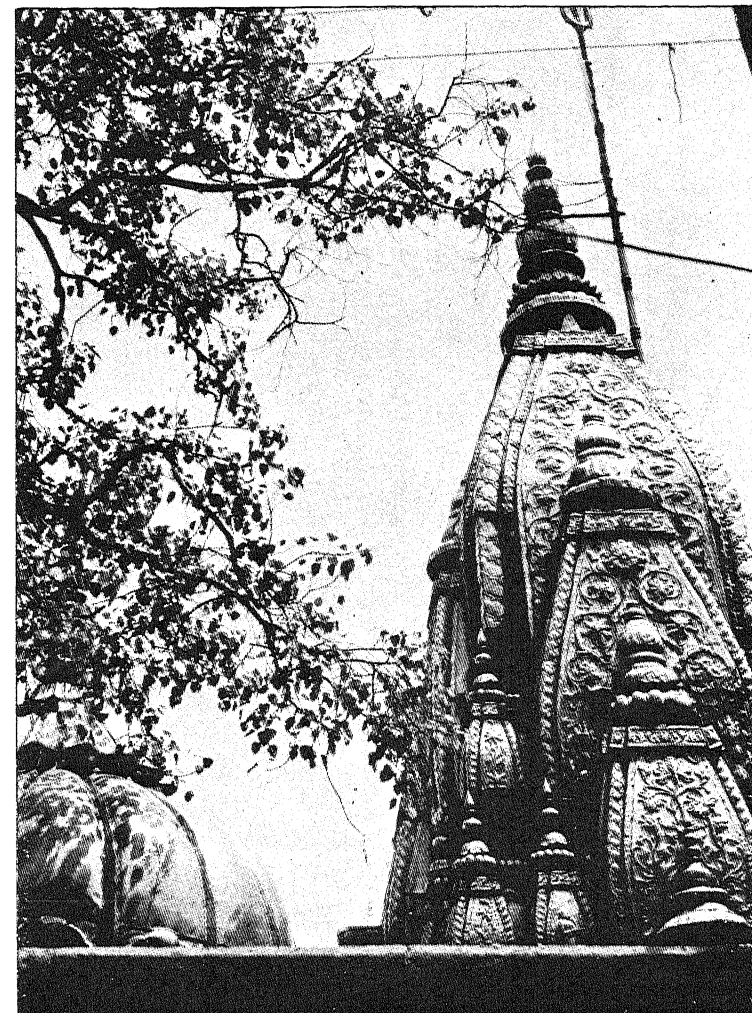
During his last days, he used to repeat the words, 'Mother! Mother!' and would behave like a child in the lap of the mother.

Like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, whatever was revealed about his inner spiritual life through occasional 'slips of tongue' as it were, was infinitesimally small compared to what was concealed.

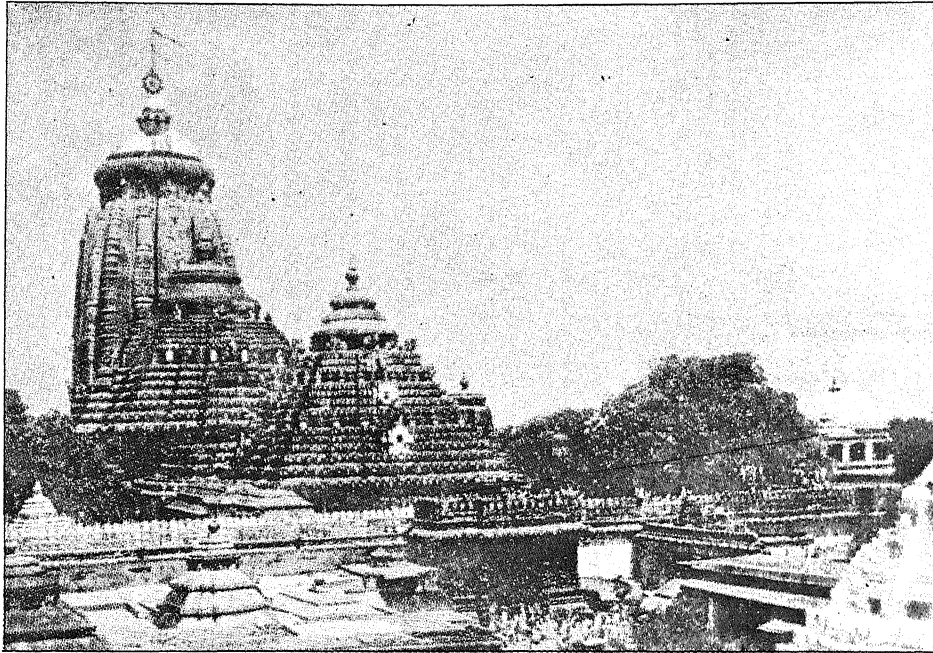


The room of Swami Vivekananda at Belur Math. Swami Vijnanananda once saw Swamiji meditating at midnight. He was surprised to see the room full of resplendence emanating from Swamiji. On another occasion he said that Swamiji still lived in that room.

The temple of Vishwanath at Varanasi.  
Once, when the Swami visited the temple, he did not find the emblem of Shiva at all. Instead, he experienced an all-prevading Existence. On another occasion, when he was ill, he saw the majestic form of Shiva who embraced him. This resulted in his immediate recovery of health.

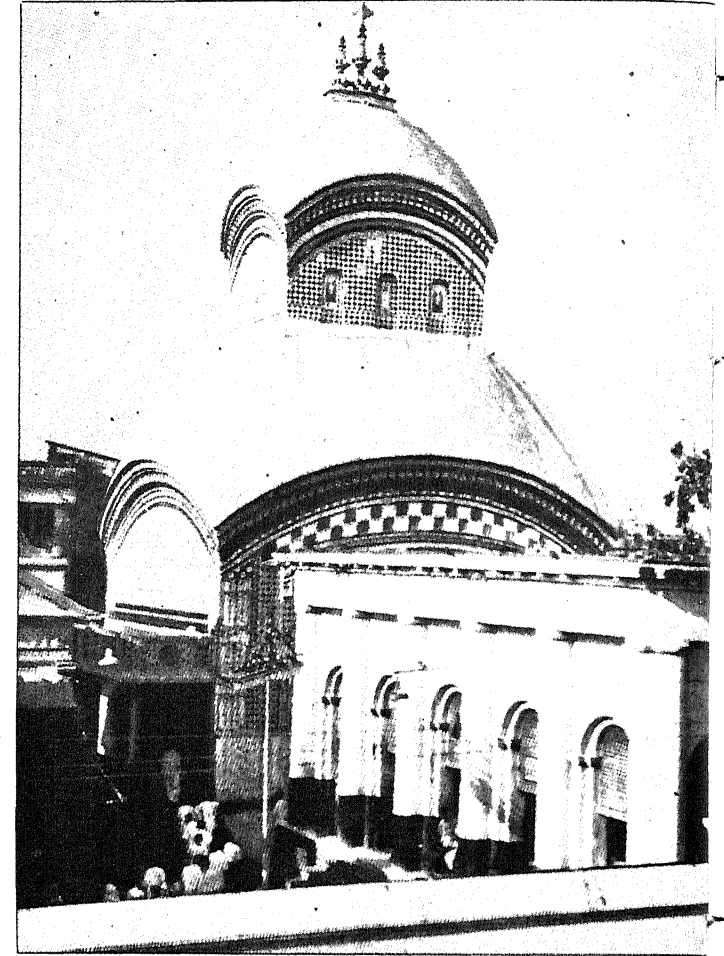


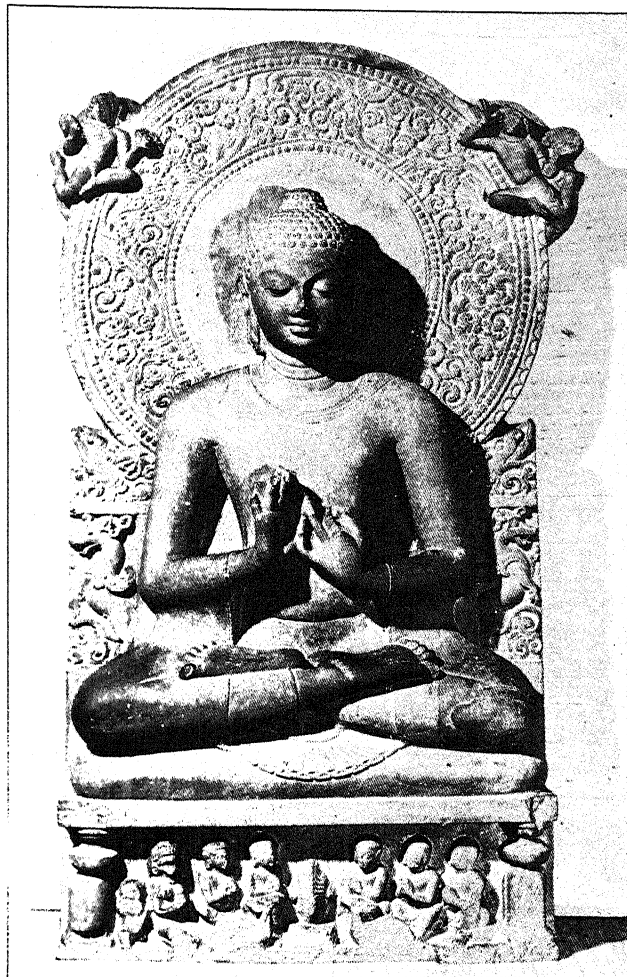




Temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri in Orissa. Once the Swami remarked: 'On entering into the temple, I embraced Lord Jagannath. He seemed soft like a doll of butter.'

The Kalighat temple at Calcutta from which the city itself has derived its name. The Swami, while on a visit to the temple, had a vision of the deity and also experienced full awakening of the Kundalini power.





Goddess Triveni as a little girl. One day at Allahabad, after he had taken a dip at the holy Sangam, the Swami had a vision of Mother Triveni as a beautiful girl who raised her head above the water, showed him her three braids of hair and again disappeared into the water.

◀ The famous image of the Buddha at the Sarnath Museum. The Swami spoke many times about his wonderful vision of Lord Buddha at Sarnath. He experienced an effulgent light in which his own individuality almost faded out. He also saw an exquisitely beautiful Buddha emerging out of that light. The intense bliss of this vision lasted for three days.

## ELEVEN

# A GLIMPSE INTO HIS PERSONALITY

Tall and hefty, Swami Vijnanananda had an imposing personality. His dress was rather odd, even funny. He was conscious of that and would crack jokes upon himself, calling himself a monkey, but of Lord Rama! Contemplative by nature, he wanted to be left alone. The odd dress and manners might well have been a ruse to keep people away. But he was available to the earnest spiritual seekers with whom he would talk freely. Towards the end of his life, he was consumed by an overwhelming compassion to help them.

He was very simple and austere in his personal life. He could suffer any amount of hardship. When ill, he would often give up food and live just on a glass of water. It was a herculian task for his disciples and attendants to make him take medicines and accept their personal service.

He had a keen intellect and a scholarly disposition. However he detested any dry scholarship which he considered as a hindrance to the inner life.

Since he had been an engineer and had distinguished himself in that work, he was often called upon by the Order to shoulder that responsibility. That was how he built the Vivekananda Temple at Belur Math and some buildings of the hospital complex of the Ramakrishna Mission both at Varanasi and at Kankhal (Hardwar). His role in the construction of the Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math was considerable. Once he plunged into the work, he could be a tireless worker.

Sri Ramakrishna had specifically instructed him to live a life of strict celibacy. This he took as a great command of the Master and followed it up assiduously. Once Swami Shivananda, the second president of the Ramakrishna Order and his brother disciple remarked jokingly: 'Into Peshan's monastery—('Peshan' was the shortened form of "Hariprasanna", endearingly used by Swamiji and other brother disciples)—at Allahabad, not even a female fly has the permit to enter.' But he was not a woman hater. Far from it. He considered them as manifestations of the Divine Mother.

Though a man of great spiritual power accumulated over years of sadhana, he was reticent to give initiation to people. However, in later life, he relented and started giving initiation more freely. But he would always say that he did not 'give initiation' but was only 'introducing' them to the Master who would do the rest!

He had his lighter side too. Then he would be full of wit and humour and the listeners would roar with laughter.

He was innocent and frank like a child, but his plain-speaking would not give offence to anyone. Rather people would be awed and charmed into respecting him.

He was a rare combination of austerity and compassion, scholarship and meditation, activism and passivity,

profound wisdom and childlike innocence, all these virtues being born out of that single basic trait: unquestioning devotion to the Master and perfect obedience to his commands.

Hardly fifty years have rolled by since he left this world. Even at this distance of time it is difficult to believe that such a man—holy to the core, but most unobtrusive—walked this earth!

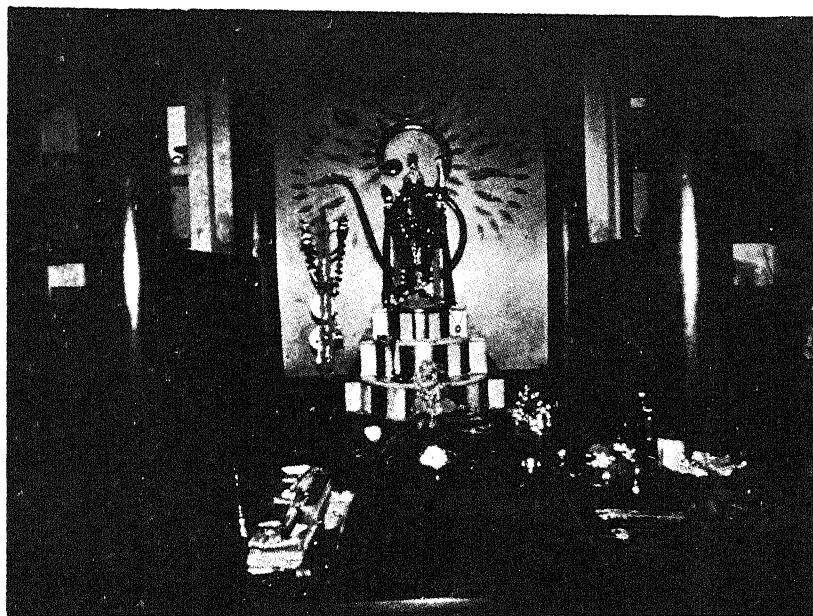




The Swami was tall, wellbuilt and had an imposing personality.



The Swami in a jovial mood. His dress was rather odd, often attracting the attention of others. However, he could share their amusement at his own cost.



The Kalibari or the temple of Mother Kali at Muthiganj. It is situated just behind the Allahabad Math. The shrine is said to be about 125 years old. The Swami was fond of visiting this temple. It is said that the selection of the present site of the Allahabad Math was influenced by the proximity to the Kalibari.



Memorial temple of Swami Vivekananda at the Belur Math campus, raised on the spot where his body was cremated. This was built by the Swami.



A painting of the 'Saptarshis' or 'Seven Sages'. While in Belur Math for constructing the memorial temple of Swami Vivekananda, the Swami got this picture painted by a famous artist. It now adorns the Swami's shrine at the Allahabad Math.



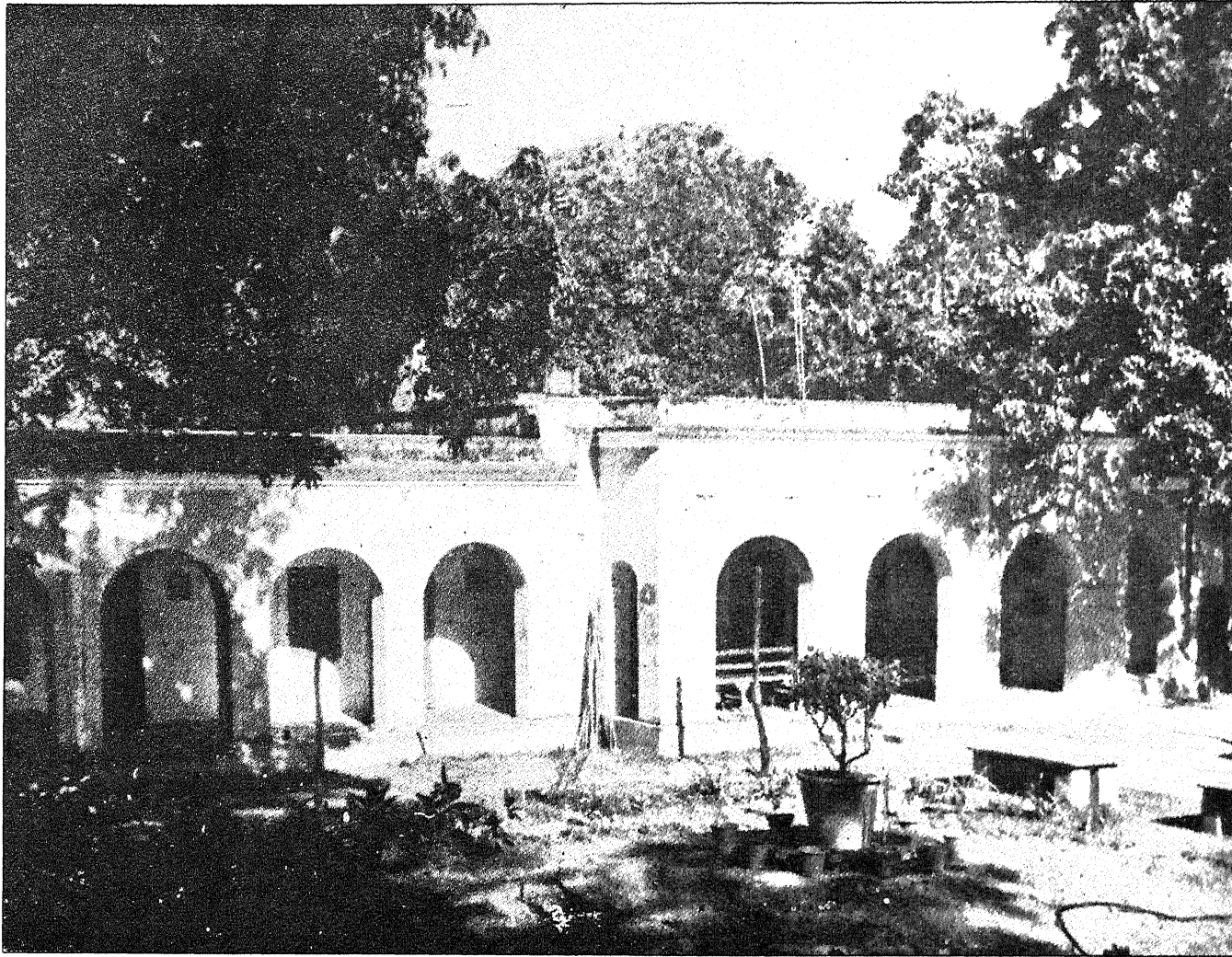


One of the main buildings at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service at Varanasi, built by the Swami.



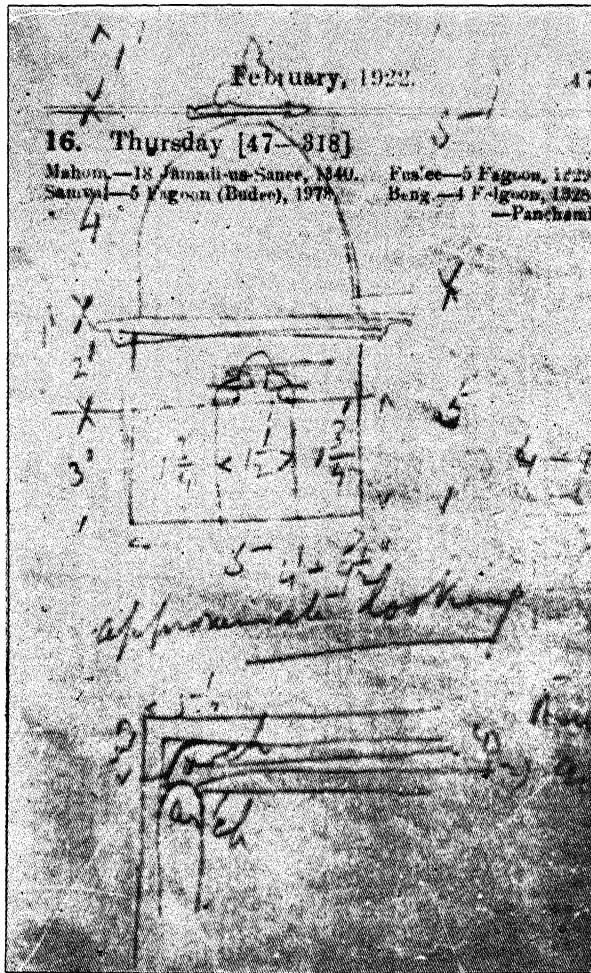
The Room at the R.K.M. Home of Service, Varanasi, where the Swami used to stay whenever he went to supervise over the constructions.



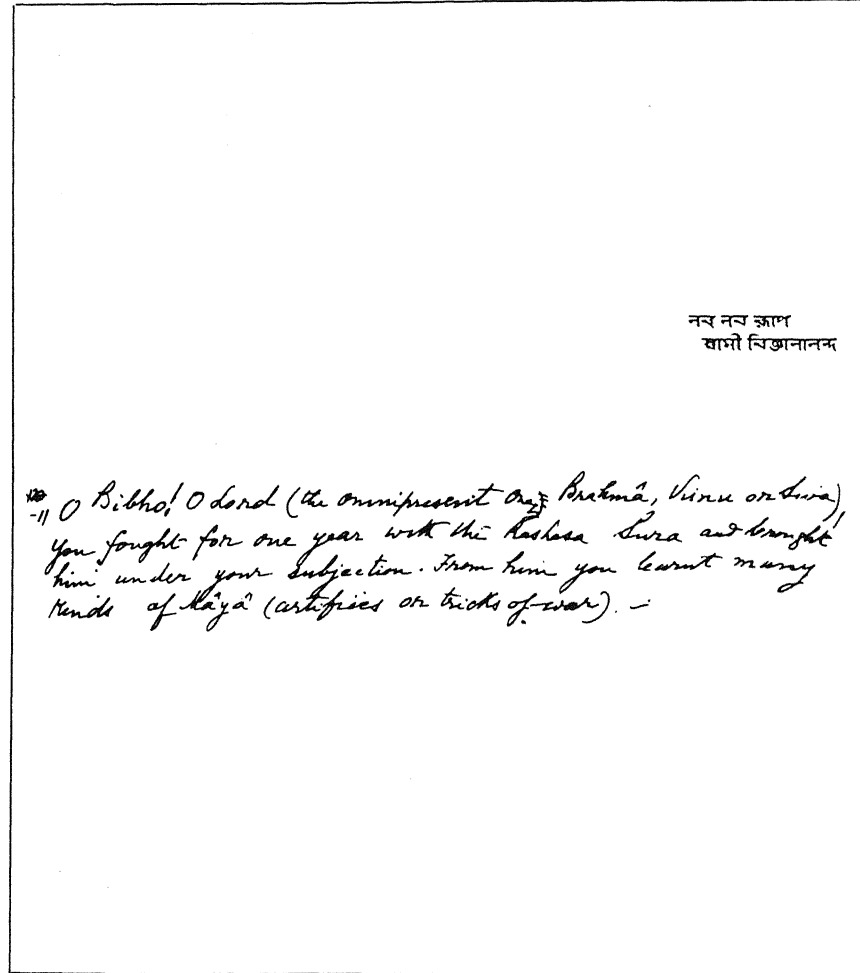


Two of the original buildings at the Ramakrishna Mission  
Sevashrama, Kankhal (Hardwar, Uttar Pradesh) built by the Swami.





A leaf from the diary of the Swami.



Fascimile of the Swami's handwriting —  
Valmiki Ramayana.

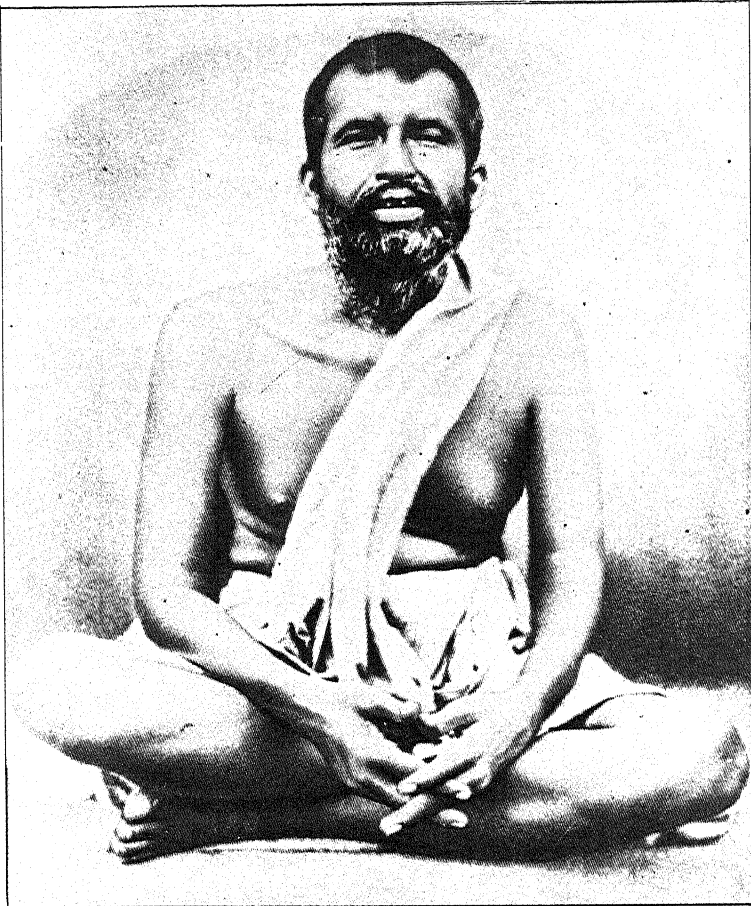
## TWELVE

# TEACHINGS

Spiritual truths can be experienced but not fully expressed. Words fail and ordinary mind gets stalled in the realm of spiritual experience. But the great saints and mystics, due to their infinite compassion for the suffering humankind, speak 'out of the fulness of their heart' thereby bringing solace and peace. But their life itself is the best teaching, since their teachings are all demonstrated there. The life of Swami Vijnanananda was no exception to this.

The Swami has not left behind him much by way of his personal teaching. Out of this meagre stock gleaned from the diaries of his disciples, a few sayings have been culled out and presented here so that they be of use to the earnest spiritual seekers.





#### ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA

'The Master's photograph reveals an image of transcendence of all the six chakras (centres of consciousness) . . . I see many things in it and so I talk about them.'

'He came to the world to save people. Go on repeating his name and peace will be yours. All the sins of the body and the mind are washed away if one looks at him for some time . . . But don't approach him with selfish desires.'

'To invoke the Master means imbibing some of his virtues. When a man thinks intensely about someone else, he comes to acquire some of the virtues of the latter.'

#### ON THE HOLY MOTHER SRI SARADA DEVI

'You should look upon the Master and the Holy Mother as inseparable . . . You should pray to the Holy Mother for strength without which nothing can be done. To the Master you should pray for reverence and devotion.'

'Invoke the Mother. Everything will be all right then. The Master on the other hand, is very strict. He is not moved until everything is done punctiliously. The Mother is very kind.'

'Previously I was of course inclined to worship God as the Father . . . Now, I invoke the Mother, morning and evening, and feel as if I am a small child on the Mother's lap.'





ON SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

'It was the Dusserah day. The monastery was then in the house of Nilambar Mukherji. We were staying with Swamiji there. Swamiji, in those days, remained on a very high spiritual plane. As I touched his feet in obeisance that day, I received a shock like that of electricity.'

'Swamiji was a man of very strict principles. Any deviation would at once invite his scolding.'

'Undoubtedly none else could comprehend the Master better than Swamiji. It was through him that the Master had all his work done. There can be only one Swamiji.'

#### MIND AND SELF-CONTROL

'You should pray to the Mother to make you pure in heart. She will set things right. . . . When the purity of heart is attained, you will have a taste of spiritual joy. That joy is incomparable.'

'God has fashioned this mind in such way that it will always be subservient to you. If the mind were disobedient by nature, we would not have been responsible for any of our actions. . . . You are the complete master of your mind and you can shape it as you like.'

'Love and discrimination have to be combined. For the realization of God, both are necessary.'





#### TRUTH AND FAITH

'God is Truth, and to realize Him you have to be completely truthful in your words and deeds. . . There should be complete harmony between preaching and practice.'

'Faith is the foundation of spiritual life. Too much of argument is of no avail. . . Book-learning is of no avail for God-realization.'

'Our ancient sages had the knowledge of the past, present and future. . . Behind what they said was their wonderful life.'

#### JAPA, MEDITATION AND PRAYER

To the question whether it was absolutely essential for a spiritual aspirant to get initiated, Vijnananandaji replied: 'Yes, it is necessary.'

'The Bijamantra (seed-word) is very powerful. The seed words like Hrim, Srim, Krim etc., have undoubtedly special powers.'

'Japa means uttering His name. You should do japa, irrespective of the state of your mind.'

'You should keep up the practice of doing japa and meditation regularly everyday. That helps the mind to become steady gradually.'

'The Master said that meditation on his portrait would be enough.'





## WORK AND SERVICE TO THE COUNTRY

'My only advice to you all is to forsake idleness. An idle brain is the devil's workshop. You must do everything with concentration and diligence.'

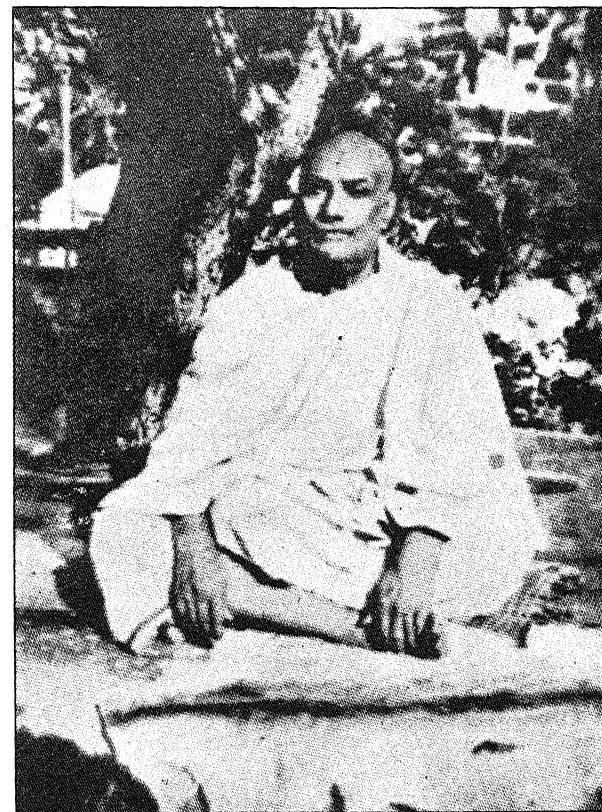
'The Western nations make good use of their time and therein lies the secret of their strength in this world. If you too make good use of your time, you would achieve great results.'

'How many empires of this world have disappeared into the limbo of oblivion!

Our country will share the same fate unless our people come forward to serve the land, each according to his ability. The country belongs to you all, not to any particular individual.'

'Organized work is also worship. In unity is manifested the power of God. Our progress depends on the effort of every individual. Every Indian will have to qualify himself to become a leader of men—which means that he is to be a man of character.'

'It is the duty of everyone to donate a certain portion of his earned income for public welfare. For, that is the law of nature. You will get back whatever you give.'

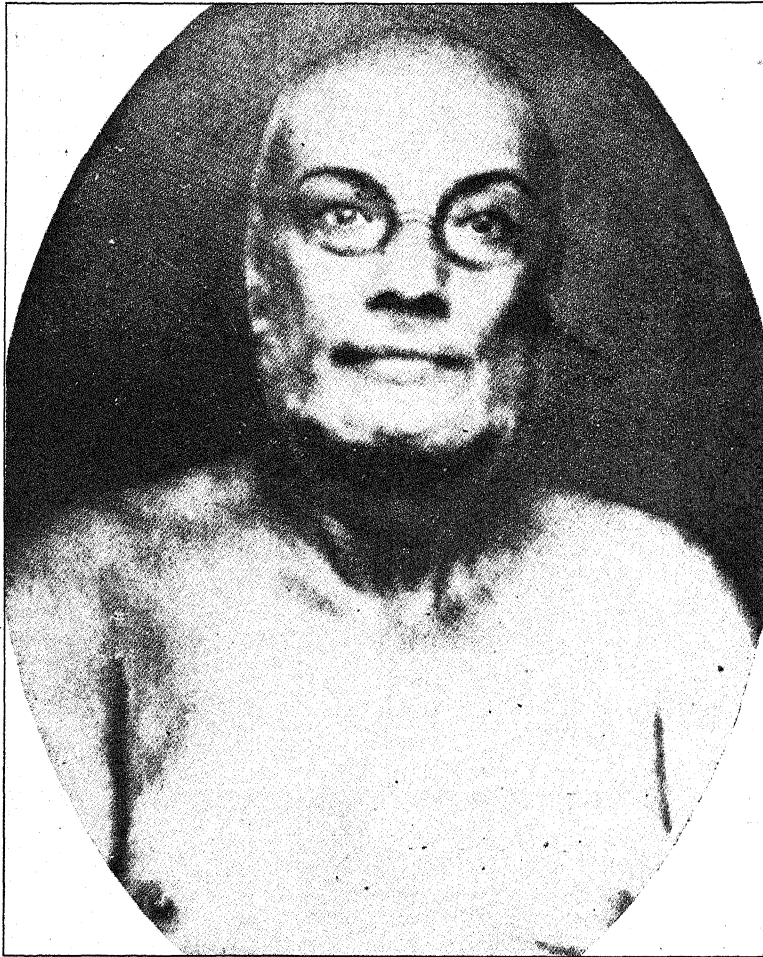


## DESIRE AND RENUNCIATION

'Why should you pray to Him for paltry things like wordly riches? Pray to Him that He may give you strength to become pure and unselfish, the power to realize the Truth.'

'The cycle of birth and death continues because we give it a new impetus in every birth. But if we stop giving it a new impetus, that is, if we overcome our desires, we will have no further births.'





#### MISCELLANEOUS

'Gods and sages do come to bathe at Triveni. If they do not come, the place can no longer be considered as a holy place of pilgrimage.'

'Our scriptures have not prescribed anything useless. We have only to understand their real import. With our superficial knowledge we may fail to grasp many things; but everything becomes clear when the mind is purified.'

'The test of genuineness of a vision is that the exhilaration of it continues for a long time and produces joy and enlightenment.'

## EPILOGUE

It is nearly half-a-century since the Swami departed from this world. But the seed of his work at Allahabad has gradually grown into a tree of modest proportions. Scope of service has expanded. Activities have multiplied.

The small homeopathy dispensary which was serving a sizeable number of patients needed more space. Hence a more commodious building was built in 1972. This building had been designed to house an allopathy section also. The same was started in 1981. It has now several departments including a pathology laboratory and specialists' consultancy service.

A small library with a reading room was started in 1940. in the annexure of the old Math building that had been added during the Swami's time. This was later shifted to its own building in 1956. An auditorium was added on the first floor of this building, the very next year. The library with its general and children's sections, as also the reading room is now one of the important public libraries of the city.

The original Math building where the Swami had spent a long 28 years was tottering. Hence it was demolished and rebuilt on almost the same pattern in 1974. This new building now houses

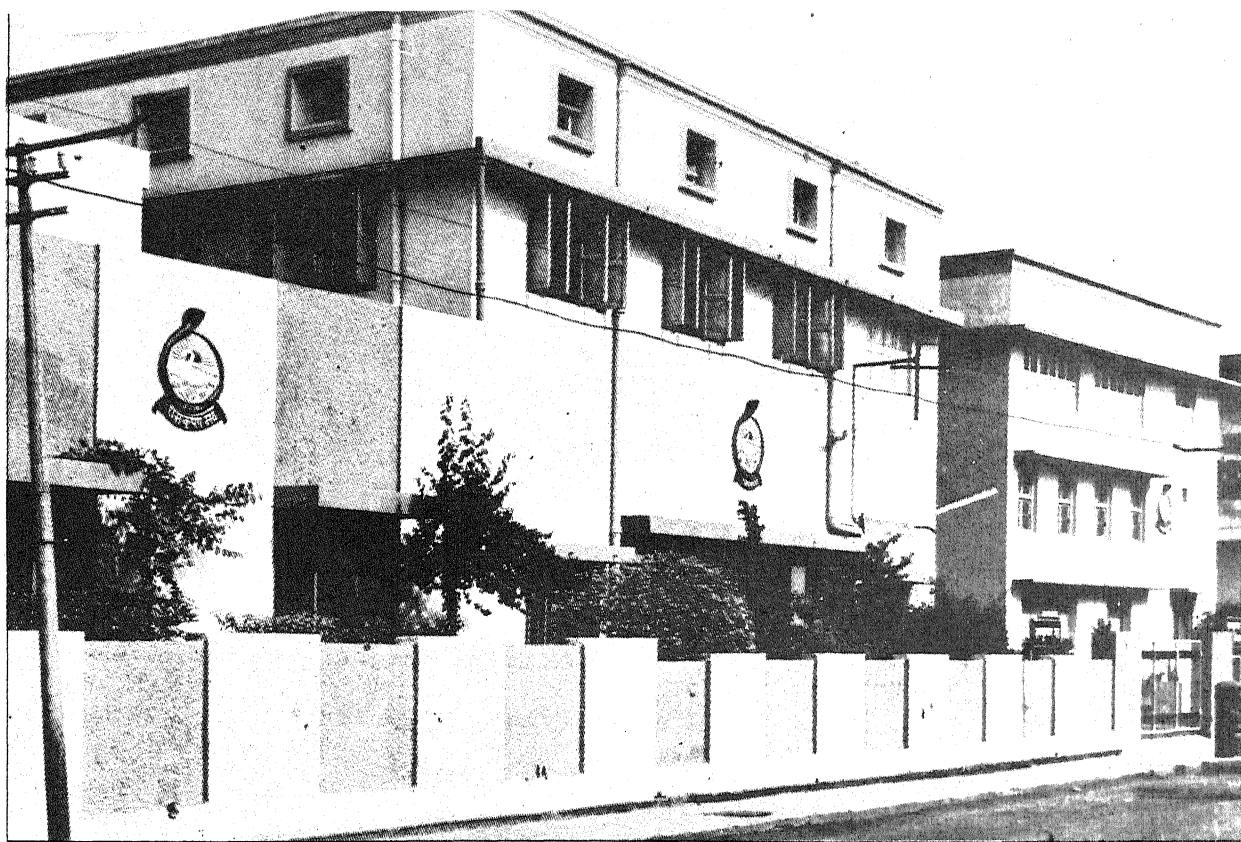
the Swami's belongings in one of its rooms, which, formerly, used to be the shrine.

A shrine and a more spacious prayer hall were added on the first floor of the Math annexure in 1960.

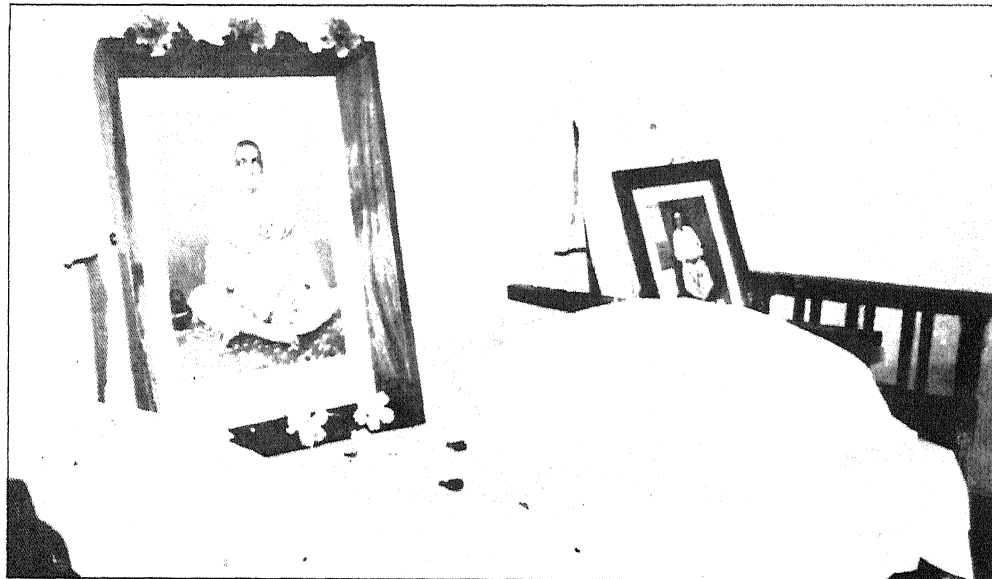
A separate guest house was built in 1963 as a Centenary Memorial to Swami Vivekananda.

Every year, a camp is being organized on the banks of the Triveni during the Magh Mela session (Jan.—Feb.) where, apart from providing religio-cultural services, a free medical camp is also run round the clock for three to four weeks.

The Allahabad centre of the Ramakrishna Order is thus carrying on its religio-cultural and socio-medical activities, following in the footsteps of its illustrious founder, Swami Vijnanananda.



The main Math building at Allahabad. The building on the left side was rebuilt in 1974 after pulling down the old structure and on almost the same pattern. The central building houses the book-sales and office sections on the ground floor and the prayer hall and shrine on the first floor. The last building on the right side is the library (ground floor) and auditorium (first floor).



Present shrine room of Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj.

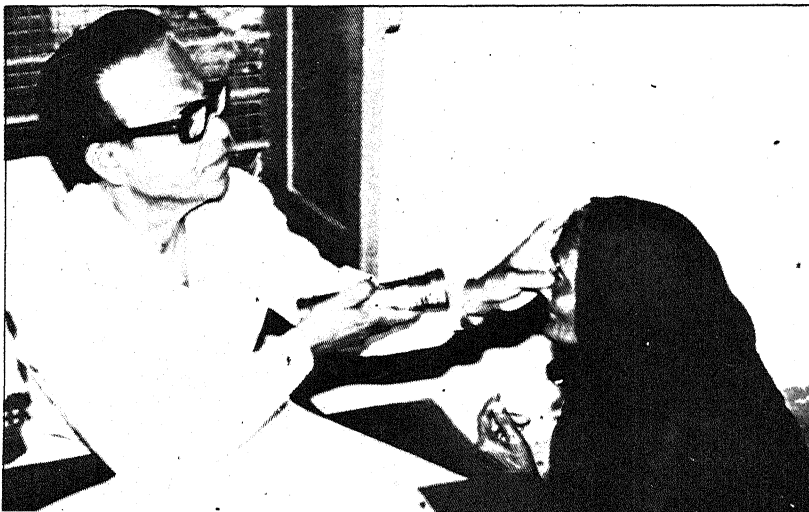
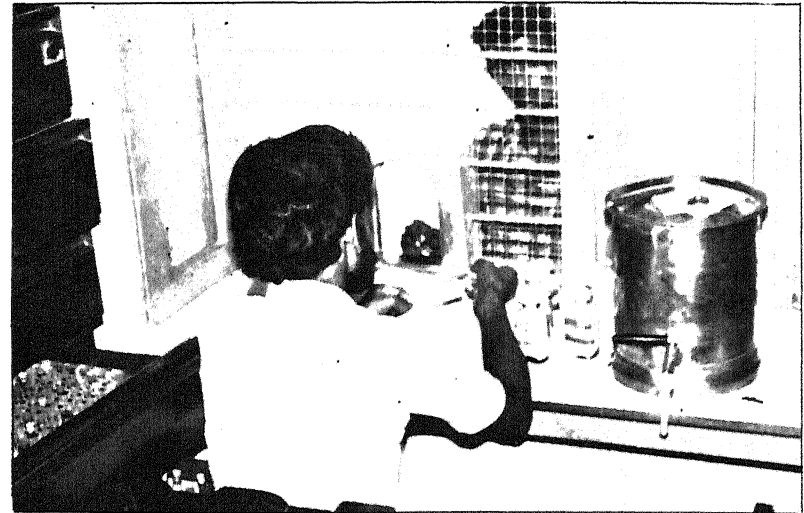


A general view of the shrine.

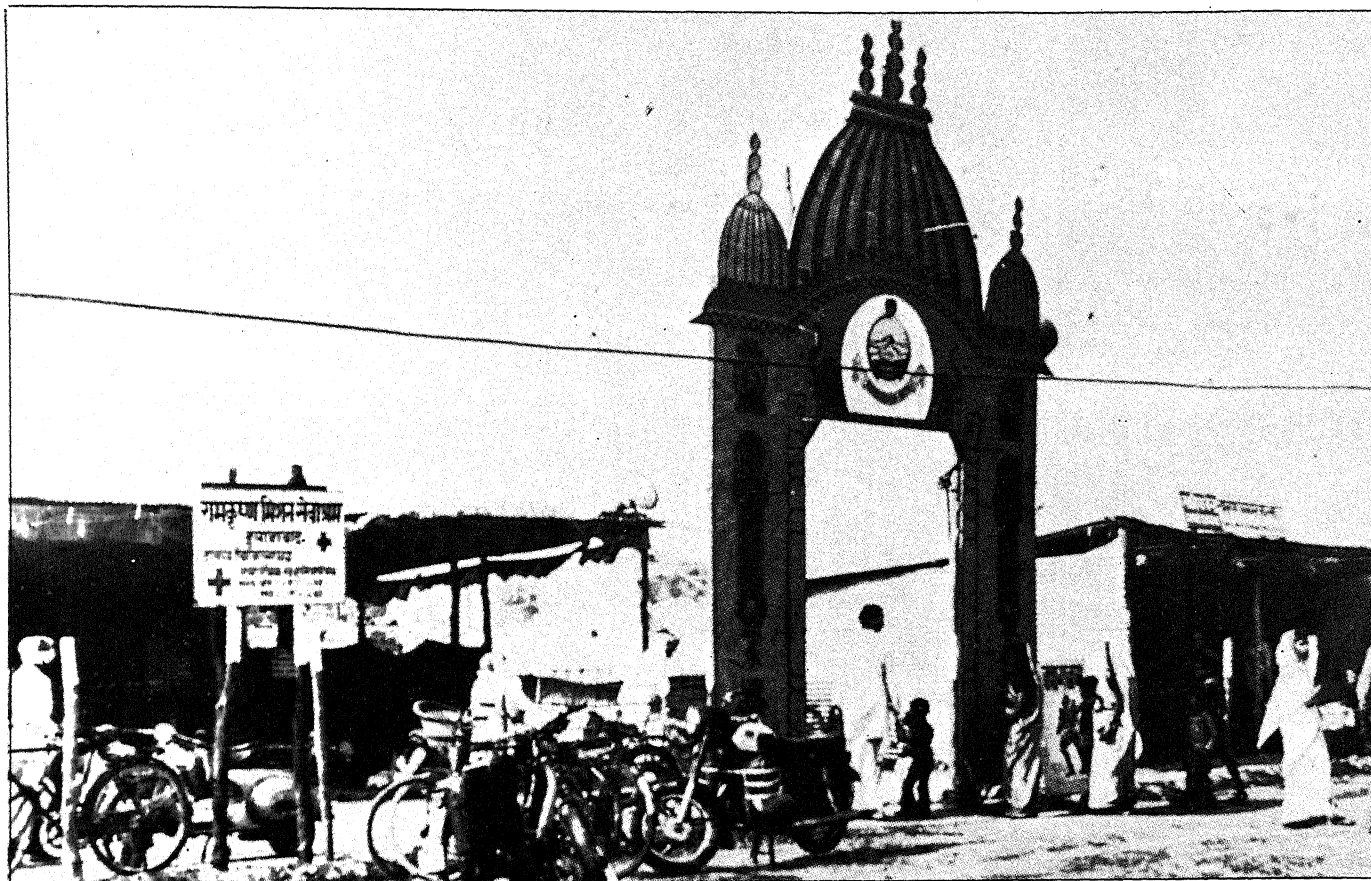
The dispensary building from outside.  
It houses both the Homeopathy and  
the Allopathy sections.







An inside view of the dispensary during the working hours.



A general view of the Magh Mela camp conducted every year on the banks of the Triveni.

# SWAMI VIJNANANANDA

## A Chronological Table

1868	Birth—October 30.	1910	Established Ramakrishna Math at Muthiganj (Allahabad) and shifted in October.		
1881	Probable year of seeing Sri Ramakrishna for the first time.	1913	Building the memorial temple for Swami Vivekananda at Belur Math campus.		
1882	Passing out of the Hare School.	1914	Visit of Swami Brahmananda to the Allahabad Math.		
1883	First meeting with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar.	1918	The great vision at Sarnath.		
1885	Passed F.A. examination from the St. Xavier's College and shifted to Bankipore, near Patna.	1931	Visit to South India including Ceylon.		
1887	Graduated from the Patna College—B.A. degree. Shifted to Poona for engineering studies.	1932	Tour of Western India.		
1892	Took the L.C.E. degree from the Science College, Poona.	1934	Elected as the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order. Re-lays the foundation for the new temple of Sri Ramakrishna.	1936	Visit to Rangoon, Burma.
1893	Joined government service as district engineer at Ghazipur in the United Provinces (now, Uttar Pradesh).	1935	Extensive tours in Northern and Eastern India.	1937	Elected as the President of the Ramakrishna Order—March.
1896	Resigned the job and joined the Ramakrishna Order at its Alambazar Math.		Laying the foundation stone for an Ashrama at Kanpur—October 27.	1938	Inauguration of the new temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math—January 14.
1898	Construction work at the new Belur Math campus.				Mahasamadhi—April 25 at 3.30 p.m.
1899	Taking sannyasa—May 9.				
1900	Arrival at Allahabad and settling down at the Brahmavadin Club, then housed in a rented building.				
1904	Maiden publication—Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in Hindi.				