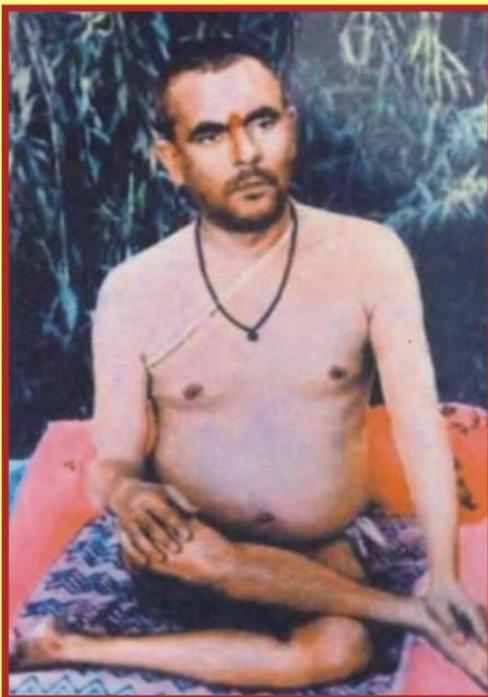




YOGIRAJ SWAMI NAND LAL JI

Sant Swami Nand Lal Ji is chiefly reported to belong to Tikkar (Kupwara) though his association with the Ashrams at Bomai (Sopore) and Hushoora (Budgam) was not anyway less important. He was influenced spiritually in his early life in the association of various highly awakened saints at an ancient Ashram in Zooni Pora (Zienpur) near Bomai (Sopore). He later practiced his basic *Sadhna* under the guidance of his Guru His Holiness Swami Lal Ji Maharaj at Bomai (Sopore) where he stayed for more than two decades before shifting to Tikkar. The guidance of his master along with his personal dedication took him to the highest stages of realization in a record time. Besides a highly awakened saint Swami Ji was recognized widely as an accomplished Yogi. Quite attractive in aspect and very soft by attitude, Swami Ji combined various captivating features in his holy person. He was deeply studious with high religious scholarship besides a keen taste for classical music and *Ayurveda*. Wherever he stayed devotees thronged to seek his blessings and the places became pilgrimage spots for ever. His devotees included many high-profile persons of the time while his main disciples, Late Mahatma Vibhishan Ji, Late Swami Kralbub Ji and Swami Mastbub Ji continued his holy legacy with full dedication. Swami Ji's influence has generated a huge *parivar* of devotees widely circulated throughout the country and abroad.

Aum Shri Gurdeva.



(1902-1966)



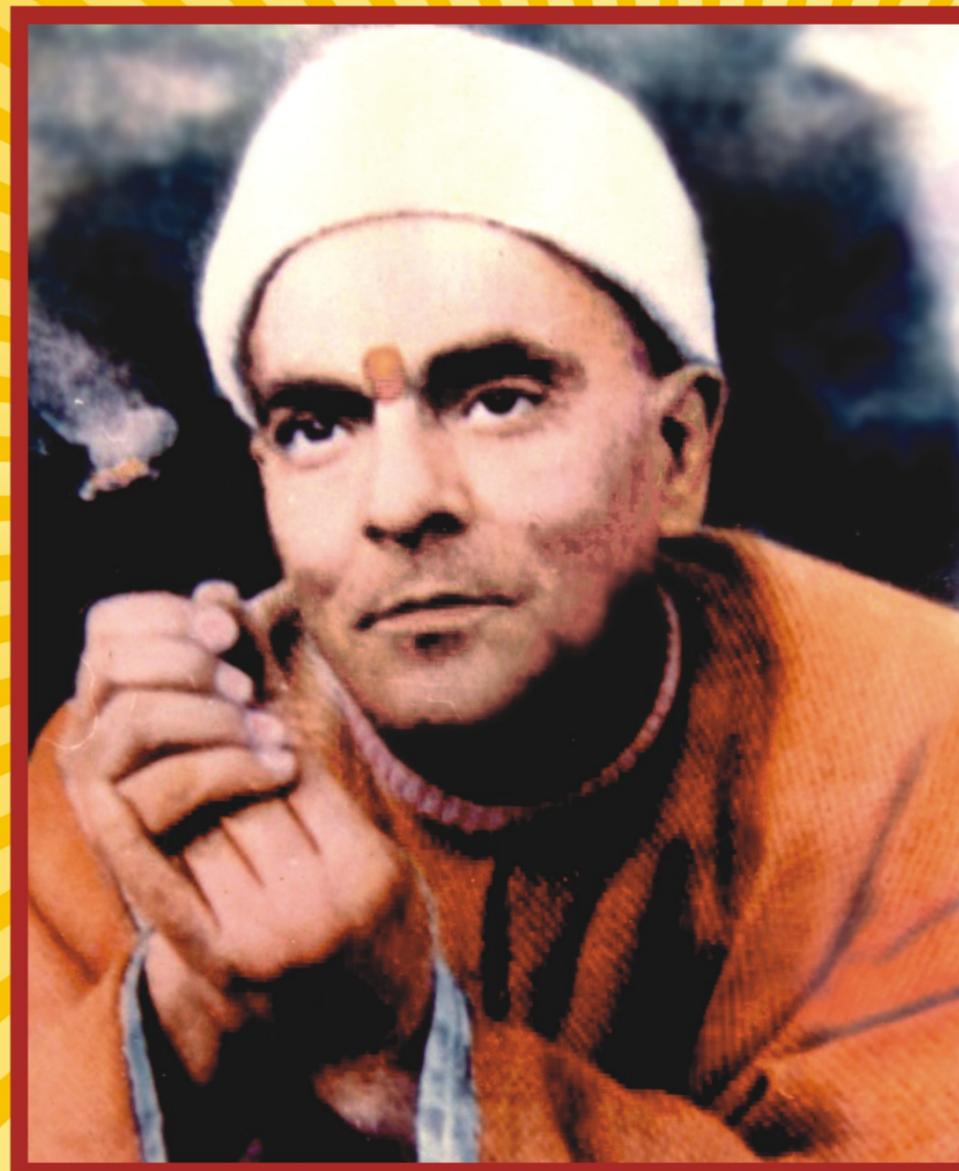
JAWAHAR LAL BHAT belongs originally to Makahama (Magam) Kashmir. A teacher by profession, he has authored six books on English Language Improvement and Personality Development before he retired in 2004 as a Senior Lecturer (English) from J&K Govt. service. His various articles mainly related to KP displacement imbroglio are published in 'Koshur Samachar' of Delhi and the online magazines 'Shehjar' 'Kasheer' and 'Harvan'. Currently settled in Faridabad (Haryana), India, he is working on a massive book on the works of Lalleshuri (Lalded), the famous poet saint of Kashmir.

Contact Information: B-3, Ashiyana Apartments, Sector-46, Faridabad, Haryana, India
Phone : +91-129-4096114 Email : bhatjl@gmail.com, bhatjl@rediffmail.com



अज्ञान घटे सिरिं प्रकाश छुक आसवोन्य
ज्ञान प्रकाश छुक आसवोन्य
ॐ श्री सत्गुरु क्षण क्षण छुम आसर वोन्य

YOGIRAJ SWAMI NAND LAL JI (A Biographical Study)



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JAWAHAR LAL BHAT

YOGIRAJ SWAMI NAND LAL JI
(A Biographical Study)



(1902-1966)

- Jawahar Lal Bhat

Author and Publisher :

Jawahar Lal Bhat

B-3, Ashiyana Apartments,

Sector 46, Faridabad,

Haryana, India

Phones : +91-129-4096114 / 9810716489

E-mail : bhatjl1@gmail.com / bhatjl@rediffmail.com

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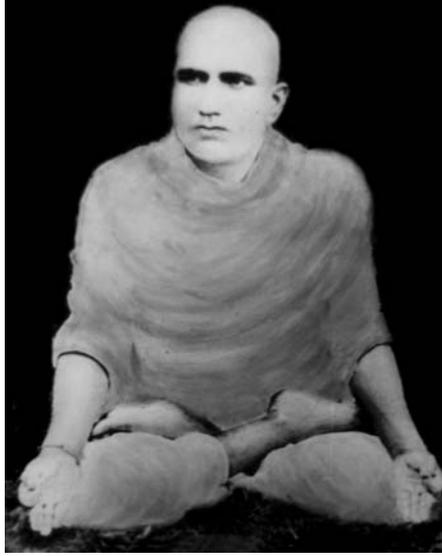
॥ ॐ श्री गुरुवे नमः ॥

Shradhanjali



गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णु गुरु साक्षात्महेश्वरः
गुरुरेव जगत्सर्वं तस्मै श्री गुरुवे नमः ॥
अखण्ड मण्डलाकारं व्याप्तं येन चराचरम्
तत्पदं दर्शितं येन तस्मै श्री गुरुवे नमः ॥
आपदा मपहर्तारं दातारं सर्वं संपदाम्
लोकाभिरामं श्री रामं भूयो भूयो नमाम्यहं ॥
ध्यानमूलं गुरोर्मूर्तिः पूजामूलं गुरो पदम्
शास्त्रमूलं गुरोर्वाक्यं मोक्षमूलं गुरो कृपा ॥
नमामि सत्गुरुं शान्तं प्रत्यक्षं शिवरूपिणं
शिरसां योगपीठस्थं धर्मकामार्थ सिद्धये ॥

॥ ॐ श्री सतुरुवे नमः ॥



HIS HOLINESS SWAMI LAL JI MAHARAJ

"....Swami Lal Ji commented proudly that young Nandlal was able to do in a few days what he himself had been able to do in several months. This showed the sharp intellect and bent of mind of Swami Ji for higher life and Yoga and the result was that ultimately Swami Ji acquired extraordinary capabilities which very few aspirants are able to achieve. The fact is also confirmed with the enthusiasm that his Guru Maharaj showed later with his beloved disciple in the coming years of his Sadhna."

PREFACE

It gives me immense pleasure to dedicate these pages to the immortal memories of YOGIRAJ SWAMI NAND LAL JI, hereinafter Swami Ji, whose celestial grace has been and continues to be a source of unlimited support and a beacon light to thousands of his devotees. The more we concentrate on the benevolence of Swami Ji the more blessed we enjoy. None of his devotees ever fall short of his divine grace whenever needed in the murky phase of life and the strange about it is that whenever we invoke Swami Ji in trouble, the worst of the misfortune passes off so smoothly that not a single trace is left and everything is followed by immense relief. Most amiable in nature and affectionate in attitude Swami Ji combined in himself vast capabilities of learning and action. His modesty and loving nature had won him a multitude of devotees in a very short period of time. Such was the impact of his holy person that anyone having his holiness' *darshan* once was undoubtedly attached for life. His devotees who have had the good fortune of being in his holy company for some time do religiously declare that Swami Ji was a living incarnation of Lord Shiva.

A saint of high repute and an established yogi, Swami Ji combined diverse aspects of divine life in his holy personality which included high academic brilliance besides achievement of the highest stages of spiritual enlightenment through rigorous practice of *yoga-kriya* under the supervision of his Guru His Holiness Swami Lal Ji Maharaj. Swami Ji instantly gained attention of numerous devotees in his early stages of sainthood (1940-50) and the impact was so great that people thronged to have a glimpse of the young saint in Bomai (Sopore) where Swami Ji stayed for not less than 22-26 years before settling down in other places especially Tikkar (Kupwara). Surprisingly the early stage or in better terms the formative period of his sainthood has been largely missed by his biographers so far, spent by Swami Ji in Bomai (Sopore), firstly in Zoonipora (Zienpur) Ashram, secondly at the Deewan-Khan in the house of Late Jia Lal Dass of Bomai and

thirdly in the Kutiya at Gowripora (Guerpur) apple orchard in Bomai. So the main thrust in these pages is to throw light on the early stages of the sainthood of Swami Ji which has had a deep impression on the later period of the holy life.

Attempting a biography of Swami Ji had been my priority for a long time but being an extra-ordinary work it was very hard venturing into until the grace of Swami Ji showed the way. Being out of the bounds of the valley was the greatest hazard and as such the work could not be satisfactorily accomplished as the direct contacts with persons and especially places was almost impossible, so there was no other way but to compromise with a limited resource based mainly on personal information and some stray clues. I hope these pages will be an excellent reading for the devotees of Swami Ji and especially those who are some way or the other connected to Swami Ji's *Parivar* and particularly youth in the age group of 20-30 who are witness to the devotion of their elders for Swami Ji and naturally eager to know everything about their roots back in Kashmir.

My immediate attempt will be to send copies of the book free of cost firstly to my known members of Swami Ji's *Parivar* extended widely and then various KP organization members including other acquaintances and friends mainly with the purpose of getting a response regarding the authenticity of the facts recorded herein and especially search for further details of the holy life definitely available with lots of devotees of Swami Ji scattered throughout the length and breadth of this country and abroad with the fervent hope that these esteemed devotees will contact this author with further reports that can be added to the next edition of the volume which I aspire to be much more exhaustive than this. I hope with the blessings of Swami Ji my long standing ambition of publishing a comprehensive volume on the holy life of Swami Ji comes true some day which I would consider a humble devotion to Swami Ji.

Aum Sbri Gurudeva

Jawahar Lal Bhat

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॥ ॐ श्री गुरु स्तुति ॥

अज्ञान घटे सिरिर्षि प्रकाश छुक आसवोनुय

ज्ञान प्रकाश छुक आसवोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु क्षण क्षण छुम आसर चोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

चय छुक ब्रह्मा चय हा विष्णु महेश्वरै

चय विश्वमय छुक अजर अमर अक्षर थ्यरय

वर त्रण गुणन पादि प्रणाम भविनय म्योनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

चान्यन पादन हन्दि गरदे हुन्दुय अंजन

युस लागि न्यतरन देव द्रष्टि तमिस छि बनन्

यथ न कांह वुछान तथ सदा चय छुक वुछवोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

दया सागर ! कर दया म्य दीनस क्षीनस

सिद्धी दितम मदमोचन म्य बुद्धि हीनस

ब अद कस वन औरत्य नाद छुक बोजवोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

शरण ब आसय च्य्य प्योसय परण पादन

वरुम म्य दासस थावतम कन ओरत्यन नादन

तरन भवसर च्योन प्रभाव इमव जोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

छुक सिद्ध योगी ब छुस रूगी दिम म्य दवा
औषध चान्यन पादन हंज गरद छ ना
उत्तम चूरण सर्व रूगन छु कासवोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

घटे घाशर ! चानि दयायि म्य रूग हटे
मटे छुसय तार भवसर अके वोटे
लटे अके मोख म्य हावतम प्रजलवोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

सन्ताप अगन पाप सूत्यन गोमुत प्रबल
शेरस प्यठ थाव कर कमल पनन्य शीतल
संताप चलयम पाप गलयम नोव तय प्रोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

सेतार मनुक तार चौरिथ सदा दिवान
हद यथ ना कुने बोद्ध म्याज सुय स्तुता ग्यवान
वृच म्यानि नचान मनव बोजतम लील वनवोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

करतम स दया वरतम तल चरनार बिन्दन
छुक बोध द्रष्टि चय दिवान अन्द्यन त मन्द्यन
अन्दान छुय न्याय चानि दयायि कर पाय म्योनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

चिन्तामनि ! सोन च बनावान छुक त्रामस
फीतस मोखतय पोखत बनावान छुक खामस
चय घटि हुन्द गाश स्वामी नन्द लाल छुय नाव चोनुय

ॐ श्री सत्गुरु.....

ई ब न ओसुस तीय ओसुस ज्ञानान ब पान
दयायि चानि यीय ब छुस तीय म्य ज़ोनुम टकान
रोवमुत लोबुम पज़ि लबित नजि रावरोनुय

ॐ श्री सतगुरु.....

इमन इमन गव ज़ि यिमन चय सूत्य लयस
दयस सूत्यन गयि ज़ि मीलिथ बाति पयस
भयस ज़य गोम दोन म्य रूदुम कुनुय भासबोनुय

ॐ श्री सतगुरु.....

भवसर तरनुक 'नीलकंठस' बनितन उपाय
स्वामी नन्दलाल जी तय स्वामी लालजी रूज्यतन सहाय
छीय तंग आमत्य अंज़ल हाथ मंगवोनिय

ॐ श्री सतगुरु.....

□ □ □

1

॥ ॐ श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

EARLY LIFE, ANTECEDENTS AND THE SANYASA

YOGRAJ SWAMI NANDLAL JI was born in GURGARI MOHALLA, ZAINA KADAL (Srinagar) into a prosperous KOUL family nicknamed as KOTHDARS. His grandfather PANDIT SEHZA KAUL had two sons RAM KAUL and HARA KAUL. Swami Ji was son of PANDIT HARA KAUL born on an auspicious day, FALGUN SHUKLA PAKSH ASHTAMI (TAILA ASHTAMI) though the exact year of birth is not confirmed. It is said that his childhood at his home was not comfortable as his esteemed mother had passed away when he was quite young so he left his home at age 14 when he was in class IX. His step-mother didn't treat him well and it was one of the reasons that he left home at this tender age. In fact he was not destined to be an ordinary householder. He had taken birth for the accomplishment of a higher mission which he did by achieving the highest stage of spiritual awakening through Yoga, higher dedication and super consciousness which very few mortals are able to do. Thus Swami Ji detached himself at an

early age from the bondages of the household life to seek a far higher purpose for himself. Having sought refuge in the feet of many awakened saints and savants of that time young Swami Ji remained on move from place to place in search of the ultimate path for himself till one day around 1932-33 he reached ZOONI-PORA (ZIENPUR), a village near BOMAI (SOPORE) on way to KUPWARA in Kashmir. Surprisingly the stay of Swami Ji at ZOONI-PORA (ZINPUR) and later at BOMAI (SOPORE) for not less than 25-27 years has been largely ignored by his biographers though his stay there is the most important period of the holy life being the formative years of his sainthood.

ZOONI-PORA Ashram (ZIENPUR)

The Ashram complex in ZOONI-PORA (ZIENPUR) was in those days very well established where lots of saints and BHABAS were regular visitors from far and near. The Ashram kept especially brimming with activities of devotees because it fell on way to MAA SHARDA, a reputed temple complex in northern India situated in SHARDI near MUZAFFERABAD across TITWAL (GUREZ) presently in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). The devotees on way to SHARDA-MAYEE, as it was popularly called, crossed ZOONI-PORA Ashram and stayed there for a couple of days or more for the facilities available and sought blessings of the DHOONI-MAYEE. It was this Ashram which was destined to be the ultimate destination for young NAND LAL JI to get associated with numerous saints and SADHUS and among them his Guru Maharaj BHABA SWAMI LAL JI, a highly accomplished saint and yogi from outside Kashmir who was incidentally one of the regular visitors to this place.

DHOONI-MAYEE

The DHOONI-MAYEE, a large fire-place kept ablaze all the time fed by large logs of wood was the main attraction of the Ashram. It had been the place for sacred oblations of some highly enlightened saint (name not known) who remained absorbed in deep meditations most of the time till he left his mortal coil and as such it had become a place of pilgrimage for thousands of devotees including numerous SAINTS and BHABAS who visited there and stayed for a couple of days or more to drink in ample measure the spiritual nectar available there in abundance. It is said that the then King of Kashmir Late MAHARAJA PARTAP SINGH on one of his customary sojourns around there had a chance meeting with the late BHABA stationed at ZOONI-PORA with the DHOONI-MAYEE and so impressed was he with the spiritual advancement of the saint that he ordered a JAGEER of a thousand KANALS of land be attached to the Ashram for its maintenance. The late MAHARAJA was himself a highly advanced saint and besides being very popular with the people of Kashmir he had a great love and respect for the saints wherever he found them without the distinction of religion. So the Ashram was very well managed and fully equipped with all facilities for the visitors and devotees and moreover a centre of attraction for numerous SAINTS and SADHUS who visited there to seek guidance and blessings from the blessed ones who stayed there, some permanently and some with some purpose. The Ashram served a great purpose of a school of learning for fresh aspirants among SADHUS and various householders from far and near who took regular lessons from the learned ones and often attended the discourses of high caliber saints whose services in the matters of religious matters was sought frequently.

The basic school of learning for Swami Ji

Before Swami Ji got initiated into the ascetic order by his holiness SWAMI LAL JI he had a long stay in this Ashram in the service of numerous saints present there and keeping attendance of many learned souls along with adhering to the disciplined saintly way of life there. Thus in an atmosphere charged deeply with spiritual brilliance Swami Ji received the choicest formal education of the saintly order in a highly systematic manner. It included the study of almost all authentic scriptures, the essential codes of conduct for sainthood and especially the practice of YOGA SADHNA all of which laid a steady foundation of his future life. Consequently the future life of Swami Ji was a distinct disciplined way of sainthood quite unlike almost all the other reputed saints of Kashmir. The diverse aspects of the holy personality included a high disciplined life coupled with brilliant achievements in the field of YOGA and high academic brilliance was an example in itself.

Thus ZOONI-PORA Ashram proved to be the basic school of learning for Swami Ji and also a place where he had the occasion to be in the feet of his Guru, the relationship which actually laid the sound foundation of the holy life of Swami Ji. Here some more details available with this author about ZOONI-PORA Ashram would surely be interesting for the reader. The Ashram in those days (around 1932-40) was headed by a saint PANDIT SHIV JEE SHAH who managed all the affairs of the Ashram along with the huge property attached to it. A regular LANGAR (cooking arrangement) on large scale to feed hundreds of visitors daily was arranged quite efficiently and devotees from far and near came there for SEWA i.e. the service at the Ashram as they took great pleasure in serving the visitors who included mostly

SAINTS and BHABAS especially. Some special delicacies besides normal foods, tea, rice and veggies were served like out of season fruits tactfully preserved for all seasons included fresh grapes, peaches, apple, cherry etc. All food-grains, vegetables and fruit consumed there were the product of the farmland attached to it tended by the farmers nearby on share basis and as such there was no dearth of anything and abundance prevailed in this Ashram to this extent that the number of devotees and visitors went on increasing day by day.

ZOONI-PORA Ashram (ZIENPUR) gutted

Unfortunately this abundance, peace and spiritual brilliance didn't last longer at this Ashram. The whole complex comprising of a couple of grand DHARMSHALAS (rest houses at a temple complex), a grand temple and many other small constructions near DHOONI-MAYEE including a grand JAGH-SHALA (place especially meant for HAWAN or sacred oblations) was razed to the ground completely in a great fire put to it in 1947 by raiders during Pakistani Aggression on Kashmir and Partition. The complex was almost deserted already as all Pandits in the area were trying to save their lives by taking refuge in safer places nearer to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. It may not be out of place to mention that this area, SOPORE, BARAMULLA, HANDWARA, KUPWARA, URI and LOLAB were the worst affected during the 1947 turmoil as thousands of Hindus and Sikhs were brutally killed and property looted and gutted and it took a long time for the remaining few to reestablish themselves at their places after Indian troops pushed back the raiders and restored normalcy in the areas. And among the tragedies that befell Kashmir in 1947 in general and Kashmir Pandits in particular was their access to their beloved SHARDA- MAYEE

temple complex which incidentally fell across the Line of Control (LOC) in the area controlled by Pakistan. The complex has unfortunately been treated very badly after the partition and is in complete ruins now. All efforts of Kashmir Pandits to allow them visiting this age old temple (SHARDA- MAYEE) at least once a year have proved futile as neither the authorities across the LOC agreed to it nor could the Government of India make it a point strong enough with Pakistan.

ZOONI PORA Ashram (ZIENPUR) post 1947

After 1947 when peace was gradually restored in the valley and the Pandits started settling back at their places some steps were taken to restore the glory of the Ashram in ZOONI-PORA also which was completely in ruins. A small temple and a DHARAM-SHALLA were constructed there but the past glory could not be restored as the Pandits were scared beyond measure though those of nearby village BOMAI had been miraculously saved from the arson and killings quite unlike the barbarous events in the area surrounding SOPORE, HANDWARA and KUPWARA. The reason of this miraculous escape was the blessing of SWAMI NANDLAL JI who had in those days advanced significantly in the spiritual pursuits and was stationed in the KUTIYA at GOWRI-PORA near BOMAI. The details about the events will be given in a subsequent chapter. The unfortunate that happened with the ZOONI-PORA Ashram later is also worth a mention. The property attached to the Ashram yielded good fortunes in the form of fruit and grains and was managed efficiently by a registered body of Pandits from BOMAI governed by SUDHAR SAMPATI, a state level KP organization for a long time after 1947. With the passage of time some scrupulous selfish elements entered the organization and wanted to have personal gains out

of it which created a serious trouble among the devotees and consequently the complex was put to great losses. The condition of the Ashram deteriorated further and fell almost to ruins again. Since the Kashmir administration was not also such efficient as to set things right so conditions could not improve anyway and the Ashram went from bad to worse day by day. Swami Ji in those days stayed mostly in GOWRI-PORA KUTIYA near BOMAI and took keen interest in the developments at the ZOONI-PORA Ashram affairs. He was pained beyond limits on witnessing certain elements trying to fulfill personal interests from the depredating conditions of the ZOONI-PORA Ashram once a pride of Kashmir. Some people are of the opinion that this was the prime reason that Swami Ji preferred to be away from the scene and took immediate steps to raise Ashram at TIKKAR (KUPWARA) and settled there almost permanently.



2

॥ ॐ श्री गुरुवे नमः ॥

SWAMI JI CHANGES PLACE

Swami Ji had already shifted to the DEEWAN-KHAN in the house of Late SHJIA LAL DASS of BOMAI, a nearby village before the great tragedy that razed to the ground the temple complex at ZOONI-PORA (ZIENPUR) Ashram in 1947. This shifting of residence (around 1936-37) of Swami Ji is worth attention as it had been in fact some predestined relationship that brought Swami Ji in contact with Dass family of BOMAI that created an eternal celestial bond and which has brought along lots of everlasting sweet memories that continue till now and would remain further eternally.

At DEEWAN-KHAN, BOMAI

While in ZOONI-PORA Ashram Swami Ji, while pursuing the vigorous activities that he was in, being probably the youngest was occasionally sent for some petty errands to village BOMAI just a kilometer away, which comprised of a good number of (about 60-70) Pandit families, almost all well-to-do. The little

Swami Ji soon became obviously the beloved of all Pandits especially DASS family of the same village which was headed by SH. JIA LAL DASS, a reputed and influential person. Pandit Dass was a fervent devotee of DHOONI-MAYEE and hence a frequent visitor to ZOONI-PORA Ashram. As was destined to be he was especially attracted towards young Swami Ji for his attractive yogic appearance and cheerful aspect. Swami Ji might have stayed 3-4 years in ZOONI-PORA Ashram and advanced significantly in the field of sainthood when one day he expressed his desire of staying in his house to PANDIT DASS and pursuing SADHNA uninterruptedly. It was evidently clear that Swami Ji had reached the stage when he needed solitude. Being quite happy on one side for getting an occasion to serve such a promising young saint in his house but at the same time scared significantly on the other to shoulder such a sensitive responsibility, SH JIA LAL JI told his esteemed mother SMT. RADHA MALI, a saintly lady about the desire of the Swami. Surprisingly without any inhibitions, she immediately consented to it and offered to provide all requirements of Swami Ji herself with full devotion and sanctity in her house. She had actually been already deeply attached to young Swami Ji as she had on various occasions invited him and fed him with great devotion in her house and offered him her services in whatever kind he would require. This association later proved to be a great devotion and service provided by DASS family to Swami Ji for decades. The devotion has strangely enough not at all ceased or discontinued but continues unabated even today with this broadly expanded family whose members are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the country and abroad especially after the displacement of Pandits from the valley and all of them

without any exception continue having extreme devotion for Swami Ji considering him as their chief preceptor or KUL-GURU.

Unprecedented devotion of DASS family

Thus Swami Ji was offered to stay in a large furnished room, the first floor of a huge wooden structure, tastefully decorated outside the main residential house but within the residential complex of Pandit Dass. The actual purpose of such guest-house type accommodation with affluent villagers in those days was to provide for receiving some official guests or holding certain small social gatherings. The house was called DEEWAN-KHAN and had a separate entry approach from outside and as such quite suitable for the requirements of Swami Ji. Dass family was quite a large joint family comprising of about fifty members and it was a matter for great pride for all members to have Swami Ji in their house and so everyone was equally eager to extend all possible service to him and his devotees. But the main contribution was of the head lady of Dass family SMT RADHA MALI whose unprecedented service and devotion in the form of serving foods and other beverages with all sanctity to Swami Ji and the numberless visitors who came there at all odd hours unendingly is really unparalleled. Though RADHA MALI didn't live longer than a few years after Swami Ji settled in the house but the responsibility was equally shouldered and carried over quite satisfactorily by her daughter-in-law and the esteemed wife of PANDIT JIA LAL DASS, SMT UMAWATI who surprisingly continued with the task of serving Swami Ji and his visitors much more devotedly and with extra dedication. It is said that on the NIRVANA of SMT RADHA MALI Swami Ji was present and his holiness gave his shoulder to her bier as her own mother, the unprecedented honour the great soul received from Swami

Ji. It is moreover said that prosperity in ample measure dawned upon this household immediately after Swami Ji settled there and it is further said ironically that the cows that had stopped giving milk started giving pails of milk and also surprisingly the business whatsoever the household handled progressed unexpectedly. Evidently Swami Ji was quite satisfied with the service provided here that he stayed in the DEEWAN-KHAN for not less than 8-10 years before he shifted to the Ashram got constructed in GOWRI-PORA (GUERPUR), BOMAI in the apple orchard of the same Dass family.

The formative period of the holy life of Swami Ji

The period of Swami Ji's stay in ZOONI-PORA Ashram and later in the DEEWAN-KHAN can be rightly described as the formative period of his holy life. The period was quite hectic and full of events as Swami Ji remained mostly on move meeting saints and SADHUS besides visiting places of religious importance and solitude. His visits to remote interiors of unknown dense forests and staying there for long periods in association with highly awakened souls have also been reported. The fact is further confirmed on observing later some unique features of higher life in Swami Ji which were not otherwise possible. Moreover, Swami Ji was all these years a regular visitor to SHARDA-MAYEE Temple complex near MUZAFFERABAD across TITWAL (GUREZ). The visits there involved a long travel on foot and later on horses through KUPWARA and LOLAB VALLEY and as such on lots of occasions he along with his associates had to stay in the houses of Pandits in villages in that area. Thus the close association that developed with many Pandits of that area created a vast field of devotees and admirers of Swami Ji in the area. This also gave rise to certain important

events that had an impact on the holy life and hence necessary to make a mention. The first and foremost was the formal initiation of Swami Ji to saintly order by his holiness SWAMI LAL JI who was already very popular and widely respected in the area. His holiness SWAMI LAL JI though a non-Kashmiri saint was also a regular visitor to SHARDA TEMPLE through the same route and stayed with the Pandits there frequently. He commanded great respect in the area and had a large number of devotees and disciples there and as such when the occasion came for the formal initiation of Swami Ji his Guru himself selected a place for him in village SOGAM in the house of one SHRIDHAR BHAT to complete his basic KRIYA. And later it is said that on completion of his first stage of SADHNA, SWAMI LAL JI commented proudly that young NANDLAL was able to do in a few days what he himself had been able to do in several months. This showed the sharp intellect and bent of mind of Swami Ji for higher life and YOGA and the result was that ultimately Swami Ji acquired extraordinary capabilities which very few aspirants are able to achieve. The fact is also confirmed with the enthusiasm that his GURU MAHARAJ showed later with his beloved disciple in the coming years of his SADHNA. The popularity of Swami Ji began immediately spreading far and wide after he settled at the DEEWAN-KHAN in BOMAI. The visits of his devotees there began increasing day by day who came there for the redress of their woes and also for having a DARSHANA of the young Swami Ji. The atmosphere was especially charged when SWAMI LAL JI was also there in Swami Ji's association. It is said that both GURU and SHISHYA used to keep so deeply absorbed in long bouts of YOGA SADHNA during long nights and days that the whole building structure

trembled with the impact. Dass family especially SMT RADHA MALI and later her daughter-in-law SMT UMAWATI, the esteemed wife of SH JIA LAL DASS served endlessly all present there including visitors which showed her unprecedented devotion towards Swami Ji.

Swami Ji though advanced significantly now in his pursuit of personal enlightenment visited those days a learned Pandit in SOPORE Town SHRI AFTAB JOO KHER frequently for academic guidance and study of certain authentic religious scriptures. The thirst of Swami Ji for learning was so great and he would almost daily travel on foot or horseback to SOPORE town (12 kilometers) and take lessons from Pandit KHER. Moreover in SOPORE those days there was one more attraction for Swami Ji as there assembled occasionally a galaxy of saints and learned Pandits in a Temple complex for discussions and discourses on sensitive issues regarding the Hindu scriptures in which Swami Ji and occasionally his GURU MAHARAJ SWAMI LAL JI also participated.

Special interest in LALDED and her WAKHS

It is said that Swami Ji especially took interest in the interpretations of the famous WAKHS of LAL-DED (LALLESHURI), the greatest YOGINI and famous mystic poet of Kashmir. Since the LALLA-WAKHS are the unparalleled and the most comprehensive source of instruction in the field of YOGA so Swami Ji was especially interested in them and greatly inspired by them. He would usually refer the WAKHS of LALLESHURI (LALLA WAKHS) in his discourses as an authentic treatise and explain the content therein very forcefully. Undoubtedly he excelled in the field of YOGA far above thousands of Kashmir saints of the modern times. It may not

be out of place to mention that among the other saints of Kashmir including the highly awakened ones quite a few practiced YOGA paths for their uplift in the spiritual arena. Swami Ji was especially an exception. He achieved the highest stages of self-realization through YOGA under the strict guidance of his GURU MAHARAJ. Evidently he has won the title YOGIRAJ for himself for the extraordinary capabilities he acquired in the field of YOGA. Most amiable in nature and affectionate in attitude Swami Ji combined in himself vast capabilities of learning and action. His modesty and loving nature besides his impressive smiling aspect had won him a multitude of followers in a very short period of time. Such was the impact of his holy person that anyone having his holiness' DARSHAN once was undoubtedly attached for life. His devotees who have had the good fortune of being in his holy company for some time do religiously declare that Swami Ji was a living incarnation of Lord Shiva.

Numerous miraculous feats

The presence of Swami Ji in GOWRI PORA Ashram and later in TIKKAR had proved a great succor for the people around who came there in large numbers to seek redress of their each and every trouble be it their own physical ailment or any other household problem and Swami Ji was there to help everyone out of it with an enchanting smile and it is said that Swami Ji left no one without hope and everyone went away satisfied. Evidently Swami Ji performed numerous miraculous feats like curing various patients of their incurable ailments instantly or blessing many childless couples with children. Many individual cases of restoring sight to almost blind eyes are reported among his devotees. This author has purposely not gone into the details

of the various miraculous feats performed by Swami Ji, still alive in the memories of his devotees as I personally rate such things quite ordinary considering the towering holy personality. Swami Ji was a living incarnation of Lord Shiva and a single gaze at his holy feet would redress a devotee of all troubles and bestow upon him or her eternal peace and tranquility. How blessed are those who had the good fortune of having easy access to Swami Ji in their vicinity and who got their troubles redressed at his curing hands or simply bowing before his holy self, though the impact of Swami Ji on his devotees, whose field has expanded tremendously worldwide, hasn't diminished anyway everyone of them is sufficiently convinced even today that Swami Ji is nearest to them than everything else and so they depend fully upon his benevolence whenever they need so.



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SWAMI JI IN GOWRI-PORA (GUERPUR) KUTIYA

While Swami Ji went on progressing in the field of spiritual advancement in DEEWAN-KHAN, BOMAI there was obviously a rapid increase in the activities and naturally the field of his devotees also broadened. Soon there was such a heavy influx of devotees that the current accommodation seemed insufficient and as such another change seemed inevitable. The problem was immediately addressed and consequently Swami Ji selected a very beautiful lush green spot away from the hustle and bustle of the village about a kilometer away from the present DEEVAN-KHAN beside the apple orchard owned by same DASS family for a small Ashram. The spot fell in GOWRI-PORA (GUERPUR) village near BOMAI under the canopy of a couple of CHINARS and fresh water flowing on one side. Strangely enough a casual view of the spot gave a simple impression that the spot was cut out for some extraordinary purpose.

So in due course a small Ashram with a couple of rooms on the

ground and a hall, a kitchen, a TAPASYA room and a balcony facing east in the first floor was raised immediately under the directions of Swami Ji and he shifted there. For an ordinary person the place was quite deserted as none else lived in the vicinity but for Swami Ji it was the choicest for its scenic beauty and solitude. All necessary essentials were provided and Swami Ji took personal pains to give the KUTIYA, as it was later called, the shape of a traditional Indian saint's cottage. A small rivulet was directed in the compound and a small waterfall made out of it beside a small rectangular raised space which was used by Swami Ji for AASANA during days before a small gathering of his devotees. The compound was walled with dry willow twigs and a small gate entry provided to keep away stray animals and cattle. Beautiful shrubs and flower plants were planted to improve the aesthetic beauty of the place. This was all done on the strict instructions of Swami Ji. Once complete the KUTIYA equaled paradise in no lesser terms. There was no dearth of anything as the devotees and especially Dass family were always keen to provide everything essential.

The KUTIYA much more coveted by devotees

The visits of devotees went on increasing and Swami Ji listened to every one patiently and thus the troubles and pains of most of them got relieved. The Muslims of the area also visited there to pay respects to Swami Ji as he had no inhibitions in meeting them and sharing their troubles. Besides the people of BOMAI and surrounding villages, devotees from far off places as far as SRINAGAR, BUDGAM, ANANTNAG and SHOPIAN came to meet Swami Ji, share his spiritual experiences and seek his blessings. The earliest devotees worth the name were PANDIT SHRIDHAR JOO DHAR, Ex. Conservator of forests who was

himself a highly awakened saint and a frequent visitor to almost all great saints of that time, SH JAGAN NATH SUMBLY Ex. Deputy Commissioner and SH. SOOM NATH HALWAI. Late MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI came here in the same KUTIYA in the service of Swami Ji and it was here after very hectic service and SADHNA that Swami Ji initiated him into the ascetic order. He was perhaps the first and foremost disciple initiated by him and was naturally very beloved of Swami Ji. VIBHISHAN JI was from BARAMULLA and this name was given to him by Swami Ji himself. The dedication and love with which he served Swami Ji is unparalleled and nonetheless the place he achieved among the disciples of Swami Ji could not be equaled by any one. The other favourite devotees who served Swami Ji during this period were SHRI PREM NATH DASS and SHRI JANKI NATH DASS both brothers of SHRI JIA LAL DASS besides many others from BOMAI who used to be continuously in the service of Swami Ji. SWAMI MAST BAB JI also came in the service of Swami Ji in the same period and was initiated probably by Swami Ji here in the KUTIYA.

Diverse aspects of the holy personality

Gradually the diverse aspects of the personality of Swami Ji seemed to exhibit here in this KUTIYA more extensively than ever. The description of a few seems appropriate here. He had acquired a deep knowledge of AYURVEDA and various medicinal herbs and their use in different ailments for their cure. Swami Ji used this skill in curing numerous people of many dangerous diseases miraculously in the KUTIYA and thereafter too. Some of his favourite devotees had learnt some knowledge about medicinal herbs from him and they also used them extensively. One SHRI DINA NATH DASS of BOMAI had

become an expert VAID with such acquired knowledge and treated patients very successfully all his life.

Swami Ji possessed particularly a deep taste for classical SUFIANA music and in this respect his holiness was assisted by a reputed singer and musician SHRI SHAMBOO NATH SOPORI in the KUTIYA. Shri SOPORI is reported to be in the company of Swami Ji frequently in the KUTIYA singing BHAJANS in classical mode and the atmosphere was quite captivating. To some of his devotees in their sweet memories the KUTIYA under the shade of the CHINAR trees and in the background of high mountain slopes with fresh vegetation of pine trees still echo the live celestial music which Swami Ji along with some of his devotees occasionally enjoyed. Swami Ji himself too loved to play some musical notes on a string-instrument called MADHAM and the holy MEHFIL put to trance many of his devotees for hours. This taste for music continued with Swami Ji all his life and also occasionally he would like to enjoy a classical SUFIANA MEHFIL by some other masters as well in this KUTIYA. It seems essential to mention here that Swami Ji was a strict disciplinarian and didn't allow any deviation from the moral and ethical standards whatsoever and the traditional codes of sainthood at the hands of anyone present. In the case of his disciples he was particularly strict in making them obey these regulations. So at times he exhibited such behaviour too that seemed much harsh but he was too soft at heart and always wished good for his devotees.

Visits of various awakened saints

The visits of some awakened saints to Swami Ji needs mention here. SHRI VED LAL JI BHAT of HANJIVERA, PATTAN, popularly known as SED-BAB and an accomplished householder

saint frequently visited Swami Ji, stayed with him and accompanied him to places. It is not sufficiently established whether he was his disciple but the relationship was definitely special as both of them were seen occasionally engaged in serious discourses on the matters better known to them and none else had the courage to disturb them or intervene. But one thing is confirmed that he was given the name SED-MOL by Swami Ji for his simplicity, devotion and straightforward ways of saintly life and dedicated SADHNA. The name was borrowed by Swami Ji from the Guru of LAL-DED who was also called SED-MOL. As already mentioned Swami Ji was a devout devotee of the mystic saint poet LAL-DED and was immensely inspired by LALA-WAKHS and the instructions for YOGA contained in them. Another name worth mention here is of one saint poet who had won great name for his Kashmiri devotional poetry (BHAJANS), PANDIT NEELKANTH JI of DAB-WAKOORA village. He was a devout devotee of Swami Ji and probably his disciple though the assertion is refuted by many devotees of Swami Ji. His oration of Kashmiri BHAJANS was exceptional as he could compose without effort very beautiful Kashmiri devotional couplets and songs on occasions. It is said he had MAA SARARSWATI on his lips and so he could sing extempore devotional BHAJANS whenever the environment demanded as such. He was very famous for his sharp wit and Swami Ji had great respect for him and visited him at his place occasionally. Many are of the opinion that he was a disciple initiated by Swami Ji. The assertion is further strengthened as Pandit NEELKANTH JI is the poet of the famous GUR-ASTUTI of Swami Ji--

Agnya'ne Ghat'y Sir'ye Praka'sh Chu'kh Aase'wonuy

Gyan'e Praka'sh Chu'kh Aase'wonuy

Hee m'yane Sat'guru Ksh'ene Ksh'ene Ch'um Aa'sare Cho'nuy

sung by his devotees everywhere every day with utmost devotion and love even today though there is no authentic confirmation and it is further said that he was his GURU himself. However, the fact remains that PANDIT NEELKANTH JI was fervently devoted to Swami Ji and visited him and both enjoyed the company of each other. An another remarkable devotional poem, as an outcome of this celestial union is the depiction of the visit of LORD SHIVA in the form of a SANYASI to the house of MAA JASODHA for having a glimpse of child SHRI KRISHNA in GOKUL. The poem has been reportedly an extempore recitation of PANDIT NEELKANTH JI in the presence of Swami Ji on his holiness' desire, probably in the KUTIYA. And interestingly the fact is rendered very beautifully in the last stanza of the poem as under-

*Yee Neel'e Kanth'as Sant Nand Lal Jee'an Won'uy
Wan Shiv'e Sund'uy Gokul'as Undh'er Yu'nuy
Shankar Te Krishen' Krishen'e Shankar Ch'uy No Byun'uy
Sho'd Bo'dh Shankar Aa'v Laa'ran Gokul Kun'y
Azar Amar Yughesh'ur Nirmal Kun'uy*

Such is the impact of this devotional song that a devotee can fall into a simple trance on reading it or listening to it attentively. Swami Ji is reported to have rendered it to music himself and sang it occasionally to the deepest ecstasy of his devotees present there.

A fervent devotee of SHARDA-MAYEE

The KUTIYA was the abode of Swami Ji and the place of his SADHNA for about twenty years though he used to be regularly on move visiting important shrines, places and persons. His sojourns included the deep forests of the area too where he

stayed at unknown places for long periods probably to follow some special SADHNA on the instance of his Guru Maharaj. SWAMI LAL JI also stayed in this KUTIYA occasionally for many days especially on the birthdays of Swami Ji which was celebrated by his devotees with great zeal and devotion. As already stated Swami Ji was a fervent devotee of SHARDA-MAYEE the celebrated temple complex in present POK, he visited there frequently on foot or horseback and stayed there for days together performing austerities in the lap of the MOTHER GODDESS. Swami Ji used to be the guest of some of his devotee there who happened to be there in connection with some business or employment. Incidentally, Swami Ji happened to be in SHARDI (SHARDA TEMPLE) in October 1947 when tribal raiders invaded and entered Kashmir through URI and TITWAL sector and went on barbarous killing and looting spree of non-Muslims of the area and Swami Ji marched towards BOMAI with some of his devotees facing encounters with the raiders. They couldn't face the miraculous power of his holiness and the guns aimed at him didn't work and as such they were compelled to bow before his holiness before fleeing. The Pandits in BOMAI were scared beyond measure and preparing for any eventuality. When Swami Ji reached there, he instructed them all to keep calm and be at their places. The miracle that ensued was that none of the raiders entered BOMAI though the Pandits there were a good number and all prosperous and hence a good prey for the raiders. It is said that some confusion erupted in their ranks and they didn't venture entering there till they were hounded back by the Indian Army.

Deep studies and YOGA were the routine of Swami Ji

Swami Ji used to practice regularly various Yogic exercises by

combining postures and breath-restraint (PRANAYAMA) vigorously along with DHOTI-KRIYA for purification. Deep studies were the routine of Swami Ji. He used to be absorbed in serious studies of scriptures and commentaries on UPNISHIDAS, BHAGAVAD-GITA and other books by reputed authors and was always ready to answer the queries raised by any of his devotees. It would be interesting for the reader to know something about the daily routine of Swami Ji in the KUTIYA. Swami Ji was an early riser and kept absorbed with routine YOG-KRIYA and deep meditation almost till mid-day. He was in the habit of smoking CHARAS and tobacco all his life incessantly from his CHILLAM otherwise he maintained very clean habits and the KUTIYA exhibited a flavour of calm and pure atmosphere. Personally he looked after the absolute cleanliness of the place though there used to be always some devotees invariably present to do all the jobs. During summers and suitable climates Swami Ji laid his AASANA on an elevated space in the compound beside the small cascade facing east and the devotees present sat in front of him and listened to his discourses. All visitors were welcomed by him warmly and before anything else he or she was served with a cup of KEHVA, a traditional Kashmiri tea without milk, taken in bronze cups (KHOS) held with a towel. Swami Ji also took a cup but after taking a few sips he offered it to some of his devotee present there as a PRASAD. The evenings were especially quite attractive as there was a collective recital of certain BHAJANS or LEELAS in which Swami Ji also participated. The scene presented such a beautiful memorable environment that attracted the devotees time and again to the evening PUJA. Regarding food Swami Ji was a strict vegetarian all his life and took very simple SATVIK food and avoided strictly onions, garlic,

tomatoes and many leafy vegetables. The preferable foods included PLAIN RICE; KASHMIRI SAAG, MOONG DAL AND LOTUS STEM (NADRU). Swami Ji observed fast on many days especially ASHTAMI, PURNIMA, AMAWASIA, EKADASHI and other auspicious days. Swami Ji prepared many kinds of pickles and medicinal preparations personally in small glass bottles which kept hanging outside on the Verandah of the KUTIYA in open sun and probably used them in curing patients who came to him.

Plans for more Ashrams

With every passing day the field of devotees expanded tremendously as whosoever visited Swami Ji once was attached for life. His numerous devotees from far off places had made it a routine to visit Swami Ji every now and then and for those who lived far away the task being quite troublesome most of them wished to have Swami Ji nearer to their place to enjoy his blessings. As such gradually plans were made to have Ashrams for the stay of Swami Ji for longer periods in other areas too. Consequently two Ashrams one at HUSHOORA village in BUDGAM DISTRICT and the other at TIKKAR (KUPWARA) came up with the blessings of the Swami. Both Ashrams were planned and the venues selected by Swami Ji himself. The TIKKAR (KUPWARA) Ashram was especially beloved of Swami Ji and he got it raised very tastefully and preferred to be there for longer periods in his later life. The HUSHOORA Ashram was probably constructed before TIKKAR ashram and was especially raised at the instance of the devotees of Swami Ji of that area. Swami Ji stayed there for many days and performed many HAWANS on auspicious occasions. The devotees at this Ashram seemed to show particular enthusiasm and devotion

for Swami Ji as the Ashram was always full of devotees and renovations here were carried on endlessly for the beautification of the place.



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ASHRAM AT HUSHOORA (BUDGAM)

The Ashram at HUSHOORA (BUDGAM) was raised in the year around 1955 on land donated by some devotee beside a steep hill-slope within scores of walnut trees and apple orchards around. The main attraction of the Ashram was a large pool of crystal clear water inside the premises fed by a stream of fresh water coming down from the height of the adjacent hill-slope diverted into the Ashram through a large pipe forming a beautiful waterfall. The water was directed out normally into the fields over a further slope which made a murmuring sound all the time. The pond was properly maintained with timely cleanliness and a beautiful SHIVA-LINGA installed in the middle with an arrangement of a continuous flow of water over it. Swami Ji took personal interest in the planning of the Ashram and gave all directions especially in the making of the water pond with the SHIVA-LINGA. Swami Ji loved to have flowing water around wherever he settled probably to facilitate the morning KRIYA and other

cleaning processes efficiently. The Ashram had many small rooms and a couple of large halls in the two storey building. A permanent arrangement for cooking on large scale was provided in the compound besides a regular kitchen accommodation. Like all other Ashrams besides the sufficient food stocks there was everything provided in the form of cooking utensils, beddings, furnishings etc enough to meet the requirements of hundreds of guests especially on the special occasions of HAVANS (sacred oblations) or celebrations on auspicious days.

Village HUSHOORA comprised of a good number of Pandit families; almost all Swami Ji's devotees besides a large population of Muslims at a small distance from the Ashram. There was always a significant rush of devotees especially when Swami Ji was present. The devotees who visited there arranged for all requirements, foodstuffs, vegetables, pulses, milk, tea, etc whatsoever was required and there always remained a sufficient stock of everything. Every now and then someone came in with other larger requirements like matting, flooring sheets, beddings, utensils all large and small and other equipment that was needed. It was a routine affair in all Swami Ji's Ashrams that whosoever visited should eat something as a PRASAD usually a cup of KEHWA, a handful of sugar candy or some fruit and nobody should leave without it. The attractive spiritual environment of the Ashram was very captivating and definitely worth a visit and whosoever came there for a while could not leave so soon and the auspicious surroundings left an indelible impression on his mind.

A great reliever of the people's sufferings

While going through the holy life of Swami Ji it is enough clear that he was very particular to relieve the sufferings of the people

both worldly and spiritual. He made it a point to be nearer to common folk and hear their problems patiently and help them get relieved. It seems it was the essential mission of the holy life wherever he used to be he tried to relieve the people of their worldly woes and give them a bit of mind for spiritual awakening. The purpose of having Ashrams in different far off places was to have close contacts with people of different areas. He emphasized on his devotees to lead a reformed simple life and urged them to take humble steps for self and God realization. In his discourses he stressed upon the fact that the purpose of meeting him and hearing him should not be only to address their worldly sufferings and troubles but to get inspired and try for achieving something higher in life and understand the real purpose of one's existence. Though Swami Ji was always keen to relieve the personal sufferings of people by treating their various ailments and other domestic problems, his main stress was on reformation of their spiritual aspect. He always brought home to his devotees the futility of gathering unlimited material wealth and ignoring the real wealth of God. He taught the spirit of true KARM-YOGA in very simple terms; doing everything just and fair for the sake of the Lord and being continuously absorbed in the thought of the Lord, was what he taught. He stressed his devotees to lead a simple life and develop love and respect for all the creations of God. Everyone without the distinction of caste and creed was worth respect as everything was God's creation and so their love was the love of God. He wanted to remove all hatred from the minds of people and make them capable to lead a higher life. He moved from place to place and Ashram to Ashram for meeting more and more people and conveying his message of the excellence of the life of a householder. There was no need to be a SANYASI to achieve a

higher state in life. A householder, he said, excelled far above in SADHNA to a SANYASI provided he or she remains substantially detached from the affairs of the world while performing the duties of a common man. It's great to be a SANYASI and a householder together than to leave the active life of the world for realization of self. That's why Swami Ji was a great admirer of SEDBAB (SHRI VED LAL BHAT OF HANJIVERA); SHRI NEELKANTH JI SHARMA of DAB-VAKOORA and other awakened household saints and honoured them greatly. The diverse aspects of his personality attracted people of different hues. Some came to get treated for various ailments and others for getting inspired by his learned discourses. Some came to take some lessons on Yoga and the others came to enjoy the holy devotional evenings. Thus the DURBAR of Swami Ji was always full of aspirants and devotees and everyone was blessed by the cheerful and smiling aspect of Swami Ji.

The HUSHOORA ASHRAM was occasionally taken care of by MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI in the absence of Swami Ji. Many annual HAWANS were performed by the devotees on occasions and people from far off places joined to take blessings of Swami Ji. The birthdays of Swami Ji were especially celebrated with a grand HAWAN and celebrations at HUSHOORA ASHRAM. All disciples and devotees made it a point to take part. His holiness SWAMI LAL JI many a time participated in the celebrations at HUSHOORA ASHRAM on occasions.

The wonder devotee of Swami Ji

A very interesting description of a very young devotee of Swami Ji who later turned to be most enthusiastic needs mention here. A young boy of 6-7 years from HUSHOORA village used to come to the Ashram daily after his school especially without fail

when Swami Ji was present. He soon became beloved of all the devotees and Swami Ji loved him the most. He returned home either late in the evening or stayed there through the night. His parents some times grew anxious about him but didn't object. The family to which he belonged was nicknamed as SHALLA and Swami Ji one day began calling him SHALPUT i.e. the child of SHALLAS. Thus the visits of this boy continued unabated in the Ashram and slowly he adapted himself to the ways of the Ashram and participated in the service there. This boy SHALPUT later dedicated his life most fervently in the devotion of Swami Ji by leaving his house and parents for good and taking to the life of a SANYASI. This miraculous happening was probably the result of something predestined or the love of Swami Ji. SHALPUT JI was too young to be initiated into sainthood but too enthusiastic to be one in the HOLY PARIWAR so Swami Ji took him into his fold when the time was ripe for him though not physically present. This made almost no difference to SHALPUT JI as Swami Ji is always with him to bless him and show him his way ahead. How this all happened and how SHALPUT JI commenced his saintly life will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. SHALPUT JI is currently placed in BOHRI (JAMMU) at an Ashram constructed by him after the displacement of Pandits from Kashmir in 1990. His Ashram dedicated to Swami Ji keeps very busy as is visited by numerous devotees everyday. SHALPUT JI, the wonder devotee of Swami Ji has acquired several extraordinary capacities and has become the centre of attraction for lots of Pandits from far and near who come there and sing BHAJANS in the praise of Swami Ji for the deliverance of their worldly woes and return home quite peaceful and satisfied.

A centre for peace and tranquility

HUSHOORA Ashram like other Ashrams of Swami Ji served as a centre for attainment of peace and tranquility for the devotees of Swami Ji who came here from far and near. Lots of HAWANS on special occasions were performed and devotees from SRINAGAR, KUPWARA, BOMAI and other places came well before time to make all the arrangements and served with total dedication and sang BHAJANS till late night during their stay and left only when every thing was back to normal. This Ashram had a special attraction for the devotees who never opted to leave before less than a week's stay as the atmosphere here was so absorbing and peaceful that even the most important vocations at home were forgotten instantly and the days passed like hours and the nights were especially captivating as various BHAJAN MANDLI'S sang to the heart's content of the devotees that touched their innermost recesses and evoked supreme BAKHTI for the Lord and Swami Ji. The BHAJANS sung by Swami Ji's wonder devotee SHALPUTJI especially on occasions here created a scene that put the devotees to a memorable trance. It is after SHALPUTJI was established as a disciple of SWAMIJI that he came and stayed in HUSHOORA ashram for many days to the great enthusiasm of the devotees of Swami Ji and surprisingly he completely avoided visits to his parents and other siblings who lived just there in HUSHOORA though they occasionally came to meet him in the Ashram and relished his elevated status as a wonder devotee of Swami Ji. Lots of devotees came from distances to record the renderings of SHALPUTJI and other artists and played the recordings at home and made their mornings and evenings alive with the divine music.

No authentic information is available about the current condition

of the Ashram. It is almost sure that the Ashram is in ruins as the caretakers and the devotees, the resident Pandits of the area and all others have left their homes for good. About two decades have passed and how can it be expected that the buildings not so strong will be in a safe condition and if at all something remains it will be another miracle of Swami Ji. It's not only with the Ashrams of Swami Ji that have been treated mercilessly in Kashmir. The history of Kashmir is full of events when the Hindu places of great religious importance were razed to ground and only traces of their existence exist to tell the story of their woe. The same has happened with the Ashrams tastefully built by the devotees of Swami Ji. Though the other aspect of the irony worth attention is that the devotees of Swami Ji and his holy PARIVAR has expanded tremendously and much more centers of Swami Ji's memories have come up in various parts of the country where devotees assemble on auspicious days to celebrate the memories of Swami Ji besides grand HAVANS on his birthdays and the days of his NIRVANA.



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SWAMI JI AT TIKKAR ASHRAM

Village TIKKAR is near KUPWARA (KASHMIR) and as already stated Swami Ji and his Guru His Holiness SWAMI LAL JI were already acquainted with the area as it fell on way to their favourite destination SHARDA MAYEE temple complex near MUZAFFERABAD across present LOC. Their frequent visits there had made almost all the Pandits familiar to them and most of them their devotees and admirers. The whole area around KUPWARA in those days was a centre of spiritual attraction because of the presence of a good number of Pandits and some ancient holy spots that were visited by devotees especially on their way to SHARDA MAYEE temple. The village TIKKAR was already famous for a sacred KUND (holy spring) in memory of MAA RAIGNYA and since a good number of Pandits living there were devotees of Swami Ji and so he used to visit there and be there at the sacred KUND to perform some particular SADHNA for many days. Thus the attraction of the sacred spot, the scenic beauty of TIKKAR and

the surrounding area along with the devotion of the people around made plans for an Ashram and without any substantial effort foundation was laid in 1957 and the complex came up soon with the blessings of Swami Ji. It is reported that while the digging of plinth for the Ashram was in progress there appeared many deadly snakes and other reptiles under the earth and the workers got scared and almost abandoned work but Swami Ji intervened and asked them to proceed fearlessly and strangely the creatures escaped without harming anyone. Next while going deep into the earth some old cooking utensils, some pairs of tongs and a KANGRI with fresh flowers were discovered. Swami Ji was informed and he told the workers to stop digging further and fill the plinth from there. It was construed immediately by the devotees that there were some memories of Swami Ji attached to the place from his previous holy life though Swami Ji didn't indicate upon enquiry to any such facts whatsoever. The readers can easily surmise how strange the ways of such great souls are and how they are above the ordinary mortals in their thought and spirit.

Swami Ji was in those days mainly placed in GOWRI-PORA (BOMAI) in the KUTIYA among very fine environs and beautiful location and any thought of a change was unthinkable. Besides lots of memories connected with Swami Ji's stay in BOMAI (ZOONI-PORA, DEEWAN-KHAN AND then GOWRIPORA KUTIYA) being the formative period of his holiness' sainthood any change as such couldn't be considered. Moreover the devotion and love that Swami Ji had received there was unprecedented especially from the DASS FAMILY. Swami Ji stayed in BOMAI for not less than 25-27 years but given the purpose to be nearer to his numerous devotees of TIKKAR

area and for the effective propagation of his teachings Swami Ji sought the change and TIKKAR Ashram was inaugurated with great fanfare. I feel it imperative to mention here that Swami Ji never liked to be confined to a single place or Ashram but was always on move from place to place and Ashram to Ashram meeting devotees and others spreading his message of a better life. After the inauguration of TIKKAR ASHRAM Swami Ji was still keen to visit GOWRI-PORA, BOMAI or HUSHOORA to meet the aspirations of devotees there besides the necessary supervision so that everything was maintained properly. Swami Ji would like to supervise every thing personally everywhere so that nothing escaped his view. It can be easily estimated how his beloved devotees of BOMAI area who were so much attached to the graceful presence of Swami Ji that his separation was unbearable to them and as such lots of them became frequent visitors to the TIKKAR and HUSHOORA Ashram.

TIKKAR ASHRAM, especially exclusive

At TIKKAR ASHRAM everything was done strictly under the supervision of Swami Ji. Besides the main temple immediately a beautiful small temple was constructed on the adjacent hilltop with about a hundred steps made out of stone boulders as an uphill approach. Swami Ji loved to perform his routine SADHNA in the hilltop temple whenever he happened to be there. The rush of devotees in TIKKAR Ashram was significantly much more than other places as the field of influence had increased tremendously than before. Very influential people of the area and far away became regular visitors in this Ashram and strangely whoever came to seek blessings once became attached for life. This author put this question to one fervent devotee of Swami Ji who had spent many hours in the holy company of Swami Ji,

‘What aspect of the personality of Swami Ji fixed a devotee for life?’ In reply he said, “Swami Ji was an incarnation of Lord Shiva himself. How a person would not!” Here it would be interesting for the reader to know something about the experiences of some eminent devotees of Swami Ji. SRI SHRIDHAR JOO DHAR the then Conservator of Forests was a highly awakened saint and a MASTANA who ignored completely his personal upkeep despite his high official position. He visited Swami Ji occasionally, stayed there for a couple of days and enjoyed the discourses of Swami Ji and especially wanted to see Swami Ji comfortable. He was a fervent devotee of BHAGWAN GOPI NATH JI the eminent saint of Srinagar. SHRI DHAR was often seen with some saint or the other in spite of his high official position. He was a great admirer of the advancement of Swami Ji in Yoga and academics both and often got some terse problems addressed and later solved by Swami Ji. The disciples of Swami Ji who progressed substantially towards spiritual awakening in TIKKAR Ashram were SH KRALBAB JI and MASTRAM JI. MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI had already been initiated before probably in BOMAI and had advanced significantly in sainthood and was very beloved of Swami Ji. His devotion, service and calm nature had won the heart of everyone and he had thus created a special place of importance with everyone. Among many others who came here in the service of Swami Ji only a few could win his favours to be initiated. SEDBAB (Shri Ved Lal Bhat of Hanjivera, Pattan) was an established saint already with considerable achievements and very fond of Swami Ji. He was seen here frequently in the company of Swami Ji and both of them shared very special secrets better known to them only as nobody had the courage to intervene. Among the earliest devotees of Swami Ji in this

Ashram Shri Shyam Lal Ji (BAITOTH) was also an established saint. He had progressed substantially under the guidance of Swami Ji and his dedication and service at the Ashram was an example in itself. He solely arranged for the making and transport of the marble statue of Swami Ji from Jaipur to Tikkar and got it installed at the Ashram. Since Swami Ji had no inhibitions in guiding his devotees in the path of divine realization lots of them came forward but since the road to ultimate success in the field is not so simple so very few could reach a certain stage but the devotion of Swami Ji was always rewarding so there was no question of disappointment with anyone.

Reminiscences of JUSTICE JANKI NATH BHAT

JUSTICE JANKI NATH BHAT was a High Court Judge and held many prestigious positions in J&K and outside had great attraction for saints both inside and outside Kashmir. He was a devotee of Swami Ji and visited TIKKAR ASHRAM many times along with his wife. He writes in one of his papers that on his first visit to TIKKAR Swami Ji called him from distance, 'Are you BHAT Sahib?' He was immediately mesmerized by the holy personality of Swami Ji. He says he had the good luck to take Swami Ji along to Srinagar Airport in his car when he (Swami Ji) was going to bid final farewell to Kashmir. As already reported Swami Ji went into eternal MAHASAMADHI in Delhi (MALVIYA NAGAR) in the house of Shri PREM NATH SADHU in January 1966. According to BHAT Sahib Swami Ji was very fond of one SHRI KASHI NATH BHAT, Advocate who was his fervent devotee those days. JUSTICE BHAT further reminiscences in his write up that he was given some money by Swami Ji for the construction of a lodge for SADHUS visiting AMARNATH SHRINE at AMBPHALLA in Jammu before his last flight from

Kashmir. BHAT Sahib fulfilled this wish of Swami Ji honestly and the building came up within a short time but regrets that the place wasn't later used as desired by Swami Ji but given on rent to raise income for the institution to which it's attached.

Swami Ji is particularly identified with TIKKAR Ashram because his stay there had essentially gained much more attention of devotees and importance than other places probably because his holiness had achieved the zenith of sainthood and numerous Pandits in the area had developed extreme devotion for Swami Ji hence the response of the devotees was equally tremendous. So much so that both in the presence of Swami Ji and after him people thronged there in large numbers and on celebration of auspicious occasions thousands attended with great celebrity and fanfare. The place was already converted into a pilgrimage spot where devotees from far and near came to get their sufferings addressed besides the serene and calm atmosphere provided high sense of peace and tranquility for the entire visiting devotees.

The daily routine of Swami Ji at the TIKKAR Ashram is also worth a mention. Whole mornings and evenings were spent in the uphill TAPASYA room in deep meditations and nobody was allowed to meet Swami Ji there. Usually in the afternoons Swami Ji held audiences of his devotees in the main temple complex and listened each of them patiently and suggested remedies to their problems. Since there used to be a non-stop cooking arrangement at the Ashram and daily scores of people took meals there as NAVEED and Swami Ji ensured that every visitor got something to eat or at least take a cup of tea before leaving.



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NAND PARIWAR

Swami Ji spread his message of sustained devotion to the Lord accompanied with fair and truthful dealings in all worldly affairs. He met all kinds of people and explained them occasionally the benefit of being somehow detached from the attractions of the world along with nurturing the true love of God. He stressed upon all to be actively engaged in just and truthful activities and not be constantly after collecting material wealth. The real wealth, he said, was to seek the extreme devotion of God (BAKHTI) and love His people. Human life is a great boon that every one of us is bestowed with and so each of us should understand its purpose. It is for us to use it purposefully or misuse it. The sooner we try to realize our real self the better. It is very simple to get access to the Lord. Simply try purifying your inner self by developing pure thoughts and intense devotion of the lord, the goal is not very far. Realization of the self is the path that leads to the Lord. These simple teachings attracted lots of devotees from diverse hues and many among them

submitted themselves eternally in the lotus feet of Swami Ji and were formally initiated into the ascetic order.

MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI



Swami Ji's earliest disciple worth the name was MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI. He was from BARAMULLA, KASHMIR. He came in the service of Swami Ji in GOWRI-PORA KUTTIYA and after hectic long service at the Ashram he was formally initiated into sainthood. His devotion and service is an example in itself. Finally he acquired such extraordinary capabilities that probably none else among the disciples of Swami Ji equaled him. His humble nature and soft attitude won him great laurels not only in the eyes of his Guru but his numerous devotees too. He talked very less and was always seen absorbed in his SADHNA. He was mostly seen in the service of his Guru Maharaj though at times he was given the charge of Ashrams at HUSHOORA or GOWRIPORA independently. He won the devotion and love of lots of people who visited him for the solution of their problems.

VIBHISHAN JI had surrendered completely before his Guru Maharaj and didn't probably like any separate personal identity. His only mission was to serve his master and pursue his personal enlightenment. Whoever met him once to seek his blessings got permanently fixed with him and did never think of leaving his aura of influence. After Swami Ji attained the eternal Samadhi VIBHISHAN JI continued staying in Swami Ji's Ashrams representing him and serving the community interests. On mass displacement of Pandits from Kashmir in 1990 VIBHISHAN JI came to Jammu and stayed with some of his devotees for some time and was then invited to BOHRI (TALAB TILLU) ASHRAM got constructed by Swami Ji's wonder devotee SHALPUT JI in those appalling conditions. VIBHISHAN JI stayed there quite absorbed with his SADHNA till in late nineties his holiness sought eternal Samadhi for himself.

Swami KRALBAB Ji



Next to make mention of is SHRI KRALBAB JI. He was the most popular disciple of Swami Ji who by dint of his SADHNA

and achievements in the ascetic order was able to make his own individual place after Swami Ji. KRALBAB was born at KRALGUND (HANDWARA) on PHALGUN PURNIMA in 1928. His parental name was BHAGWAN DASS and he was given this name by Swami Ji himself as he loved to call him as such because he belonged to KRALGUND. KRALBAB was initiated by his master in the TIKKAR Ashram and as such he performed his basic KRIYA in the same Ashram. His progress in sainthood was very rapid and soon he was recognized as an established saint. He had soon a vast field of devotees not only in the TIKKAR area but far off places as well though he remained mostly confined to TIKKAR Ashram only. Due to the very cold climate of Kashmir in winters he had considered an Ashram outside valley. And his blessings soon matured into the plan for an Ashram at UDHAMPUR in Jammu region. There were a good number of his devotees among Pandits in UDHAMPUR town and consequently the magnificent Ashram of GARHI (UDHAMPUR) with the name KRALBAB ASHRAM came up beside the national highway. The Ashram proved a great boon for the fleeing Pandits from the valley for its sufficient accommodation and efficient management. Lots of them found shelter there in the most telling circumstances. It is said that KRALBAB JI had well before indicated to the turmoil in the valley and the bad times for Pandits and wanted the Ashram to be built for this purpose also. Hence it served as a resting place for hundreds of Pandits till they got temporarily settled somewhere else. KRALBAB ASHRAM of GARHI gained great admiration and reputation among Pandits especially in the post-migration era as the Ashram is very well maintained by SHRI KUMAR JI the beloved disciple of SHRI KRALBAB JI.

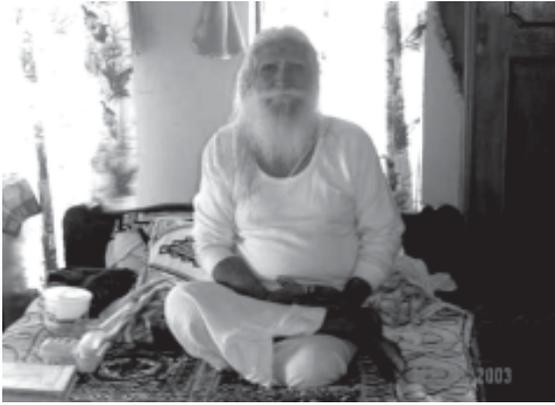


Swami KUMAR JI

Hence the legacy of Swami Ji is very well carried forward by his PARIVAR wherever they are. The other Ashrams in his name were constructed at VENKURA and NAMTEHAL in BUDGAM area of Kashmir besides the recently constructed at BANTALAB, JAMMU. Shri KRALBAB JI achieved NIRVAVA on MAGHA SHUKLA TRITYA in 1968 and the day is celebrated with grand celebrations and HAVANS in all Ashrams especially GARHI (UDHAMPUR).

Swami MASTBAB JI

MASTBABJI belonged to BUDLADA (PUNJAB) and was a householder with two kids. He belonged to a farmer family with name SOHAN LAL. Right from childhood he was not satisfied with his life and wanted to achieve something extraordinary. The worldly material wealth didn't attract him at all till one day he left his home in search of the ultimate destination for himself. He visited lots of noteworthy places and persons throughout for a couple of years but his soul's thirst remained unquenched. His sojourns continued unabated and at last he reached Kashmir



and heard somewhere about Swami Ji and the TIKKAR Ashram. On reaching there Swami Ji welcomed him and told him it was his destination. It is said Swami Ji had already laid out AASAN for him and so he found his soul's content immediately and dedicated himself to the service of Swami Ji. Swami Ji gave him the name MASTRAM and initiated him into sainthood probably there or in GOWRIPORA ASHRAM as in those days Swami Ji was frequently on move from place to place to spread his celestial message. MASTRAMJI proved to be the most dedicated saint to the purpose. He acquired the various stages of sainthood and Yoga in minimum prescribed time and soon became the beloved of Swami Ji. He has adopted all the SANSKARS of Kashmir Pandit culture and become fully conversant with Kashmiri Language. He can sing Kashmir devotional songs with extreme ease and devotion. His Ashram at BADIPORA (BUDGAM) near the ancient temple of MAA RAGINYA was constructed by his devotees of the area and named MASTBAB ASHRAM. He stayed there on the insistence of his devotees but he always preferred to be nearer to his GURU MAHARAJ. After the MAHA-SAMADHI of Swami Ji MASTBAB Ji remained on move often

outside valley visiting TIRTH-ASTHAPANS unknown even to his beloved devotees. The grand MASTBAB ASHRAM at PATOLI JAMMU was raised in mid eighties and MASTBAB JI came there when it was on the last stages of construction. In fact MASTBAB JI is an awakened saint quite unconcerned about the material developments. He keeps always away from the worldly matters and never looks to what's done by his devotees to please him. The MASTBAB ASHRAM at PATOLI JAMMU proved a great shelter and support for the displaced Pandits in Jammu after 1990 turmoil. Hundreds of Pandits spent days and nights in the Ashram and found solace and peace in the blessings of MASTBAB JI. The Ashram keeps always humming with activities both in the presence and absence of MASTBAB JI. The mornings and evenings keep very busy with devotees singing BHAJANS in the praise of the lord and especially the GUR-ASTUTI which gives immense solace to everyone every where. Other MASTBAB Ashrams constructed in Delhi and HARIDWAR are also very well established and provided with all essential requirements. The HARIDWAR MASTBAB ASHRAM is the real beloved place of MASTBAB JI. He spends most of his time there and many of his devotees go there in his service and stay there for many days. MASTBUB JI is a different kind of saint who wants solitude and nil interference in his SADHNA so he prefers mostly being out of Jammu as the heavy rush of devotees there seems to disturb his peace and tranquility.

SEDBAB

The original name of SEDBAB was SHRI VEDLAL BHAT. He belonged to HAJIVERA (PATTAN) and was a householder. He was a saint of very high order with numerous attained SIDHEES. His association with Swami Ji is not well defined but one thing



is clear that the name SEDMOL was given to him by Swami Ji himself as a tradition maintained by him and consequently he was called SEDBAB by his devotees and admirers. Some are of the opinion that Swami Ji had initiated him and he was his Guru but the fact is not very strongly established and the confusion remains. Whatever the facts are it can't be denied that there was some sacred celestial relation between the two great souls. They have been seen together on numerous occasions in almost all Ashrams, tours and on special occasions sharing some very special moments quite unknown to the onlookers but definitely indicative of some special relationship. During the last moments of worldly existence, in the house of SHRI PREM NATH SADHU at MALVIYA NAGAR, NEW DELHI, Swami Ji was accompanied by SEDBAB and it is said that they kept busy for long hours in some special discussions before Swami Ji went into eternal SAMADHI. SEDBAB, though a householder with a large family, was substantially detached from the worldly affairs. Though seemingly associated with his family responsibilities he was a SANYASI in the real sense of the term. A perfect SIDH Yogi he

was a fully awakened soul with clear knowledge of everything that made him stand upright in the realm of sainthood. SEDBAB had opted for no Ashram or a place associated with his memory in Kashmir. He left his mortal coil at his native place at HANJIVERA (PATTAN). His devotees later tried to raise a memorial at the site of his Samadhi but strangely a feud erupted between local Muslims and Pandits and the administration had to put a ban on the construction to avoid confrontation. This was in late eighties as the situation in Kashmir had already turned volatile due to large scale influx of Pakistan trained insurgents into the valley. Now after the displacement of Pandits in 1990 and the bulk of them placed in Jammu part of the State the devotees of SEDBAB have constructed a magnificent Ashram in his name at PALOURA, JAMMU where there is a huge rush of devotees daily besides celebrations of grand HAVANS and other events in the name of SEDBAB.

SHALPUT JI

The mention of this wonder devotee of Swami Ji has come in a previous chapter also. SHALPUT JI was a boy of 5-6 years when he got attracted to Swami Ji in HUSHOORA ASHRAM. He belongs to parents from HUSHOORA who had been regular visitors to Swami Ji. Though Swami Ji didn't initiate SHALPUT JI directly to sainthood in his lifetime because of his tender age but SHALPUT JI came into the holy fold automatically when the time was ripe for him. It has been some celestial connection and a quite unknown guarded secret but the indications definitely relate something worth a mention. It was in late seventies when SHALPUT was a student of class X that he left his home for a destination for which he had taken birth. A youth of barely 18 with flowing locks of hair, strikingly attractive handsome



features, came directly to the house of SHRI JIA LAL DASS of BOMAI (SOPORE), probably to get inspired by the place and people where Swami Ji had stayed for many long years in his formative years of sainthood. He was welcomed warmly by the whole household for their love and devotion to Swami Ji. Everyone in the DASS FAMILY instantly became alive once more with the reminiscences of Swami Ji and thus started the renovation of the KUTIYA at GOWRI-PORA and the youth especially showed great interest in helping SHALPUT settle down at Swami Ji's cherished place of SADHNA. It was soon discovered that SHALPUT was a past master singer of BHAJANS in accompaniment of harmonium. Thus the whole nights in DASS HOUSE were spent for not less than two months with SHALPUT singing BHAJANS in accompaniment of the youth of the family and the rest of the members enjoying as if Swami Ji was himself present. I've personally seen that everyone in the DASS family kept awake all these nights enjoying the devotion of the lord and Swami Ji. SHALPUT JI was so overwhelmed by the devotion

of the family and others around for Swami Ji that he decided to stay there in the KUTIYA and get inspired by the place where Swami Ji had spent many long years of SADHNA. Here the contribution of SHRI KANYA LAL DASS son of Late SHRI JIA LAL DASS is greatly commendable. He along with his wife looked after precisely all the needs of SHALPUT JI with great devotion for at least about four months so much so that SHALPUT called them Mummy and Daddy as his own children do and continues as such even today. This author has also had the good fortune of attending the celestial MEHFIL of SHALPUT JI many a time in the DASS HOUSE in BOMAI and also in AANAND NAGAR, BOHRI. Soon SHALPUT settled in the KUTIYA and the people in large numbers started coming to see this wonder devotee of Swami Ji. What followed were more constructions in the KUTIYA and more celebrations and HAWANS and especially the daily BHAJAN-MANDALI which was the main attraction. Time passed and SHALPUT JI progressed in sainthood unexpectedly with the number of devotees increasing day by day till 1990 when the displacement of Pandits started in consequence of the threat perception of the Muslim fundamentalist elements in the valley. In no time Pandits began moving out bag and baggage and so did SHALPUT. After some stray lodgings he managed for a little piece of land in BOHRI JAMMU donated free by a builder and thus came up the SHALPUT ASHRAM at AANAD NAGAR, BOHRI (JAMMU). Here the field of influence of SHALPUT has increased tremendously and devotees especially Pandits from far and wide continue coming here. MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI had been staying here in this Ashram for a long time and SHALPUT JI served him with great devotion and treated him his Guru. It was here that VIBHISHAN JI achieved NIRVANA and SHALPUT

Ji did all KRIYA and service whatever suited this great soul and the beloved disciple of Swami Ji. One more SHALPUT JI ASHRAM was constructed with the help of local people at JIBB near GARHI (UDHAMPUR) within very beautiful and cool surroundings. MAHATMA VIBHISHAN JI loved to stay there for the solitude and serene atmosphere and the devotion that he got from the residents especially Pandits.

SHRI NILKANTH JI

SHRI NEELKANTH JI was a householder saint of high order and a fervent devotee of Swami Ji. There are sufficient indications that he was not just a devotee but a disciple initiated by Swami Ji. But again the fact is not confirmed as the opinion is also soundly grounded that SHRI NEELKANTH JI was his GURU himself but a fervent devotee of Swami Ji. He was a poet of various authentic Kashmiri devotional poems. It is said that he was a person of sharp wit and capable of composing high class poetry extempore without any preparation or effort. It is also said that he enjoyed special blessings of MAA SARASWATI as to make him capable of such extempore renderings. The special contribution of SHRI NEELKANTH JI is the famous GURASTUTI written by him and most popular with the devotees of Swami Ji. Though the GURASTUTI is a clear indication that SHRI NEELKANTH JI was a disciple of Swami Ji but the fact is not sufficiently corroborated with any other strong evidence. Whatever the fact there is no doubt that SHRI NEELKANTH JI was a great admirer of Swami Ji and remained in his holiness' company for long hours sharing divine nectar and enjoying the celestial secrets unendingly.



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SWAMI JI - HIS TEACHINGS

SWAMI NANDLAL JI was a celibate since childhood and an accomplished Yogi. He got his basic training in sainthood which included studies of essential scriptures and modes of conduct in ZOONI-PORA (ZIENPUR) Ashram, near BOMAI (SOPORE) where Swami Ji landed at a tender age of 18-20. As already stated the Ashram was well-managed and rich in resources and frequently visited by hundreds of saints and BHABAS especially on visit to SHARDA MAYEE (now in POK) temple. It was here that Swami Ji got acquainted with the essential foundation of sainthood and met his GURU MAHARAJ. During his stay here for about 3-4 years and got the occasion to be in the service of hundreds of awakened saints and hence got blessed naturally to lead a higher life. It is said that he was most beloved of all the visiting saints and the managing personnel of the complex and it actually made the sound foundation of his saintly life. He acquired later the higher stages of enlightenment through rigorous SADHANA and YOG KRIYA in minimum period of time.

Crystal clear conscience and simple teachings

His crystal clear conscience and simple teachings won him great laurels and he was soon accepted one among the most awakened saints in the high echelons of sainthood of the time. Though Swami Ji had acquired bare minimum formal education but his thirst for knowledge was so great that from day one he sought ways and means to acquire the highest religious scholarship firstly at the feet of some learned teachers and then his Guru Maharaj. Lots of aspirants later took advantage of his profound knowledge of religious scriptures and especially his discourses on the teachings from BHAGAVAD-GITA, UPANISHADS and VEDAS. He was a great admirer of LALLESURI, the great YOGINI and poet saint of Kashmir. He often quoted LALLAWAKHS in order to establish his philosophy of advancement in life by way of simple detachment from the futile worldly attractions and glamour of riches. He believed in the strict disciplined life based on the Yogic practices and sustained SADHANA. He also believed in the supremacy of a householder's life model but the aspirant here had a greater responsibility of combining SANYASA with day to day activities, is what he said. The same is true with everyone. KARMA-YOGA shows us the simple way of achieving the highest goals in life. Swami Ji wanted his devotees to follow the normal activities of life based on truth and fair dealings. He time and again stressed upon the great opportunity that we as human beings are provided with in our lives to achieve something higher than the ordinary existence. One whose mind is perpetually attached to the memory of the Lord despite being busy in just and truthful worldly vocations is a perfect Yogi. Swami Ji wanted his devotees learn the simple lesson of doing everything in the name of Lord

so that nothing wrong is done and each and every life performs better for the uplift of his or her individual self. One should cultivate the feeling that whatever exists belongs to the Lord and regard the whole drama of life as God's play and act religiously for the good of all renouncing completely the interest for the self and desire for fruit. The greatest enemies in achieving spiritual advancement are intolerance, lust, greed and ego. These are the gates of hell. By purifying our conscience, attitude and head we are able to protect ourselves and others from negative feelings. As peace-loving souls we should be able to spread peace not anger. Anyone who succeeds in such purification of mind is immediately lifted above the ordinary and experiences a strange joy often wished for by the devotees advanced in their SADHNA.

An open book to be read by all

The life of Swami Ji is an open book to be read by all. Thousands of his devotees were especially inspired by his simple, clean and highly disciplined way of life. Whosoever came into his influence once was captured for all times along with his family friends and relatives. He was always ready to help anybody out of worldly difficulties as well as spiritual hurdles. He involved his devotees occasionally in discourses on the purity of life, NITYA-KARMA and BAKHTI (sustained devotion of the lord). About NITYA-KARMA that we perform every morning and evening, Swami Ji said, it was an exceedingly important item in our daily routine. It should therefore be performed with due attention and in right earnest. The time devoted to the NITYA-KARMA i.e. morning (GAYATRI) and evening (SANDYA) is the most valuable, most sacred and most useful throughout the whole day and night. Paying less attention to it and going through it hurriedly, he said, was the reason that we're deprived of its benefits and joy.

Swami Ji had no inhibitions in allowing anybody into his fold provided one was ready to maintain certain discipline essential for the higher life. Lots of Muslims too have been benefited by the healing powers of Swami Ji and as such many of them even now remember his magnanimity and the height of his awareness.

BAKHTI or sustained devotion of God is the surest, shortest and easiest way of reaching the Lord but a SADHAKA should clearly understand the spirit of the BAKHTI otherwise a lukewarm approach will lead him nowhere. BAKHTI pertains to the spirit of devotion which is disinterested in character and unobstructed in its course. Human mind gets purified only by the extreme love of the Lord. One whose heart melts completely in His devotion is the true beloved of the Lord. Swami Ji said that the Lord's wish is absolutely the wish of His celebrated devotees. Those who surrender completely to the will of the Lord win Him over completely. This is essential for our SADHANA that our heart must cooperate. Swami Ji said that one must be able to put one's whole heart into one's SADHANA, be it DYANA (meditation), JAPA or PRANAYAMA (control of breath). The most important factor in UPASANA is love (BAKHTI) combined with reverence. Love transforms all work into worship and whatever is done with love leaves an indelible impression on our mind. The worship done in desultory manner, in a half-hearted way, will bear no fruit even if done for years together; whereas UPASANA done with reverence and love, even once, will yield speedy results and be a source of untold joy and peace.

Practice of divine name

As spiritual SADHANA, Swami Ji said, practice of divine name is at once the easiest and the best; there is nothing higher than

that. The more secretly the practice is performed, the higher is the result. It is necessary that the JAPA of the divine name be performed most secretly without making any unnecessary show. A SADHANA performed secretly floods the heart of the devotee with love for the Lord and brings immense joy and peace. Concentration of mind while performing any kind of SADHANA is essential. Achieving concentration is hard but not impossible. It takes some time and practice to master concentration. Mind should be cleared of all the dross of worldly worries and cares and got fixed on a single point i.e. God's name; concentration follows. BAKHTI or love of God is the supreme achievement to be attained by a SADHAKA. When a person is flooded with intense love of God he is freed of all worries and cares and he experiences great joy and peace and nothing but the grace of the Lord remains supreme with him. All worldly attractions instantly shake off and a feeling of eternal bliss is experienced. Swami Ji stressed upon his devotees to work tirelessly for achieving BAKHTI of the Lord such that it became the only priority with them not the collection of worldly possessions. The ardent lovers of God enjoy the perennial presence of the almighty in their thought so naturally their each deed or action is enveloped by the divine bliss and hence nothing goes amiss in their hands and everything whatever they do or experience is right and there is no question of doing anything wrong by them. Swami Ji worked tirelessly in making his devotees understand how they could in a simple way attain the highest purpose of their lives. "Be truthful and fair, clear your mind of the dirt of the worldly attractions and keep the Lord's name alive in your mind all the time so that nothing bad is done," said Swami Ji. BAKHTI or love of God transports a SADHAKA to the realm of Godliness and hence there remains no choice of

doing anything wrong. 'Everything and everybody is simply God's grace', such higher feelings clear the mind of the devotee of all the dross of worldly attractions and naturally he or she is lifted above the normal life of an individual and there remains a negligible gap between God and the devotee. Swami Ji was a saint with a mission who made his devotees follow the greatest reality of human life in simplest terms. He left no stone unturned to fulfill his mission and succeeded in transforming the lives of thousands of his devotees from ordinary to ideal human beings. His impact was so great and lasting that whoever came to bow before his holy self once got attached for life. And surprisingly it hasn't ceased even after Swami Ji's celestial flight but remains eternally with his devotees, not only those who have blessed themselves with his holy DARSHANA but also those equally who are coming into his holy fold after his material absence. The fact is appropriately described in the famous GURUASTUTI penned by LATE SHRI NEELKANTH JI and recited by all devotees every morning and evening which says:

*O my Satguru! I depend only upon your moral support every moment,
In the darkness of my ignorance you are always a beacon light like
Sun to show me way out from darkness to light.*





॥ ॐ श्री गुरुवे नमः ॥

MAIN ASHRAMS IN THE NAME OF SWAMI JI

Only three Ashrams were constructed on the personal directions of Swami Ji, the first and the earliest at GOWRI-PORA (GUERPUR) BOMAI, the second and the most reputed one at TIKKAR (KUPWARA) and the third that attracted the devotees the most at HUSHOORA (BUDGAM).

KUTIYA at GOWRI-PORA near BOMAI (SOPORE)

The first Ashram popularly known as KUTIYA at GOWRI-PORA near BOMAI (SOPORE) in the apple orchard of Late SH JIA LAL DASS has a special significance. It was here that Swami Ji accomplished his heart's desire through rigorous TAPASYA mostly under the guidance of his Guru Maharaj. As already discussed, KUTIYA was the most beloved of Swami Ji for its importance in his holy life. Swami Ji stayed here in this KUTIYA for about twenty years out of his total stay in BOMAI for not less than 25-27 years and the period of his stay here is rightly known as the formative period of his sainthood. This author

has had the good fortune to listen to the first hand reports of many devotees of Swami Ji who had been in the association of Swami Ji in this KUTIYA. It had been a divinely atmosphere when Swami Ji held small audiences of his devotees in the compound of the KUTIYA sitting on the AASANA which was laid beside the small flowing water cascade. The KUTIYA was quite intact until recently after mass exodus of Pandits from the valley in 1990 but unfortunately recent reports confirm that this beloved spot of Swami Ji and his devotees is reduced to only a mound of earth and there remains nothing but to shed a tear for a casual visitor whoever has the courage to pay obeisance at the place and get a blessing in return. This small construction partly in wood with a couple of rooms and a small TAPASYA cell on ground and the first floor terrace facing East kept brimming with activities both during Swami Ji's stay and equally when Swami Ji shifted residence from here or was on a routine sojourn on a personal or community mission. The KUTIYA was especially alive with activities till 1990 for a pretty long time for the stay of SHALPUT JI, the wonder devotee of Swami Ji here who attracted attention of the devotees of Swami Ji in large numbers and as such lots of HAWANS and other holy congregations took place here on special occasions and the devotees took the holy nectar of the blessings of Swami Ji in abundance. SHALPUT JI had put a new life to the KUTIYA by his devotion and improvement of conditions and arrangements. He had got constructed a big JAG-SHALLA beside the KUTIYA with arrangements of lots of equipment required for large HAWANS when hundreds of devotees came to pay obeisance. He was there till the mass displacement of Pandits in 1990 and left for Jammu leaving everything with the hope of an early

return not actually the wish of Swami Ji. Alas now nothing remains except some cherished memories with the devotees who visited there and sought blessings in good old days. The most beloved Ashram of the devotees of Swami Ji is converted to just a mound of earth as per the recent reports available with this author probably as the consequence of a fire put to it by the miscreants who were apt to destroy all the Hindu traces from the Kashmir culture.

Ashram at TIKKAR (KUPWARA)

The second and the most reputed one is the Ashram at TIKKAR (KUPWARA) where Swami Ji got the widest acceptance of the masses as the most celebrated saint of the time. It was here that Swami Ji's field of influence widened unexpectedly. Swami Ji held his sacred audiences regularly here as the Ashram was always full of devotees and abundance of everything made their stay very comfortable. The spot was already sacred for the presence of an ancient temple and a KUND (spring) in memory of MAA RAGNIYA and much beloved of Swami Ji. After the construction of the Ashram and the TAPASYA cell on the nearby hilltop the importance of the spot multiplied tremendously. Swami Ji was visited here by many high dignitaries and the common people from far and near in large numbers daily. It was here that Swami MASTBAB JI and Swami KRALBAB JI were initiated by Swami Ji into sainthood. Both of them achieved their heights with great service and dedication here. The Ashram soon become a pilgrimage for devotees living nearby who paid obeisance here almost daily and those who lived at a distance invariably attended on ASHTAMI or other days of their convenience. It was maintained well by devotees and disciples especially Swami KRALBAB JI, MASTBUB JI and VIBHISHAN JI after Swami Ji's

NIRVANA equally till 1990 the year of mass displacement of Pandits from the valley. Fortunately, probably with the divine blessings of Swami Ji the Ashram is guarded sufficiently by the security forces and the current reports confirm that the Ashram is quite well in tact with regular POOJA performed daily morning and evening by the security force JAWANS and officers on duty. The Ashram was always a place of a big pilgrimage and remained always busy with devotees especially on special occasions when devotees in large numbers visited here to seek blessings of Swami Ji and others.

Ashram at HUSHROO (BUDGAM)

The third Ashram and most tastefully planned by Swami Ji was at HUSHROO (BUDGAM). Though quite at a distance from BOMAI and TIKKAR, HUSHROO was selected for an Ashram by Swami Ji at the insistence of the devotees of that area. As already discussed Swami Ji was always keen to fulfill the aspirations of his devotees and preferred to be near them for the advancement of his simple philosophy and teachings. Swami Ji was a saint with a mission who had come to relieve the sufferings of his devotees for all times to come whosoever came into his fold or bowed before his holy person. The venue of the Ashram was just out of the main dwellings in the village at a hill slope with a beautiful pool of clean flowing water surrounded by rooms some small and some large and a couple of big halls safely walled with a secure gate. The approach to the site was a on-foot track through huge walnut and other trees and the atmosphere within was so absorbing and sacred that once inside one would not think of coming out for at least a couple of days or even more. The Ashram was especially brimming with devotees in the presence of Swami Ji or some of his disciples, VIBISHAN JI or KRALBAB JI or MASTBAB JI. It is said that the

birthdays of Swami Ji on FALGUN SHUKLA PAKSH ASHTAMI (TAILA ASHTAMI) was especially celebrated in this Ashram and reportedly his holiness Swami LALJI MAHARAJ has also participated at some occasions. Devotees from far and near attended to celebrate the grand HAVANS there. After the MAHA-SAMADHI of Swami Ji VIBHISHAN Ji had almost taken charge of the Ashram and he used to be there for long periods. In later days the wonder devotee of Swami Ji SHALPUT used to be there frequently and arrange for the daily routine PUJA and AARTI besides grand HAWANS celebrated on special occasions. Now after the mass displacement this area also saw Pandits leaving their homes and hearths for good and like most temples and houses of Pandits this Ashram had also to bear the brunt of the Muslim fundamentalist forces and this beloved Ashram of Swami Ji and his devotees was razed to the ground by a fire put to it on some unknown date.

KRALBAB Ashram at GARHI (UDHAMPUR)

Various other Ashrams have been raised by the disciples and devotees of Swami Ji in his memory in Kashmir, Jammu, Delhi, HARIDWAR etc but only a few worth a mention can be described here. The first and the most established Ashram was constructed on the instructions of SWAMI KRALBAB Ji at GARHI (UDHAMPUR) on JAMMU-SRINAGAR highway in late seventies by the name KRAKBAB ASHRAM. The Ashram is very well maintained by his beloved disciple SWAMI KUMAR Ji and has become a beloved pilgrimage spot for numerous devotees who prostrate themselves here in submission to Swami Ji and attain their soul's peace. Since the location of the Ashram is very commendable there is always a heavy rush of devotees especially in the mornings and evenings.

MASTBAB ASHRAM at PATOLI, JAMMU



Second Ashram worth a mention is the MASTBAB ASHRAM at PATOLI, JAMMU a very well managed Ashram got constructed by Swami Ji's beloved disciple MASTRAM JI in early eighties. The Ashram has proved equally a grand pilgrimage spot for the devotees of Swami Ji who come there regularly especially to participate in the morning and evening ARTI. The Ashram is especially full of devotees on ASHTAMI when a mass LANGAR (cooking arrangement) is arranged for the fasting devotees who busy themselves by singing BAJANS the whole day. Moreover, grand HAVANS are arranged to celebrate the birthdays and NIRVAN DIWAS of Swami Ji when devotees in thousands come to pay obeisance, take PRASAD and get blessed eternally. MASTBAB JI doesn't necessarily be present on all these occasions as his holiness is usually away in some other Ashram or with some other devotee as temperamentally he doesn't like more of the hustle and bustle and likes to be especially in solitude. The PATOLI Ashram is a well managed huge complex with big congregation halls and rooms for temporary stay for devotees

and fully equipped with all essential equipment, large cooking vessels, beddings and flooring mats, carpets, chairs, whatever is required for huge gatherings and functions and there is no dearth of anything and the stocks go on increasing every now and then with somebody without giving personal identity making donations in the form of equipment or money.

Ashrams maintained by SHALPUT JI

Other Ashrams worth mention are those got constructed and maintained by SHALPUT JI in the name of Swami Ji the first at ANAND NAGAR, BOHRI, JAMMU second at JIBB, UDHAMPUR and third at NAJAFGARH, DELHI. All these Ashrams in the name of Swami Ji are the result of the efforts of SHALPUT JI who toiled hard single handedly in their construction and now maintenance with the help the devotees of Swami Ji everywhere. The Ashram at ANAND NAGAR, BOHRI, called SHALPUT ASHRAM keeps always very busy with devotees as the area is sufficiently populated with PANDITS from Kashmir and besides the devotion of SHALPUT JI remains always unparalleled.

SEDBAB ASHRAM

One more Ashram that needs mention here is the SEDBAB ASHRAM at PATOLI, JAMMU. This complex is the result of the deep devotion of some devotees of SEDBUB who have devoted their full lives for the construction and maintenance of this Ashram. Since most of his devotees recognize SEDBUB as the first honoured disciple of Swami Ji so considering Swami Ji as their SATGURU, their devotion towards Swami Ji goes on flowering day by day for their advancement uninterruptedly. As such at every morning and evening AARTI the GURUASTUTI of Swami Ji is sung with full devotion besides the auspicious days of Swami Ji celebrated with lot of devotion. ❀