

Swami Shivamayananda



Ramakrishna Math

Belur Math

Howrah 711202

Published by:
Swami Smaranananda
Ramakrishna Math
Belur Math, Howrah 711202

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23rd June 2021

Price: ₹ 20/-

Printed in India at:
Soumen Traders Syndicate
9/3. K. P. Kumar Street
Bally, Howrah - 711201

SWAMI SHIVAMAYANANDA

Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, was known as Ranendranath Sen in his pre-monastic days. He was born on Thursday, the 20th December 1934, in the town of Supaul in Bihar. Their ancestors belonged to Mulghar village in the Khulna division of Bangladesh. Ranendra's paternal grandfather was a government employee and this brought him to Supaul. It is said that he built a Kali temple in Supaul.

Ranendranath's father, Jitendranath Sen, was a physician by profession (in fact, the family traced its ancestry to the lineage of *Dhanvantari*-physicians). Jitendranath's medical services covered the town of Supaul and the adjoining areas. In a family of 11 siblings (6 boys and 5 girls), Ranendra was the 9th child (the 5th of the male children). Ranendra's grandfather bought a residence in Benares called *Chandra Villa* (in the vicinity of *Agastya Kund*). Jitendranath and his family settled with his father at Varanasi in 1941, where Charubala Devi, his wife, continued to stay with her children, even after Jitendranath passed away in 1945.

Ranendra began his academic career in the local Education Academy and moved to the well-known *Chintamani Mukherjee Anglo-Bengali Collegiate School* in Benares. It was from here that in 1952, he passed the High School exam. In 1954 he passed the Intermediate (higher secondary) exam from the Central Hindu College, Kamachha (Varanasi), as a science student. He completed his graduation studies in Science-Mathematics from Benares Hindu University (BHU) in 1956 and his postgraduation course in Mathematics in 1959 from the same university passing in the first division.

He was always a brilliant student. In the intermediate class he got *distinction* marks in Bangla, stood second in his bachelors-degree studies and capped it all with a mathematics-gold-medal in his university studies. His brilliance deeply impressed even his teachers. The world-renowned astrophysicist Dr. Jayant Narlikar and Ranen were co-students at the BHU. Dr. Vishnu Vasudev Narlikar (Jayant's father), who was then the Head of the Department of Mathematics at BHU, was so impressed on seeing Ranen's postgraduate mathematics mark-sheet that he asked him to enrol in the mathematics research wing immediately! Subsequently also in the Probationers Training Centre (PTC) at Belur Math (when he was *brahmachari* Ranen), the acharyas were happy to have such a brilliant *brahmachari* student. Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Sangha, was as Assistant Secretary then and would teach the Upanishads to PTC *brahmacharins*. He was known for his deep scholarship and wonderful intellect. He remarked in later days: "Do you people know Ranen? He was one of my brilliant students; I gave him 100% marks in the Katha Upanishad exam!"

Ranen was living in the *Chandra Villa* house with his mother and younger brother, Rabindranath. His immediate elder brother, Nirendranath, worked for

the railways at Gorakhpur (in Uttar Pradesh) and would often come to Benares to see his two younger brothers. There was a very strong bond especially between Ranen and Niren.

One of his father's sisters (*pishi-maa* in Bangla), called Monee *pishi-maa*, stayed in Purnea (Bihar). She frequently visited the *Chandra Villa* near *Agastya Kund*. She was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. From the age of 15 itself Ranen had been her companion during her visits to the Advaita Ashrama at Varanasi (a branch of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math). Swami Apurvananda, a disciple of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and also a *sevak* of Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda), was the head of the Advaita Ashrama then. Many senior sadhus of the Ramakrishna Sangha who were disciples of either the Holy Mother, or Swami Brahmananda or Mahapurush Maharaj stayed there during those days. He also had the good fortune to interact with Swami Arupanandaji (Rashbehari Maharaj, a *sevak* of the Holy Mother) who compiled the book *Sri Sri Mayer Katha* (in Bangla).

Gradually his visits to the Advaita Ashrama started increasing. On holidays he would almost always come to meet these illumined souls and listen to their words of wisdom. Swami Dharmeshananda (Dhiren Maharaj, a disciple of Mahapurush Maharaj, who had the good fortune to associate closely with Master Mahashay 'M') was then the librarian at Advaita Ashrama. This library had a rich collection of invaluable books. Dhiren Maharaj slowly became very affectionate towards the young Ranen and would entrust him with light library work. Many moth-eaten old books had just been carefully cleaned; Ranen was entrusted with the task of recording their titles in a new register since he had very good handwriting. Ranen would also sometimes go and see Swami Jnanadananda (Neelakantha Maharaj, who was Thakur's pujari at Belur Math and had done puja on the consecration day of the Sri Ramakrishna temple), another senior swami, and unabashedly say that he was hungry and the swami always gave him some sweets or fruits.

Swami Arupanandaji was impressed with this young boy endowed with good *samskaras*. Ranen was then engaged in his postgraduate studies at BHU and would do the library work at the ashrama in the afternoons. Seeing him working with full concentration in the library, Arupanandaji one day asked him (in *Bangla* in his typical East Bengal accent): "Do you attend to your studies also or do you just do this library-work?" With a soft smile, Ranen replied that he also attended to his course studies. Another question: Did you eat *Thakur's Prasad* (food offered to Sri Ramakrishna)? Yes, I did, was the answer from Ranen. Ok then, eat this betel-roll (*paan*). Ranen was taken aback because elders would always discourage youngsters from eating *paan*. Seeing Ranen's hesitation, the swami persisted, saying 'eat, eat'! And then he explained that the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi always gave her children a betel-roll after meals (*Prasad*) and said that she felt very happy to see them eat *paan* after food. In later life Swami Shivamayanandaji cultivated this habit of chewing *paan* after having *Prasad*.

Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj, then one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Sangha, had decided that he would spend the rest of his life at Varanasi. He was accordingly staying at the Home of Service where he would give *mantra diksha* (spiritual initiation) to aspirants. Swami Arupanandaji asked Ranen to get *mantra diksha* from Swami Vishuddhanandaji. Ranen asked Rashbehari Maharaj in turn: Is this swami a *brahmajna* (knower of Brahman)? Arupanandaji in his usual East Bengal style told him point blank: “Keep aside all these enquiries! What you will get here is genuine, unadulterated stuff! (*ekhane dikhaa-tee nilay, bhe-jaal paabee naa*)”. And so it came about that on 26 October 1956, Ranen was blessed with *mantra diksha* by Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj.

One particular incident from the life of Rashbehari Maharaj had especially impressed Ranen. He once saw Swami Arupanandaji Maharaj sitting on a cot in the shade of a fruit tree on the Advaita Ashrama campus, listening to the radio. Young Ranen said to Maharaj: “You are a sadhu. Instead of utilising your time for *japa* and meditation, you are listening to the radio!” Unabashed, Arupanandaji replied: “I am not doing anything secretly!” The scene left an indelible impression on the young Ranen and this trait of complete openness was noticeable in the life of Shivamayanandaji Maharaj himself.

Even as a student of the BHU, Ranen had become a volunteer at the Advaita Ashrama. During the Durga Puja he would stay at the ashrama for the entire duration of the puja’s 5-6 days. He would also stay overnight in the ashrama during Kali Puja, helping in the puja jobs. Thus from 1952 itself he had the good fortune of associating closely with Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj. For several years he had observed Maharaj remaining absorbed in deep meditation when the puja was in progress. He was charmed with such singular attention to *japa-dhyana*.

The seed of renunciation started sprouting in Ranen’s mind around this time. After writing the MA exam he went to Lucknow with his brother to their elder sister’s house. Their mother was not at the *Chandra Villa* home then. On the way back, Ranen got down from the train at Varanasi and his younger brother journeyed further to reach the Shilpa Mandir of Saradapitha at Belur Math for studies.

Ranen had now decided that he would join the Ramakrishna Order and accordingly conveyed this intention to his guru. Swami Vishuddhanandaji asked him to report to Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj (both were Holy Mother’s disciples) at the Sargachhi ashrama, who was then leading a retired life. He wrote a letter to his *gurubhai* and handed it to Ranen asking him to go to Belur Math. Just on the day Ranen had decided to leave the *Charu Villa*, his elder brother Niren arrived there. Though taken aback a little initially, Ranen boarded a Howrah-bound train early next morning and, after visiting Dakshineswar first, he came to Belur Math. With him was the 5th volume of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-Kathamrita* (which he had obtained surreptitiously from his brother!). He had asked his elder brother: “By losing which volume of the

Kathamrita would you feel the least pain?” A strange question indeed! After some thinking, the brother said that loss of the 5th volume would perhaps be the least painful. And so that night Ranen took away this volume from his brother’s possessions. From Belur Math Ranen wrote a postcard to his mother conveying his decision to join the Ramakrishna Order.

Ranen arrived at Belur Math on 11 July 1959. He was allowed to stay in the *Visitors’ Room*. He would do odd jobs at the Math: dressing vegetables, cleaning Swamiji’s temple, etc. Soon, he was asked to go to Sargachhi. Thus on 29 July 1959, Ranen arrived at Sargachhi ashrama. A senior swami at Belur Math reminisced: One day in the month of June or July, I went to see Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj at Sargachhi. There I saw a good-looking young lad dressed in typical Bengali attire of (white) dhoti and (blue) shirt staying at the *Vinod Kutir*. I asked Premesh Maharaj about this boy. Premeshanandaji explained that Jiten (Swami Vishuddhanandaji’s pre-monastic name) has sent this talented boy from Kashi (Benares) saying: “Maharaj, this boy is well educated, well mannered and of good character. Please keep him with you. He will serve you through which he will get both his food (daily requirements) and medicine (spiritual guidance)”. Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj (then as Br. Sanatan) was attending to all the needs of Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj. Calling Swami Sukhadanandaji Maharaj, the then secretary of Sargachhi ashrama, Premesh Maharaj said to him: “Entrust this lad with school work. He will prove to be an asset”. Swami Sukhadanandaji was naturally very glad to hear this. From that time onwards, up to August 1967 (barring the 2 years at the Probationers’ centre at Belur Math and the 1 year for completing the BT course—Bachelor of Teaching then, now called B.Ed.), Ranen served the multipurpose high school at Sargachhi, including as its headmaster. During this period he also became conversant with school administration work, puja, etc. Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj would often enquire about the welfare of his disciple, Ranen.

During this time he had the good fortune to serve Premesh Maharaj in an indirect way. Premesh Maharaj was then quite old and was suffering from old-age related ailments. There was need for an assistant who would stay through the night. Two or three young boys would do this by turns. Ranen also started reporting here for vigil after finishing his school work. When, after finishing his duration of the seva, one of the assistants would retire for rest, Ranen would go to wake up the second sevak to report for work.

When he was at Sargachhi, Br. Ranen was involved in an important project as a part of Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj’s centenary celebrations. Many of those who had the blessing of associating with this favourite *gurubhai* of Swami Vivekananda were then still living. Br. Ranen set about collecting their hitherto unpublished reminiscences and details of Akhandanandaji’s life, and gave these a book form titled *Anjali* (literally—offering). This concern for preserving tradition was a habit with him. He maintained several files containing details of the Sangha’s earlier sadhus and elderly ones still living. It

was his earnest intention to print a book from this material and he had entrusted one or two monastics to attend to this work even up to his last days.

Ranen Maharaj knew each one of his students inside out. Students on their part knew him not just as their teacher but even outside class hours they could approach him whenever they wanted, as he was their friend, philosopher and guide. Even after he left Sargachhi, whenever the opportunity came, he would visit this place. The sadhus at the centre always welcomed him joyfully and many past students and teachers would also come and meet him. Maharaj too made detailed enquiries of past acquaintances. His popularity was a result of his outstanding monastic qualities, utter unselfishness, lack of ego and genuine interest in people.

Students remember him as an ideal teacher. One of his Sargachhi students recalls: “Whatever little English I know today is the contribution of Ranen Maharaj. He taught us English grammar in classes 6 and 7. How wonderfully he taught us the game of word-making cannot be described in words. I have myself tried to pass it on to my own students, but only in vain. Where is that genuine unselfish love in us for our students? He taught us English translation in class 7. Two specific sentences I remember to this day: (i) *Taakaa-e taakaa aane, shanti aante paare naa* = Money begets money, but not peace of mind; and (ii) *Nijer sum-pad nasht koraar adhikaar kaaroar naayee* = One should not abuse one’s wealth”.

Maharaj had unbounded enthusiasm for rural development activities. And among these works cleaning of village drains appealed to him most. One of his students recollects: “It was once decided to clean the drain skirting our school at Sargachhi and running straight towards Vaninathpur. The Ranen Maharaj that I saw on that occasion, I can never forget. He had folded his dhoti over his knees, and with a spade in hand worked like one possessed! The drain was overflowing with garbage, the droppings of animals (cats, dogs, cows, sheep, horses...), human faeces, and what not. Maharaj was totally unperturbed and did not say anything to anybody. Most of us were cleaning a bit here and a bit there, but Maharaj, with sweat dripping from his fair face, was leading from the front with upraised spade. That scene opened a new vista in my life. From that day onwards to this very day I have never allowed anyone to clean my toilet, be it in rented premises or living quarters provided by my employer or elsewhere. Today I understand what is meant by Leadership Quality!”

As advised by the authorities at Belur Math, Ranen Maharaj studied during 1960-61 at the Saradapitha’s Shikshan Mandir and got the BT (Bachelor of Teaching = Bachelor of Education today) degree from the Calcutta University, passing in the first division. Subsequently he spent the two years from 1965-67 at the Probationers’ Training Centre at Belur Math. He had the good fortune to have stalwarts of the Order like Swamis Gambhiranandaji, Bhuteshanandaji, Tattwanandaji, Bodhatmanandaji, and others as acharyas at the Training Centre. During his Belur Math stay he could also interact with senior Swamis like Madhavanandaji, Dayanandaji, Yatishwaranandaji, Omkaranandaji,

Vireshwaranandaji and Ranganathanandaji. Needless to say, these two years helped him to absorb the uniqueness of Belur Math.

To take part in Swamiji's Centenary Celebrations (1964), monks of the Order from various parts of the world had assembled at Belur Math. Charismatic monks of the Sangha like Swamis Nikhilanandaji, Prabhavanandaji, Sambuddhanandaji were also present. Swami Vireshwaranandaji was then the General Secretary. Swami Madhavanandaji, President of the Order was then bedridden after an operation. Swami Yatishwaranandaji, the only Vice-President of the Order at that time, presided over the Monks' Conference. Swami Shivamayanandaji remembered the words uttered by Swami Yatishwaranandaji to his very end. He sometimes reminisced thus: "Several swamis spoke on that occasion. All were in a light and fun-filled mood until Swami Yatishwaranandaji rose to speak. He spoke only 10 or 15 sentences but that changed the whole atmosphere. He cautioned sadhus who went about proclaiming that they had spent 40 or 50 years in the Order. He asked them to introspect and find out how much they were advancing spiritually. That is the only thing that matters. His words landed like whiplashes on the assembly". These words and that scene were embedded in Shivamayanandaji's memory.

Ranen's *brahmacharya diksha* was postponed by a year to 1968 owing to health problems. After this he was known for a year as Br. Pareshachaitanya. The following year, 1969, Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj conferred Sannyasa vows on him with the name Swami Shivamayananda.

Ranen returned to Sargachhi after the 2-year study-sum-orientation stint at Belur Math, but in 1967 he was brought as Vice-Principal of the *Vidyamandir* College at Belur Math (Saradapitha). Later, during 1969-70, he was the Acting-Principal of the *Vidyamandir*. During the Naxalite disturbance, in 1970, after Swami Prabhanandaji, Swami Shivamayanandaji assumed charge of the *Vidyamandir* as Principal. He was Principal here for two periods: 1970-72 and 1974-80.

A senior monk of the Order who was a student at *Vidyamandir* when Maharaj was Principal, reminisces: "Maharaj did not smile much. He always appeared to be serious. But when we became acquainted with him, his endearing smile won us over. He could lecture very well in Hindi. He taught us Integral Calculus in the 1st year and also gave the Spiritual Heritage class. He was very popular with the teaching staff. He also conversed freely in the Teachers' Common Room. He knew the name of every student in the *Vidyamandir* and of course the names of all the teachers. He always kept in touch with teachers and his past students until his very end". Some of these teachers took *mantra diksha* from Maharaj subsequently.

In 1972 Shivamayanandaji left *Vidyamandir* to assume charge as Headmaster of the Mission's Secondary School at Katihar; in fact he was the first monastic headmaster here. The school was affiliated to the West Bengal Secondary Board of Education (WBSBE). During his tenure, a student of the school was ranked among the first 10 successful candidates in the *Madhyamik* exams.

Even though Maharaj spent a short time at Katihar, he was popular with the students, teachers, guardians and local devotees. Students liked his mathematics classes immensely. When he visited Katihar after many years, his old acquaintances remembered him well enough. During that short period he participated in all ashrama activities, not restricting his services to the school alone. Very soon he was to come back to the *Vidyamandir* at Belur Math.

Swami Shivamayanandaji was again brought back to *Vidyamandir* as Principal in 1974. Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj (the present President of the Sangha) was made Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha in 1976.

One of the earlier teachers of the *Vidyamandir* has this to say: “A sharp distinction was noticed in the pre-Katihar Ranen Maharaj and the post-Katihar one. The earlier Ranen Maharaj was assertive, sharp-tongued and was not very social. But the subsequent Ranen Maharaj was totally different. As Principal, he walked the same path as his predecessor Swami Prabhanandaji and mixed freely with all—the teaching staff, the illiterate non-teaching staff, the hostel wardens, all of them. He empathised with them sharing their joys and sorrows and developed Team Spirit. He opened his heart to the Teachers’ Council and tried his best to improve the financial condition of the *Vidyamandir*. He developed strong personal bonds with many people”. He breathed fresh life into the almost defunct alumni association and, with the help of some contemporary teachers, helped organise meetings and get-togethers of the association. Past students thus keep contact with one another to this date.

Earlier when he left Sargachhi in 1967 he had written on a sheet of paper titled: **My work here** (*aamee jaa jaa kortaam*) and left it in the bottom drawer of his table. Many years later, when he received feedback on this, he realised that he had indeed left these guidelines to help the young inexperienced monk who was chosen to do this job at Sargachhi. One incident reveals the principles that guided him. Once a junior monk asked him how one could hold on to spiritual values when administering a college. Shivamayanandaji in reply sent the monk a few points written on a piece of paper, a few of which were: (i) Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice (Shakespeare). (ii) When one comes to a new place or changed environment, usually for the first few years the so-called defects of the existing system already developed there over the years for decades will strike you first. Patiently study the system with an open mind and you will discover many good points in it. (iii) Cultivate great patience and forbearance. Remember Thakur’s teaching: *Sha, Sha, Sha* (forbear, forbear, forbear). *Je shoy shay roi, je naa shoy, shay naash hoi*. “If you forbear, you survive; if you do not, you perish.”

Putting the *Vidyamandir* on a firm financial footing during his tenure may be said to be one of his many significant contributions. Owing to his perseverance various workshops and sections started thriving at *Vidyamandir*.

Though strong as the thunderbolt, Maharaj yet possessed a mother’s loving, gentle heart. An employee of one of the hostels of the *Vidyamandir* had

committed some blunder for which he had to be dismissed from employment. Maharaj gave him 3 days' time to leave the hostel. At the same time Maharaj knew that he had a family to support. Before the person moved out, Maharaj was silently trying to find him some alternative employment outside.

Maharaj possessed indomitable courage and was always sympathetic towards students. He handled the Naxalite disturbance with an uncompromising attitude and strong mind. Five students of the Vidyamandir were identified as leaders of the Naxal movement. It was decided to expel these students from the college by giving them Transfer Certificates (TC). This notwithstanding Maharaj saw to it that they got admission elsewhere so that their studies would not be hampered.

A brilliant student was once admitted to *Vidyamandir* for the English Hons course. This fellow would finish his daily studies very early every night and then go to disturb other students. It was also known that he was trying to spread Naxalite propaganda among the students here. The hostel warden could not control this boy, and the matter was reported to Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, who found a wonderful solution. He told the boy that since his English was excellent and Maharaj was good at mathematics, it would be good for the boy to come and stay in the same block with Maharaj (which was a little away from the hostel) and teach Maharaj English daily. The student was thus saved from going astray and the other hostel students also could go about their studies undisturbed.

Another remarkable incident deserves mention. The first period in the college had just started that day. Maharaj was sitting in his office. He was informed that a gang from outside had abducted a student from the *Vidyamandir* campus and fled to the Nilambar Babu's garden house (a little away from the southern gate of Belur Math). As soon as he heard this, Maharaj left the office and started running all alone towards the garden house. Others from the college also started following him. Making a few enquiries here and there he reached the garden house and saw that a group of people had encircled the boy. When they saw Maharaj, the abductors realised that they had picked up the wrong boy and so they allowed Maharaj to take him back. Shivamayanandaji thus brought the still-in-shock and shivering boy back to *Vidyamandir*. Without sparing a thought for his own safety, Maharaj saved the boy's life that day.

Under Shivamayanandaji's able leadership, *Vidyamandir* regained the charm it was known for. But soon after it started functioning smoothly, he was sent as the Principal of the Vivekananda Centenary College at Rahara. The teachers of this college were involved in an agitation when Maharaj was sent there, and it was to tackle this agitation that Shivamayanandaji was sent to Rahara. One swami had commented in this connection: "Ranen Maharaj is a trouble-shooter. Wherever there is discontent, agitation and turmoil there Ranen always is". Before he left *Vidyamandir*, he had transformed it to a secure and sound institution from all points of view.

It was in 1980 that Maharaj left *Vidyamandir* and took up the Rahara responsibility, which perhaps was the most challenging phase of his life. He had to tackle here a group of teachers whose agitation had the backing of political leaders and who did not hesitate to inflict bodily harm even. Some of these teachers, at the prompting of political leaders, encouraged some students and their guardians too to create a variety of problems in the functioning of the college. Shivamayanandaji's strong spiritual foundation, his cool temperament and affectionate dealings stood him in good stead through this crisis. He possessed in full measure the unique capacity to mingle freely with all—brahmacharins and monks, senior and junior, devotees young and old.

An interesting incident at Rahara amply illustrates this. Maharaj would eat in the dining hall with the students. The most common item in the dining hall those days was gourd-potato-curry (*aloo kumdo torkaari*). Some boys had found a unique solution to this boring repetition. They would collect some green chillies (peppers = *kaachaa lonka*) from the kitchen beforehand. When this vegetable was served some boys would collect the potatoes from those who did not want to eat it. The peppers would then be cut into small pieces and then mixed with the collapsed (mashed) potatoes and served to the interested boys. Ranen Maharaj also was part of this group. If the boys overlooked him on account of shyness, he would call them to him and get his share. Incredible Maharaj!

Six brahmacharins from the Probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math were sent to assist Maharaj. They assisted him in various college jobs and in dealing with the Calcutta High Court work. Many prominent members of the Calcutta legal fraternity like Shri Shaktinath Mukherjee, Shri Dipankar Gupta and Shri Shiblal Bose helped the Ramakrishna Mission untiringly during this period. Swami Shivamayanandaji always remembered with gratitude their invaluable services and kept in touch with them.

An elderly swami who had seen Maharaj in Rahara remembers: "In 1981, the earlier Principal of the college came to the monks' quarters and started telling Shivamayanandaji about the many problems that the college was facing. At this, Shivamayanandaji simply laughed and said, 'We are running a relay race. You ran with the baton in hand all these days, now I will run with the baton.'" The college was literally a burning hell at that time. Yet Shivamayanandaji walked away towards his room totally unconcerned.

The next day when he went to his office, he saw that a poster saying "An imposter is replaced by a criminal" had been pasted on his chair. On the third or fourth day after this when he entered his office he found that a teacher was sitting on the principal's chair. Shivamayanandaji sat on another chair at the far end of the room. The teacher wanting to light a cigarette, placed one in his mouth and from his packet gave one to Shivamayanandaji. Unruffled, Shivamayanandaji lighted a match stick and put it to the cigarette in the teacher's mouth. The teacher was totally taken aback at this. He blew the cigarette smoke on Maharaj's face and went outside the room. The other

swamis heard of this incident in the evening. There was a pleasant smile on Shivamayanandaji's face when they discussed this!

A few days after this, students *gheraoed* Maharaj at about 11 am on the college campus. Maharaj was sitting under a tree. On hearing of this incident, the secretary of Rahara centre wanted to come to the site and enquired whether the police should be informed. However, Shivamayanandaji dissuaded him. At about 3.30 pm a teacher who was totally anti-Ramakrishna Mission but very well respected by the students, teachers and workers, came and said to Maharaj, "Maharaj I am very sorry about this. The students have made you sit outside and *gheraoed* you and that is why I came running. Please get up and go to your room. Nobody will object." Maharaj simply smiled and returned to the monks' quarters.

On another occasion, students of the college along with a few politically motivated youths from outside were lying down on the porch of Maharaj's office and did not allow him to leave the office. It was almost evening by the time Maharaj came to his room and he was seriously ill by then. These few incidents show how Maharaj practiced Swamiji's teaching: Face the brutes.

After witnessing such incidents it was decided by the authorities that 11 students should be shunted out of the college by issuing Transfer Certificates. Shivamayanandaji was absolutely firm about this decision and no amount of requests and prayers, protests or threats could dissuade him. In 1985 an Enquiry Committee meeting was held at Belur Math to discuss the Rahara College disturbance. Many people suggested various options. Shivamayanandaji, however, simply said: "A sannyasin must bestow fearlessness on all—I have to live by this *mantra*".

Soon after this he went away for *tapasya* (practising austerities). It was found that many of the agitating teachers had now become repentant. They readily accepted that they had misbehaved with Maharaj.

In later days an elderly *brahmacharin* wanted to know from Maharaj how he felt after going through such miserable experiences. Shivamayanandaji replied: "Don't you remember how much *tapasya* sadhus had to practise earlier? They had to assemble their cottage (*kutir*), beg for alms, and what not. Now owing to Mother's grace we have no lack of food, clothing, shelter, or anything else. It is hence that Mother gets a little *tapasya* done through us by creating such situations. Should these make us crestfallen?"

Shivamayanandaji's life and teachings were really inspiring. Some of his *Vidyamandir* and Rahara students later joined the Ramakrishna Order as monks and are now quite senior in the Sangha. Similarly his Sargachhi-Vidyamandir-Rahara students in the outside world too are quite well settled. Many of them were in touch with Maharaj till his last days.

The authorities at Belur Math allowed Maharaj one year's leave for *tapasya* in 1989. On his return he was asked to work at the Mission's Seva Pratishthan hospital in Kolkata. Before this, between April 1982 and 1984, he was a

member of the Working Committee at the headquarters. In 1990 he was appointed a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and made a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. In 1991 on the 1st of June, he came to live at Belur Math as the head of the *Bhava Prachar* section.

He joined the headquarters in 1992 as an Assistant Secretary (when Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj was the General Secretary). He left this post on 3 April 1995 to assume charge as Secretary of Saradapitha and continued there till 1997. In October 1997 he returned to the headquarters as an Assistant Secretary when Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj was the General Secretary. The two swamis had worked together earlier in Saradapitha also. During his two stints as Assistant Secretary he looked after various sections: Relief, Legal, Veda Vidyalaya, Bhava Prachar, etc. He made special efforts to develop the Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya at Belur Math, a project which was very dear to Swamiji.

One of the sadhus who worked at the headquarters when Shivamayanandaji Maharaj served as Assistant Secretary says of him: “Of the 14 years that I spent at the headquarters I had the opportunity to work with him for 9 years. I was staying in the headquarters’ building on the 1st floor just opposite his room. One morning as I was studying, I heard someone reading aloud Latu Maharaj’s reminiscences. I peeped through the door of my room and saw that the boy who served Maharaj was doing the reading and Maharaj himself was sitting in his room reading something. The reading continued even as I went to attend office (around 8.30 am). While returning after noon *prasad* we asked Maharaj about the morning’s reading. Maharaj replied laughing: ‘Oh! This boy comes to me every morning and complains about various other boys. I asked him to read the book so that his energy would not get wasted in complaining but would be utilised in doing something beneficial and he would also get over the habit of fault finding’. We asked Maharaj what would happen if this medicine failed to act. Again he laughingly replied: ‘Then I will ask him to read Turiyanandaji’s letters in which every page contains several Sanskrit shlokas. As he tries to pronounce these words and loses some teeth in the process, only good can result!’ We all wondered about this unique method of punishing someone whereby the offender is benefitted in multiple ways.

In 2007 Maharaj gave up his position as Assistant Secretary and devoted his time fully to the activities of the *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Committee* at the headquarters at Belur Math. He tried his best to put the headquarters’ bhava prachar activity on a firm financial footing and also helped member ashramas of the Parishads in various ways. He seemed to establish strong personal bonds with the members of Parishads and their associated ashramas.

For over two decades (from 1991 to 2014) he served as convenor of the *Bhava Prachar Committee*. He personally attended many *Bhava Prachar Parishad* conferences in various parts of the country and also encouraged monks from

the headquarters and other centres to attend these conferences as representatives, to ensure that the *bhava prachar* work continues smoothly. Whenever he attended conferences he would participate in all activities connected with it like *mangal-aarti*, *Sandhya-aarti*, singing of bhajans and *japa*-meditation, etc. He would have *prasad* with others in the common dining hall and would even there discuss various matters. He always emphasised that love for Thakur-Maa-Swamiji is at the core of *bhava prachar* and for this, the related spiritual practices have to be sincerely carried on. Moreover, he would say that applying these principles in one's own life is more important than giving prepared speeches or fine lectures.

Maharaj thus had extensive experience of *bhava prachar* work and also of the *Bhava Prachar Parishads*. He often emphasised that these two are related but have different connotations. For the benefit of future generations he put his thoughts in this connection into an essay titled *Bhava Prachar Vs. Bhava Prachar Parishad*. He had seen many member ashramas of Parishads tottering owing to organisational drawbacks. It is in this particular context that this essay would prove extremely useful.

He was made Secretary of Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre for a brief period between 2009 and 2012, after which he returned to Belur Math. Even during this short stay at Swamiji's House, he upgraded the small charitable dispensary there so that it could help local poor patients better. Just as he loved to work independently he also allowed those working under him similar freedom.

He was always enthusiastic about helping the distressed. While at Swamiji's House, he once went with the sadhus of the centre to distribute relief material to the afflicted in South 24 Parganas. He assigned each monk a particular area for doing relief. The materials were accordingly distributed and they returned by evening, exhausted but full of joy nonetheless.

Once he visited the flood relief work being carried on in the Saharsa-Purnea-Katihar (Bihar) area. He was deeply moved when he saw the plight of the relief victims in several villages. He breathed new life into the monastic brothers and workers there by narrating anecdotes from Sri Ramakrishna's life.

He visited another cyclone-cum-flood relief site. The journey involved going by boat for several hours. On the way to the camp he said to one of the monks with him to observe silently the condition of the kitchen at the relief camp. Just before returning he handed ₹ 1,000 of his personal money to the earlier monk and asked him to give it to the camp in-charge but not to tell him that he had given it. His eyes were glistening with tears on the way back. When asked about it he said: "It is unbearable to see so many people suffering in this fashion."

The Advaita Ashrama at Varanasi was once doing leprosy relief work in a nearby village. The victims were also being given minimum education, taught rules of hygiene and self-reliance methods, etc. When Maharaj saw all this,

with tearful eyes he said to the head of the centre: “Thakur will surely draw you into his lap.”

Returning from Swamiji’s House in 2012, Shivamayanandaji was once again at his *bhava prachar* office in Belur Math until 2014. As a part of Swamiji’s 150th Birthday Celebrations, in 2012 he was sent to Germany as the representative of the headquarters to attend the Conference of Heads of Vedanta Centres in Europe. He also visited other places in Europe especially the ones where Swamiji had gone. In all he visited France, Italy, England, Holland, Switzerland and Russia.

Renunciation and austerity were the hallmarks of Shivamayanandaji’s life. A senior sadhu said in this regard that when Shivamayanandaji heard that his name had been proposed for selection as a trustee, he wrote to the trustees to remove his name from the proposed list. They replied to him saying if Thakur wishes he will see that you do not become a trustee.

Swami Shivamayanandaji was possessed of inborn simplicity and was a completely self-effacing sadhu—the traits that are associated with his name, Shiva. He was very particular about his *japa-dhyana* routine. Even when overwhelmed by work, he would not compromise on his *japa*-meditation. Even in old age when it was difficult for him to sit for *japa*, he insisted on sitting for his daily duration.

Those who have seen him at Rahara remember that, in the midst of administrative problems, the classes that he had to take for students, attending to legal issues, talking with numerous people on various topics, etc, he would stick to his spiritual practices without fail. He always found time for daily scriptural study and *japa-dhyana*. It was his practice to read *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* before going to bed at night. He would daily read from some scripture with Paritosh Maharaj. He would participate in the *Japa-Yajna* arranged on Saturday nights by monks. He would visit the Shyam Sundar temple at Khardah now and then. Almost every day he would go to the nearby Shiva temple and on Mondays he would invariably go to offer water on the Shiva-linga.

When he was at Saradapitha, one of his monastic assistants who stayed in the room adjacent to Shivamayanandaji’s, noticed that daily Maharaj would go to his room at a particular time. Out of curiosity, one day this sadhu followed him after some time. He was surprised to see Maharaj immersed in meditation.

Maharaj had imbibed this quality from his guru Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj. He had also picked up another unique habit from Maharaj: that of asking some devotee to read the *Kathamrita* during *Pranam* time while he listened. He had studied the *Kathamrita* very well. When he was Assistant Secretary at the headquarters, *Kathamrita* would be read in the night class on Wednesdays. If he had any doubt about what was read he would interrupt the reading and get the portion re-read. After the reading was completed, there would ensue a discussion and the *Kathamrita* would be fetched for reference

and verification. Invariably it would be found that what Maharaj said was correct.

Unflinching faith in Sri Ramakrishna was the edifice on which his spiritual life blossomed. Sometime in the 1990s he was speaking at a Ramakrishna Ashrama in the Northeast. Suddenly a young man got up and asked Maharaj whether he had the vision of God. In reply Maharaj said: “I do not know what you mean by vision of God. But this much I can say with conviction that Sri Ramakrishna is *avatara-varishtha*, the *yuga-avatara*, *Bhagavan* himself. About these statements I have no doubts whatsoever, either in the waking state, the dream state or in the state of deep sleep. Through Thakur’s grace I have 100% conviction that he is the *yuga-ishvara*”.

Maharaj was very much inclined towards *tapasya*, *japa* and meditation. He visited Antpur on the 24th December every year (the anniversary of the *Dhuni Utsav*) and after spending the whole night in *japa-dhyana* would return in the morning. He did this at a stretch for many years.

This tendency towards traditional *sadhana* was manifest in him even when he finished his university studies and joined the Order. He knew that in our Sangha the tendency is more towards unattached work. Despite this, whenever the urge for *sadhana* became too powerful, he retired to the Himalayas either with permission or without. Thus he visited Uttarkashi, Rishikesh, Kankhal and Amarkantak several times. The life style of the sadhus of Uttarakhand, their scriptural discussions, austerities, self-reliance, and their love for solitude, naturally appealed to him. During one of his visits to Kankhal, he begged food in the *sapta-sagar* region and spent his time in *sadhana*.

Once he and another sadhu were together doing *tapasya* at Uttarkashi. They were sitting at the base of a hill one day. Suddenly Maharaj said, “If that opposite hill were not there, we could have seen the limitless expanse beyond, is it not? We would at least have had a fleeting glimpse of the Creator’s *Vishwavaroop* (Universal form)”.

On one occasion he was summoned to Belur Math from his *tapasya* and the then General Secretary, Swami Gambhiranandaji, asked him to talk with Swami Bhuteshanandaji, one of the Assistant Secretaries. Bhuteshanandaji listened to his desire for uninterrupted *sadhana* and then said to him, “Let us have a discussion on this matter. What do you understand by God realisation?” Ranen Maharaj replied according to what he had assimilated, “Offering one’s mind and everything to God, to be absorbed in Him, or to experience the oneness of Brahman and atman by meditating on the atman. The sadhus in Uttarakhand do not want to get involved in anything else but this. They say anything else will produce *vikshepa*, draw the mind outward and become a sort of bondage.”

Bhuteshanandaji agreed and said, “Yes, when I was doing *tapasya* there, I too heard this. Whenever *seva* was talked about, sadhus there would say ‘This causes *vikshepa*’ (distraction of the mind)”. Then Bhuteshanandaji narrated an

incident which he had witnessed: Two sadhus used to stay together. When one of them became seriously ill, the other abandoned him. When asked why he acted this way, he replied, “Otherwise this causes *vikshepa*”. Bhuteshanandaji continued, “Now tell me what you mean by *vikshepa*? It is wavering of the mind, some obstacle to concentration. When immersed in *sadhana* do you maintain calmness or peace of mind if you feel hungry or you feel sick? You do have *vikshepa* then also! Now, if you can accept *vikshepa* in your own case, why should you not accept the same for another”? You are engaged in Vedanta *vichara*; therefore when there is nothing other than Brahman, what one calls the not-I is nothing but the *atman* or Brahman; there is nothing other than I or *atman* or Brahman – is it not?”

This irrefutable logic from Bhuteshanandaji’s razor sharp intellect was gradually calming Ranen Maharaj’s mind. Bhuteshanandaji continued, “Swamiji wanted strong, educated, intelligent young men of good character. Through his Karma Yoga based on potential divinity of all, Swamiji wanted to uplift the masses steeped in lethargy. Why do you want to backtrack from this ideal? Swamiji gave a filip to modern India through this new ideal. The conclusion (*siddhanta*) then is: when you are granted leave at a suitable time, you may fully immerse yourself in spiritual practices, keeping aside the assigned work for the time being. Otherwise these two, Karma Yoga (*seva*) and *Upasana* (meditation) should be practiced simultaneously. This alone has been emphasised by Swamiji.”

In later years Shivamayanandaji would say, “I always wanted to remain absorbed in meditation, etc. Gambhiranandaji, by referring me to Bhuteshanandaji that day, kept me engaged in this twin ideal.” Throughout his life Shivamayanandaji had a strong inclination towards *tapasya* and to live the traditional life of a monk. Quite often he would be seen with a small shoulder bag (invariably with an *asana* inside) travelling in a local bus going to Dakshineswar or similar nearby places for doing *japa*. During the summer vacations and the Durga Puja holidays he would almost always opt to spend time in *tapasya* at some place or the other. Of course, when the urge was too strong, he would apply for leave and depart.

We may consider one such incident. Maharaj once went to Swami Chidatmanandaji (Alopi Maharaj), an Assistant Secretary to submit an application for leave along with other documents relating to Rahara College. As they went on discussing college problems, Alopi Maharaj differed on certain issues and gradually his voice began to get louder and there was also a tone of mild reproach. Ranen Maharaj then submitted softly with all humility and reverence, “Maharaj, however much you may scold me, kindly approve my application for leave and do not reduce the duration of leave prayed for.” Hearing this Alopi Maharaj could not help laughing.

After receiving his *sannyasa diksha* in 1975, Swami Sumedhanandaji (Sujit Maharaj) set out to visit Jayrambati-Kamarpukur on foot. Ranen Maharaj and Jyotirupanandaji (Rathin Maharaj) joined him and they returned walking after

visiting Antpur on the way. When they started their walk barefoot from the Bally railway station, Sumedhanandaji wrapped a turban around his head and carried a staff in hand, Jyotirupanandaji held a sadhus's water-pot (*kamandalu*) while Shivamayanandaji had a blanket on his shoulders. After walking some distance they noticed a group of boys near the road engaged in heated discussion. Suddenly a boy from the group came towards them on a bicycle and obstructed their path. As Shivamayanandaji admonished him, he went away embarrassed. It was later found that these boys were arguing about who these queer-looking sadhus could be. Finally to ascertain this, the boy (who happened to be a student of *Vidyamandir*) had come with the bicycle. On recognising his *Principal Maharaj* in this strange group, he was taken aback and left abruptly.

One night, they took shelter in the hut of a *tantrika*. He procured some puffed rice and gave them to eat. Early next morning he was beside himself with joy listening to the devotional songs like *jogaashone mahaa-dhyaane mogno jogi-bor* (the Yogi sitting in yog-aasana is immersed in deep meditation) sung by them. On another day, Shivamayanandaji, exhausted after non-stop walking, lay down on the roadside almost unconscious. He joined the group sometime later when he felt a little better. His companions were unaware of what happened as he requested them to continue without saying anything about his condition. Later he was nursed to normalcy by repeatedly bathing his head with cold water. On their way they noticed Swami Niramayanandaji of Udbodhan and Dr. Satyendranath Sen, Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, going by car to Kamarpukur. Though they knew Shivamayanandaji very well, they could not recognise him in this condition and in such strange garb.

Shivamayanandaji had once visited Amarnath on foot from Srinagar, along with Rathin Maharaj and Kalipada Maharaj. Overjoyed on visiting the holy cave shrine, they returned to Chandigarh after staying for a few days at Srinagar. From Chandigarh, Shivamayanandaji along with Rathin Maharaj went to Hardwar and started to walk towards Yamunotri. They had to face a lot of difficulties on the way amidst heavy downpour. Shivamayanandaji became terribly sick. Shrewdly he kept himself aloof so that Rathin Maharaj could carry on the journey without disruption. Suffering a lot on the way he reached Uttarkashi after three days. Rathin Maharaj had already reached there. This time, his health broke down so much that it took a month to recuperate his health and return to the Math. Swami Prathamandaji (Priti Maharaj) sponsored his travelling expenses on this occasion.

Later, at quite an advanced age, he went with Rathin Mj to Prayag (Allahabad) and then both visited Ayodhya on the holy Ramnavami day elbowing their way through thousands of devotees, to have *darshan* of the baby Ramlala (Rama as a toddler).

Maharaj loved scriptural studies. He had practically memorised *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, *Yogavashitha*, Letters of Swami Turiynanda, The Eternal Companion (*Dharma-prasange* Swami Brahmananda), *Sri Sri*

Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga and The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. He repeatedly asked others to study the *Letters of Swami Turiyananda*. He had the conviction that dispassion would dawn if one studied the texts written by Acharya Shankara.

Quite often he used to quote this mantra from the Katha Upanishad (2.3.1): “*Urdhva-mulo Avakshakha ay-show-ashwatthah-sanatanah...*” With this he would quote the Shankara-bhasya on the mantra, “*Avichinna Janma Jara Marana shokaa-dyaneka-anartha-atmakah ... Kadali-stambha-vat Nihsarah*” and then give its meaning. He indeed had the conviction that this world is devoid of any substance like the stem of a banana tree (*Kadali-stambha-vat Nihsarah*).

Maharaj also had a thorough grasp on the Mahabharata and Puranas. Quite often he talked about the anecdotes from these texts and discussed the many characters in these books. He had committed to memory many verses from these texts. Once he wrote a letter to a devotee, “I recall a verse from Srimad Bhagavatam while writing to you; please get it read out by someone, you will like it: “*Tribhuvana-vibhava-hetave apyakunṭha-smṛtirajitātma-surādibhir-vimṛgyāt | Na Chalati bhagavat-padāravindāt lava-nimiṣārdham api yaḥ sa vai vaiṣṇavāgryah ||*” (Bhagavata 11.2.53) – ‘Even the greatest gods beginning with Brahma are desirous of attaining the lotus feet of Sri Hari; he is the greatest devotee whose mind never wavers from the lotus feet of the Lord, even for a moment, in exchange for ruling over the three worlds.’

During daily *pranams*, Maharaj now and then used to seek clarification on difficult scriptural topics from Bhuteshanandaji. Ranen Maharaj was the object of special affection for Swami Bhuteshanandaji. When the latter became President of the Order and was staying in Belur Math, at times he used to visit the headquarters and would invariably visit Ranen Maharaj at his office. Other sadhus would laughingly comment, “You always visit Ranen, as if we all others have been tossed in here by the high tide?”

Ranen Maharaj on his part had very deep and loving regard for Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj. When Shivamayanandaji was at Saradapitha he conducted classes for the *brahmacharins*. Often Bhuteshanandaji would visit Saradapitha and stay in the car with his sevaks in front of Holy Mother’s shrine. Shivamayanandaji would then at once stop his class and all would come out to offer *pranams* to Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj. Once Bhuteshanandaji remarked, “Ranen, why have you stopped the class?” Shivamayanandaji replied, “Maharaj, you are the *Sangha-guru* and you have come. What class can we take now?” But Bhuteshanandaji said, “Then I shall not come any more”. Shivamayanandaji immediately explained, “No, Maharaj, kindly visit us whenever you feel like it. We shall resume the class when you return”. Bhuteshanandaji was very happy with this reply. At times, sadhus and brahmacharins of Saradapitha used to sit under a tree in front of the auditorium; Bhuteshanandaji too used to sit there. On one such occasion, Bhuteshanandaji remarked, “Ranen, you see, it seems we are sitting amongst sadhus of yester-years where scriptures are being

studied”. Shivamayanandaji replied in turn, “Yes! It seems you are one of those ancient rishis and we are your disciples”.

In Ranen Maharaj’s life we see practical demonstration of the saying, *there is no virtue like forbearance*. A very senior and revered monk says, “Shivamayanandaji’s forbearance was unparalleled. He faced every dilemma head-on. He was never heard to complain when he was suffering from painful hernia for the past few years. One could never notice any expression of agitation in him. During the turbulent days in Rahara, even some of the demonstrators changed their attitude on seeing Maharaj’s unruffled composure. Once when Maharaj went for *tapasya* for some time a couple of lecturers, not seeing him, enquired with a monk when he would return. The monk said, “You people do not want him here. Then why do you enquire about him?” Haltingly they replied, “Actually, the college seems so very empty without him.”

Sadhus and devotees all flocked to him because of his feeling heart. Sadhus who were not able to adjust in any centre always found refuge in him. If any sadhu misbehaved, Maharaj would always be liberal in giving one more opportunity for rectification. Thus he was always surrounded by such *hot-headed* sadhus. He would always assure them of protection. He would often land himself in trouble owing to such temperament, but he would never for that reason give up this rare quality.

In his *bhava prachar* office at the headquarters, a mat was kept aside for a particular youth. On hot summer days this young lad would meet Maharaj, have noon *prasad* and then sleep in the office on the mat. Only after this he would return home. Countless people have come to him in this fashion for financial help and mental peace. His doors were ever open to the suffering and distraught. About this Maharaj would say, “I wonder how such people come to know of me!”

A person given to singing had been coming to Maharaj’s office at the headquarters for a few days. He would come daily and start singing in a loud voice: “*Jagat joo-day jaal falay-chhis Maa; Shyama Maa tui jail-air may-ay*” (You have thrown your fishing net to trap the whole world Mother, O Mother Shyama, you must be a fisherman’s daughter). Shivamayanandaji would be attending to his office work through all this. On one particular morning the voice became too loud to bear. From the next room a senior swami was walking towards Ranen Mj’s office to complain. Maharaj saw this through a gap in his office window and said to the singer, “You have to reduce the volume of the radio a little; I can see a *gerua* dhoti through the window coming this side!” And the other swami returned to his office without making any complaint.

When any monastic brother was passing through a difficult phase owing to some problem and would find it difficult to continue his *sadhana*, Shivamayanandaji was sure to be by his side, trying his best to cheer him up. A swami at Belur Math was unable to get over his depressed state of mind for quite some time. He was keen on pursuing studies. Maharaj kept track of his condition and even supplied him the books suited to his field of study. He

would attentively listen to all that the swami had to narrate. Shivamayanandaji was at that time invited to participate in a Maharashtra *Bhava Prachar Parishad* Conference to be held at Kolhapur. Knowing that the swami who was interacting with him hailed from that region, he took him also along with him. Many devotees met this sadhu during that visit including many of his pre-monastic relatives. All these old acquaintances had a soothing effect on the swami and he returned quite refreshed.

His visits to Seva Pratishthan revealed how he felt when others suffered. Wherever he was in Kolkata, either at Belur Math or at any other centre, he always kept himself informed about the condition of sadhus or devotees admitted to the hospital and frequently visited them. If he found any patient sleeping he would not disturb him but would ask the others in the room the condition of the sleeping patient. If they could not say much about him, he would mildly reproach them saying, “You are staying in the same room with him and you do not know about his condition?”

During his Rahara days he was staying for some time in the same room with a *brahmacharin* who was much older to him. The *brahmacharin* was sick for some days during which period Maharaj would smilingly and in a cheerful mood, wash his clothes and hang them for drying, and also get his food from the kitchen several times a day. All this brought tears to the patient’s eyes. Maharaj consoled him saying, “Don’t think much about all this. You are now sick and are not in a position to do these tasks yourself. Someone has to do them.”

His affection for others manifested in various ways. During the troubled times at Rahara, some *brahmacharins* who had been sent from Belur Math to help, spent whole nights preparing legal documents for the next day. Shivamayanandaji, despite spending the day in his office in a completely hostile environment, used to sit with them through the night trying to help in whatever way possible. They would request him and urge him to go and sleep as he was not only much older than them, but also had to face the vociferous opponents during the day time at the college the next day. Maharaj would not listen, saying he could not go and sleep when the young *brahmacharins* were sacrificing their sleep and struggling so much trying to help and assist him. When it was almost dawn, Maharaj would say: “There is nothing I am able to do to help you in your work of preparing these documents. Let me do one thing—I will go to our *goshala* (dairy), get some fresh milk, and prepare good coffee for all of you.” Maharaj actually went, procured milk and prepared coffee—not just for one or two days, but day after day for several days! With tearful eyes of thankfulness they would enjoy the coffee, to be sure! Such was his simplicity, egolessness and love for his younger monastic brothers.

In the *Bhava Prachar* office at Belur Math, an office-boy from a very poor family was employed. When Maharaj left this office he eagerly waited to see who would take charge of *bhava prachar* work here. He then requested the new person to ensure that the office boy would continue in his job since he was not in a condition to work in any other section.

Several heart-touching incidents were narrated by a sadhu about their Rahara days: (a) The Head Clerk was suffering from cancer. Saliva would flow from his mouth and it was clear that his days were numbered. Swami Shivamayananda and the swami went to his house to comfort him. (b) Next, it was a staff member of the ashrama who had died. Both went to his house and chanted verses from the Gita to comfort the family. (c) In the case of another staff member of the college who had departed, his dead body was brought to the college from the hospital as a mark of respect to the departed soul. (d) On another occasion the teacher in the ashrama who guided the ashrama students to perform in fundraising dramas of the ashrama passed away; his body was taken around the campus by the students of the ashrama and thence to the cremation ground.

Another anecdote was recalled by a Rahara sadhu: An employee of the Physics Department had breathed his last. Maharaj and several sadhus went to his house with flowers, garlands and some money. He arranged for the departed soul's two small children to study in the school at Rahara. He consoled the employee's wife lessening her sorrow and then accompanied the body to the cremation ground. He returned to the ashrama with the others after a bath in the Ganga.

When he was once at Gurap for giving *mantra diksha*, he got the news that one of his *gurubhais* was ill at Ranchi. After finishing the *diksha* ceremony, he left that night for Ranchi to see this person. All the programmes fixed for the next day were cancelled.

During his days as convenor of *bhava prachar* activities he tried his best to uplift the member ashramas of various *parishads*. With a calm mind and feeling heart he would try to solve their many knotty problems. Many sadhus stay in such ashramas who are not within the fold of the Ramakrishna Order, but have nonetheless dedicated their entire lives for the cause of Thakur-Maa-Swamiji. Maharaj would silently, secretly help such sadhus in multiple ways even arranging for their medical treatment when necessary. He enjoyed cordial relations with all office-bearers of these ashramas. In one particular case he went to see the secretary of an ashrama who was admitted to hospital as a cancer-patient. He consoled him with his gentle speech and sweet smile, gifted him some fruits and also gave some money.

Maharaj once gave some valuable suggestions to a sadhu who was to attend a *Bhava Prachar Parishad* Conference as the headquarters' representative: "Remember that the persons who run these ashramas are working in these areas because the Ramakrishna Order does not as yet have the manpower to do these tasks on its own. As such, they are also our representatives who are spreading the message of Thakur-Maa-Swamiji in those regions. Give them the same respect that you expect from others. This is the first point to remember. The second one is: We have dedicated our lives to the Ramakrishna Sangha and as such the responsibility for our food, clothing and shelter has been taken by the Math & Mission. But these people as householders have to attend to their worldly responsibilities and then give their time for *bhava prachar*."

Accordingly, their work might not be up to our standards. It is our duty to see how we can gradually upgrade their work. We should never pester them with pointed questions like: Why has this not been done, why this been done in this way, etc”.

In *bhava prachar* conferences he would emphasise 3 specific points: (i) youth contact, (ii) contact with devotees through *patha chakras* (study circles), and (iii) interactions with local people. He would always remind sadhus to remember that we are only to oversee or supervise, not command or order. We have to be understanding and accommodative and give suggestions. Our relations should be governed by love and mutual respect. When gentleness does not work, only then one must act strictly. But then also, our acts must be tempered with loving understanding. He would often draw attention to another issue and would say: “Just because we are wearing the gerua cloth many elderly people in the *bhava prachar* fold will offer us their *pranams*. Do not get carried away at this and feel exalted. Always behave with modesty. Always be guarded when you talk with them”.

There were some heated exchanges in some *bhava prachar* conference and a tense atmosphere seemed to prevail. During the tea break Maharaj said to a sadhu, “You will be speaking last. Can you talk on what Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi has said: Love makes everything possible, love is the only thing that sustains the Ramakrishna Sangha. Try to speak at length on this aspect of Maa’s teaching. You have seen elderly sadhus of the Order from who you tasted the love that sustains you in the Ramakrishna fold and allows you to continue here. Convey to them how they too can work through mutual love through their love for Thakur, and how they can in turn attract and inspire youths through such love”. The sadhu did as he was told and Maharaj was naturally quite happy. On their way back he said to the swami, “Did you see? We forget that if we are full of love in our dealings, even the beasts of the forest become tamed. And these people come here because worldly miseries scorch them. If they could get a taste of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda’s love in the outside world, would they come to the ashrama? Never; only because they are dissatisfied there, do they come here to hold on tightly to Thakur. And if we can on our part give them a little love, then everything becomes so easy.”

In one of the *bhava prachar* conferences Maharaj said to youths: “Study with the aim of not just uplifting yourself but see that others also will be benefitted. Only then will your studies get transformed into puja, worship”. Many times Maharaj said to devotees, “We are to embrace *workable spirituality*. Of course we will meditate with closed eyes. But with open eyes also we will meditate on the God manifesting in everyone through our service. We will worship Him by giving knowledge to the illiterate, by helping to eradicate poverty we worship God in the poor, and by nursing the sick we worship God in the suffering.”

Shivamayanandaji played a major role in the affiliation of the Gurup centre (the birthplace of Swami Vishuddhanandaji) and also in helping it to prosper. He once said to the head of the centre, “Bring out a magazine containing the

reminiscences of Swami Vishuddhanandaji”. He also gave the swami the contact details of many people initiated by Vishuddhanandaji and asked him to get in touch with them. Shivamayanandaji himself did the proof reading and the magazine titled *Prapatti* became a reality in 2017.

Maharaj used to follow the traditions of our Order scrupulously. He was always present at the cremation ground when any sadhu or *brahmacharin* was being cremated and stayed until the very end. It is also our tradition to sing various bhajans at the time of cremation. He participated in the singing with gusto. He had left word with the swami responsible for arranging cremation at Belur Math that he should be always informed about the timings of cremation in advance. If he happened to be away from the Math he would come in time for the cremation. Once a sadhu’s cremation could not be done at Belur Math but was done in the Cossipore *Maha-sashan* opposite the Math on the east bank of the Ganga. Some sadhus and *brahmacharins* had gone there from Belur Math. Soon after, Shivamayanandaji also arrived. He said to the others, “Do you know, this sadhu was very dear to me.” This really did not matter in his case because he attended every cremation whether it was that of a senior elderly sadhu or any relatively junior sadhu. On that occasion at the Cossipore site since there was no good singer in the group, Maharaj sat down on the ground and started singing the usual bhajans we sing on such occasions.

It is a tradition of our Sangha that the Sangha-Guru is accorded the same respect as one’s own guru. Once the then President of the Order, Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, had gone to attend a function of the Saradapitha’s Shilpamandir unit. Shivamayanandaji was also present. Swami Atmasthanandaji was seated on a sofa and Shivamayanandaji was sitting on a chair a little farther away. Swami Atmasthanandaji again and again beckoned Shivamayanandaji to come and sit beside him on the sofa. But every time Maharaj refused and at last said to Atmasthanandaji, “I have heard from our seniors that we should not sit on the same seat with the Sangha-Guru.”

Maharaj had a loving and respectful relationship with the elders of the Order. He enjoyed a special relationship with the present President of our Order Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj. They had worked together at Saradapitha and also at the headquarters. President Maharaj says of him, “I have noticed in Shivamayananda childlike simplicity, utter lack of egoism and intense feeling for others.”

Shivamayanandaji enjoyed a sweet and intimate relationship with Swami Prabhanandaji, Swami Gautamanandaji, Swami Suhitanandaji, Swami Bhajananandaji, and many others. He had worked with each one of these swamis at different times either at Sargachhi, or Saradapitha, or the headquarters at Belur Math. Their relations were rooted in mutual love and affection. Every one of them had been keenly keeping track of Shivamayanandaji’s condition at the hospital during his fatal illness. They all testify with one voice to his utter lack of egoism, impeccable sadhu life, marvellous forbearance and depth of feeling for sadhus.

Shivamayanandaji always considered himself to be just a monk and nothing more, there was never any trace of pomp or authority in his dealings. Freely mixing with sadhus and *brahmacharins* very much junior to himself, he joined them in *japa-dhyana* and during singing of bhajans or Kali kirtan. When he started giving mantra diksha, one day he characteristically asked, “What’s the matter? Why are all so obliging towards me now?” One could know that this was said from the heart. One teacher known to him, who was reputed to be a staunch Marxist in his beliefs and dealings, had said of Shivamayanandaji, “The Gita shloka, *Yasmaan-know-ud-vija-tay low-koh...* (a loose translation = who is never the cause of another’s discomfort), finds perfect expression in Shivamayanandaji Maharaj.”

Maharaj’s childlike simplicity was manifest in his daily dealings. During the turmoil at Rahara, once a *brahmacharin* seeing him so distraught and disturbed, ventured to ask him if he would allow him to give Maharaj a piece of ‘spiritual advice’—not out of audacity, but a genuine and deep concern for Maharaj’s mental welfare. Maharaj smiled and asked him what it was. And the *brahmacharin* replied, “Why don’t you turn to Thakur and pour out your heart in sincere prayer—*cry to Him with a real cry* as Thakur has said himself. Try this for a few days or weeks and you will see that solutions will come miraculously.” Maharaj was not annoyed at the *brahmacharin* and the junior also knew this. Shivamayanandaji simply said with great seriousness: “*Theek bolay-chhis, aami tai korbo, day-khi Thakur kee koren*”. This was the simplicity and egoless-ness of Swami Shivamayanandaji.

When he was an Assistant Secretary at the headquarters, he once went to the Mission’s Patna branch centre. Early one morning he went to attend the *mangal-aarti* at the famous *Paatni-Devi* temple. The *aarti* had just started. The temple’s manager had arrangements made for Maharaj to stand very close to the Deity. When standing, Maharaj noticed that he was obstructing the *Devi’s darshan* for people assembled behind. He immediately sat down on the floor. It was raining heavily that morning. Maharaj noticed that someone was mopping the water from the temple floor. He immediately went to that person and he himself started doing the work. His attitude was, “I am a *sevak* of the Divine Mother. I will help Mother’s devotees by doing this small service”.

Maharaj also had the good habit of fearlessly accepting mistakes in perception in his dealings. Once he was chastening a younger swami who was also very dear to him. The swami said to Maharaj that he was acting only to fulfil Swamiji’s dream and he wanted the blessings of seniors like Shivamayanandaji. At this Maharaj also was touched and in turn blessed the swami. When the swami finished the task, Shivamayanandaji said to him, “I have given you a lot of pain. Are you feeling disturbed?” When the swami comforted Maharaj that all was okay, Maharaj felt relieved.

During his lifetime Maharaj lectured hundreds of times and wrote innumerable articles. Right from his boyhood he was good at composing small poems. He held on to this past-time even during his later life. Once he sent a small poem

to a devotee whose family title was Mitra:

‘যে ধন পেলে আর কোন ধন/ ভাল নাহি লাগে,/ তার চেয়ে আর কোন সুখই/
মনে নাহি জাগে;/ যা পেলে আর কোন কষ্ট/ কষ্ট নাহি দেয়,/ তারই লোভে
‘খেপা’ মিত্র/ বেলুড় মুখো রয়!/ এমন সুজন পেলে প্রভু,/ তার পিছনে ঘোরে,/
সুজন ভাবে ‘আমি খুঁজি’,/ তিনি সুজনেরে।/ লুকোচুরি খোজাখুঁজি/ ‘বুড়ি হোয়ার’
খেলা,/ মিত্র বলে ‘দিন ফুরালো,/ দাও দেখা এই বেলো!’

Jay dhan pale aar ko-no dhan, bhaa-low naa-hee laa-gay
Taar chayay aar ko-no sukh-ee, mo-nay naa-hee jaa-gay
Jaa pay-lay aar ko-no kashta, kashta naa-hee daey
Taar-ee low-bhay Khepaa mitra, Belur mu-khow roey
Emon sujan pele prabhoo, taar pi-chhow-ne gho-ray
Sujan bhabe aamee khoun-jee, tini sujanere
Luko churi khonja-khunji, bu-dee chow-aar khela
Mitra boley din foo-raa-low, daaow dekhaa ei belaa.

(The gist of the composition is: If one gets the Lord as his wealth, one seeks nothing else. With a play on the word “mitra” (= friend), the play with Thakur at Belur Math is compared with the game of hide-and-seek that children play, the poem ends with a plaintive prayer to Sri Ramakrishna: the day is about to end, please grant me your vision).

Although a brilliant student of mathematics, Maharaj had studied a wide range of subjects: English-Bengali-Hindi literature and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in particular. He had studied and discussed various scriptures. Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* was one of his favourite books. When he was at Kankurgachhi, he one day asked the *brahmacharin*-librarian to find the *Shantiniketan* section in an essay titled *Dharma* written by Rabindranath Tagore. Some days later he asked the *brahmacharin* to read out to him that portion of the essay. Tagore has given here a humorous presentation of the art of letter writing in the eternally antagonistic old and modern styles. Maharaj was laughingly listening and making comments all the while. He then said to the *brahmacharin*, “You go now and read this and later tell me about it.”

In the same way he had a special liking for songs. More than the tune of the song it was the meaning that he cared for. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s songs on the theme of worship were his favourite. Once he had asked a college student (who is now a monk of our order) to sing *aamaar bhaangaa pather raangaa dhoolai poday-chhay kaar paayer chinha* (Whose footprints are these on the red dust of my broken road...) and few other songs. He was likewise very fond of Tagore’s poem *Vasundhara* and could easily recite it. Songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam, Atulprasad Sen, Rajnikant Sen and some other Bengali poets and he could recite many of these from memory. Sometimes he would quote a line of a well-known poem or song and would ask others to complete it.

He had an equal liking for the songs usually sung in in our Order. He would take part enthusiastically in the chorus singing of *Agamani*, *Kali Kirtan* and

Usha Kirtan at Belur Math. Of the Kali Kirtan songs, the one beginning with *nilaborani naveena ramani* was dearest to him. If he was late in joining the singing he would ask the singer to sing a particular song. His favorite songs included *ab shiva paar karo meri naiyaa* composed by Devi Sahay and Ramprasad's *maa aamaay ghurabi koto*. During his last illness he called a junior monk over the phone and asked him to sing the song *bhay kee ray bhaayi* and Maharaj also joined the singing.

Maharaj's lifestyle was very simple; lethargy was unknown to him. He was reluctant to allow others to wash his teacup or plates. Many times devotees noticed that while talking to them he would leave his chair and sit on the floor along with them. If someone brought a food item for him, he would take a small portion of it and then ask the others around to share the rest of it. He did not like his *sevak* keeping a cushion below his feet when he was sitting on a chair as he thought this was a mark of luxury. With his attitude of respect for every person, he was very much against someone touching his footwear.

He utilized his time fully without wasting a single moment. It was not uncommon to find him lost in deep thought quite often. Whether it was reading a book or poem, or listening to a song he would seriously ponder over its meaning. While receiving *pranams* from devotees, it was his habit to ask someone nearby to read aloud a book. This made the onlookers realise that reading the book was more important than his receiving *pranams*. Once in a while he would inquire about the topic being read or explain the reading in simple words.

Swami Shivamayanandaji was much devoted to Shiva. As Mondays are considered auspicious for worship of Shiva, he rarely missed going to a Shiva temple on that day. Once during his days in Swamiji's Ancestral House, he was coming to Belur Math along with a few other sadhus. When the vehicle reached Bally, he asked a monk in the party to buy *bel* leaves and Ganga water. He then stopped at Kalyaneshwar temple and offered worship. When he was serving as an Assistant Secretary in Belur Math, he would go by bus or on foot to Kalyaneshwar temple on Mondays. Such was his modesty that others in Belur Math were not aware of these visits to the temple until one day he fell from the bus and injured his leg!

Even after becoming the Vice-President of the Math and Mission, his Monday visits to the Shiva temple nearby continued. Accompanied by his *sevak* he would go there walking, chanting different hymns on Shiva all along. They would return likewise singing Shiva songs. This routine continued for many years.

Maharaj delighted in being self-reliant and he remained so till the end. It was always tough for his *sevaks* to make him accept their service. At the Yogodyan Math he would not allow the staff in his quarters to do any of his personal work. Maharaj cleaned his bathroom himself, washed his clothes and dried them. If someone offered to help, sharp was his retort: "Did I ask you to do this?" One day as he was coming out of the temple it started raining. Maharaj's

sevak rushed to him immediately with an open umbrella. Seeing him, Maharaj expressed his annoyance saying, “Have you become my guardian?”

He was a bird-and-animal-lover. Some years ago he kept with him two pet dogs. In Kankurgachhi the ducks in the pond received his special care and attention. He would often feed them. While walking on the campus of Cossipore Math, he would listen to the chirping of birds intently and try to understand their “words”. Once in a while he would even share his thoughts on animals and birds with his *sevaks*.

All through his life Maharaj remained steadfast in practising *japa*, meditation and attending *mangala-arati* and *sandhya-arati*. Never would he miss these. When Cyclone *Amphan* struck Kolkata in May 2020, Maharaj was living in Kankurgachhi Math. Heavy rain and powerful winds were pounding Kolkata since afternoon which continued till evening. Unfazed by the cyclone he left his room for the temple when it was time for *sandhya-arati*. Though he carried an umbrella and the distance was not much, he was fully drenched. Nevertheless, he sat in the temple and got immersed in meditation. Sometime later the head of the Math noticed the plight of his clothes and had fresh clothes brought for Maharaj. Shivamayanandaji changed into them in the temple itself and returned to his room a little later.

Another interesting incident happened at Kankurgachhi Math during the pandemic lockdown. Daily at around 10:30 or 11 in the morning Maharaj used to sit for meditation either in the temple or in Holy Mother’s Room on the first floor. One day Maharaj was meditating in the temple as usual. After the offerings, the *pujari* opened the sanctum for a short while and then closed it for noon as per the custom. But Maharaj remained absorbed in meditation oblivious of time. The *pujari* and the temple worker were in a quandary: the temple had to be closed, but how to disturb Maharaj? After a while Maharaj’s *sevak* arrived and escorted him to his room.

Maharaj’s sense of humour was well known. One day he had joined the group singing of Kali Kirtan in Belur Math. Monks were singing *khyapaar haat-bazar...* A monk present there was a bit eccentric. Unable to control his surging emotions, that monk started dancing with both hands stretched. When the line “*Tow-raa dooi satee-nay kay-oo bukay kay-oo maa-thai choe-dis taar* (you two co-wives try to climb over the head and chest of Shiva) was repeated, Maharaj smiled and remarked pointing to the monk who was dancing, “Here one co-wife is dancing. Where is the other one?” Maharaj’s remark filled the hall with peals of laughter.

In advanced age Maharaj often could not recall easily the names of monks and novices. So he had his own ingenious method of calling a person. In Bengali young lads are referred to as ‘*chhele*’. Maharaj would call even senior monks (of course those younger to him) as ‘*chhele*’ to the amusement of all. Once a senior monk who was thus addressed jokingly remarked to Maharaj, “You call us ‘*chhele*’ and those who are in their teens also as ‘*chhele*’. You may at least call them differently so that the difference between us will be honoured!” Apart

from this familiar '*chhele*', Maharaj used to call monks with strange-sounding vocatives. Once he said, "Call that sadhu who sings in the cremation ground!"

Monks residing in the headquarters building of Belur Math used to do Vedic chanting and *stotra-paath* (chanting various hymns) every morning. Maharaj was staying at the headquarters building at that time and used to hear this chanting. One day the venue of the chanting was shifted to some other place in the same building. Next day Maharaj asked the sadhus about this in his inimitable style, "So long your chanting used to strike my right ear, but now it is striking my left ear. What is the matter?" Though amused by this question, monks understood the intention behind it and continued their chanting in the earlier place. In the days that followed, monks used to ask Maharaj jokingly, "Hope you are now hearing our chanting with your right ear!" His disarming smile was the reply they received.

One day a devotee entered Maharaj's room and found him searching desperately for something. After a while the devotee felt uncomfortable sitting idle while Maharaj went on with his work. "Can I help you Maharaj?" Maharaj then told him what he was searching for, "You see age is catching up with me. To keep all my essential papers safe I had put them in one file. I had named that file 'Not to forget'. Now I am unable to locate that file itself".

Countless are the people who received love and affection from Maharaj. A devotee came to meet Maharaj along with his niece one day. The young woman was then studying medicine. Maharaj offered them tea and snacks which they happily relished. The niece wanted to wash the teacups and plates, but Maharaj told her lovingly, "You don't need to worry about it. Is it the prerogative of women to wash the plates always?" These words brought tears to her eyes. She said that there was such warmth of affection behind those words which she had not experienced till then.

Maharaj had instructed his monastic *sevak* at the outset that he expected from him mental service more than the physical service. That is to say, he wanted him to grow spiritually by devoting more time and energy to japa, meditation, study of scriptures and such other disciplines. In the beginning, his *sevak* hesitated to enter Maharaj's room without his permission. Maharaj assured him after a few days that he can just enter his room whenever needed and that there was no need to seek his permission. Such was his simplicity and openness.

One of his *sevaks* was fond of South Indian dishes. Maharaj sometimes would take extra pains to arrange *idli* or *dosa* for that *sevak*. At times Maharaj would go to the market in search of these dishes for that *sevak*! On hot days he used to ask his *sevaks* to rest in his room where it was cooler. This loving concern however made his *sevaks* uncomfortable and they would somehow, after much persuasion and pleading, manage to extricate themselves from this embarrassment.

Swami Shivamayanandaji spent six months exclusively in *tapasya* in 2014. A new chapter began in his life after this. In March 2015 the trustees of the

Ramakrishna Math authorized him to give *mantra diksha* to devotees though he was not keen on taking the role of a guru. He immersed himself in spiritual practices for some months at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama in Kankhal (Hardwar). Unfortunately he then contracted a virulent form of *herpes* which troubled him greatly for some months. Forbearing by nature, the excruciating pain of the infection did not reflect much on his face. But those who knew him closely could understand through his actions that he was silently suffering.

Finally however, the first batch of aspirants was given *diksha* on 3 January 2016 at Jayrambati, the birthplace of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. At that time he was living in Belur Math. In May 2017 he moved to Kankurgachhi Math (Yogodyan). On 21 July 2017 he was appointed Vice-President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and continued in that office till the end. Only two months before his passing away (April 2021) he moved to Cossipore Math to take charge as head of that centre, after Vagishanandaji Maharaj, who was also a Vice-President of the Order, attained Mahasamadhi.

Maharaj was keen about meeting *diksha* aspirants before giving them *mantra diksha*. It was his view that before the *diksha* ceremony, the guru and his future disciples should know each other well. He would enquire about the candidates and ascertain how familiar they were with the lives and teachings of Thakur, Ma and Swamiji. If he found them lacking in this respect, he would try to give some basic ideas to them. During his meetings with aspirants he would especially impress upon them Sri Ramakrishna's message *joto math toto path* (as many faiths, so many paths); the assurance given by the Holy Mother 'I am the mother of both good and wicked people'; and Swamiji's ideal of *Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva* (Service to man is worship of God) along with its practical implementation.

Often his *diksha*-giving ceremonies used to take longer time than usual. This was because of his earnestness in clearing all doubts and questions of candidates. These delays, however, never annoyed him. He used to say, "*Mantra diksha* is once in a lifetime experience". On the day of *diksha*, it was his habit to fast until the end of the ceremony. Sometimes it would be well past noon before he ate his first morsel on such days. When candidates were having *prasad* after the *diksha* ceremony, he would go to them and make kind enquiries. Maharaj gave *diksha* to some devotees by going to their house when they were unable to go to the ashrama for getting initiation.

In keeping with the tradition of the Ramakrishna Order he never considered himself a guru. If anyone sought his blessings he folded his hands and prayed for his or her welfare. Once he initiated a few teachers who had worked with him in Saradapitha. Just before the end of the *diksha* ceremony when these persons approached him to make pranams, he got up from his seat saying "My friend!", "My friend!" and started conversing with them in a loud voice. There was no vanity in him whatsoever.

Diksha programmes took him to several parts of the country. In addition to the branches of the Math and Mission, he gave *diksha* in several unaffiliated

ashramas, whether big or small. Unlike the branches of the Math and Mission, many unaffiliated ashramas lacked the necessary facilities for holding *diksha* programmes. Considering the inconveniences Maharaj would perhaps have to face, his *sevaks* would point out the difficulties in accepting invitations from such unaffiliated ashrams. But Maharaj would turn a deaf ear to such entreaties and say, “Because of financial constraints these ashramas cannot invite other *diksha* gurus. So I go there even if I have to face some inconvenience.” Maharaj also initiated devotees in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore.

Frequent trips to different places for giving *mantra diksha* took a toll on his body. For the last few years he was suffering from high blood pressure and problems of the respiratory tract and liver. Nevertheless his trips and *diksha* continued relentlessly. On many occasions his *sevaks* objected to his whirlwind trips and requested him to take rest intermittently. Brushing aside their objections, he would remark, “Let me continue this way. After all, I may live at the most for 2 or 3 years”.

He gave *mantra diksha* for the last time at Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy (Kerala) in February 2020. Subsequently he was forced to cancel all trips and *diksha* programmes on account of the Covid pandemic. In all, he blessed about 30,000 devotees with spiritual initiation.

The Covid pandemic disrupted his routine of giving initiation and meeting devotees. While in Cossipore Math, he used to receive many requests from ashramas for *diksha* visits. Touched by their earnestness he started meeting people, though he knew well the risk involved when the pandemic was raging all over the place.

Maharaj felt feverish on 19 May 2021, though the thermometer reading was normal. Doctors advised Maharaj’s *sevaks* to start recording pulse, temperature, blood pressure and oxygen saturation. The next day as he reported body ache and coughing, doctors began treating him. On 21 May some diagnostic tests were conducted including the Covid test. Before the test results were out, he developed a fever and his health suffered a little setback the next day. He was admitted to Seva Pratishthan hospital immediately. In the afternoon, the laboratory report confirmed that Maharaj had contracted the life-threatening Covid infection. Doctors shifted him to the ICU and started treatment. In the beginning he responded quite well to their treatment. But from 25 May he needed round-the-clock external oxygen support. Doctors concluded that his illness was a case of dangerous Covid-pneumonia. Seeing no improvement in his condition despite continuous oxygen therapy, doctors put him on non-invasive ventilation on 29 May. But by 10 June his condition deteriorated further and he needed mechanical ventilation. A team of expert doctors were monitoring his condition and treating him. Unfortunately he suffered a heart attack on 10 June and became unconscious at about 2 pm.

Maharaj had remarked to someone in the course of conversation in ICU, “I wish for *jivanmukti*” (liberation while living in the physical body). He repeated many times towards the end, “Let me be free this time”.

On the night of 9 June was *Phalaharini Kali Puja*. Special worship of the Divine Mother was going on at Belur Math and other branches of the Math and Mission. Maharaj was in ICU and an attendant was also in the same room attending to him. Maharaj was apparently asleep without any movement. To check his condition the attendant tiptoed to him. Although Maharaj's eyes were closed, he somehow sensed the attendant's presence near him and gestured to him with his hands to move away. But the attendant noticed that he was repeating faintly "Ma", "Ma". This repetition of "Ma", "Ma" and signalling the attendant to move away when he was approached happened quite a few times on that night.

The next day afternoon (10 June) the nurse on duty noticed that Maharaj was moving his hand as if he needed something. Seeing his gesture she guessed that Maharaj wanted to see a holy picture. She immediately brought a large picture of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi that was adorning a wall in the ICU and placed it in front of Maharaj. Maharaj then started doing japa, keeping the count with both hands. He then turned towards the picture of the Holy Mother and continued to repeat "Ma", "Ma". He even tried to join his hands to salute the Mother. Soon after this he suffered a heart attack and lost consciousness. Immediately doctors made many attempts to revive him but with no success. Maharaj's condition remained the same all through the next day (11 June). At about 9 pm his pulse could not be detected. Doctors examined him and declared that Maharaj had breathed his last at 9:05 pm. He was 86 years old.

As Maharaj had contracted Covid infection, the body had to be cremated as per the rules set by the government. Accordingly, his body was taken to Nimtala Crematorium in Kolkata that night itself. The last rites started at 12.15 am (12 June) and were over within an hour. Subsequently, in the dead of the night, his ashes were brought to Belur Math and immersed in the sacred Ganga at the ghat opposite Holy Mother's Temple. Swami Shivamayanandaji who all through led a life of detachment and loved solitude, fittingly embarked on his final journey all alone to the abode of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

Just about a month before his passing away when he was still in good health, he had written to a devotee on 13th May: "I was glad to know from your mail of 11 May that you are keeping well. This second wave of Covid-19 has taken away many good people close to us. I may also fall sick and pass away. In the midst of all this you should hold on firmly to Sri Thakur and Sri Ma. If you can do that you will be able to remain unaffected by all sorrows and miseries."

On Maharaj's demise, President of India, Prime Minister of India, Governor of West Bengal, Chief Minister of West Bengal and many others sent their condolence messages.

The memory of Swami Shivamayanandaji's bright and spotless life remains etched forever in the minds of hundreds of monks and devotees.
