

[Karnataka's Revival](#)

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INDIA

Karnataka's Revival

How one gifted leader has transformed his state's educational, social and religious landscape

Rajiv Malik, Delhi

Jagadguru Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami took charge as the 71st spiritual head of Sri Adichunchanagiri Mutt in 1974 at the age of 30. Twenty million members of the Vokkaligas community, mostly farmers, look to this ancient monastery for both spiritual and mundane guidance. Sri Swamiji's 70 predecessors oversaw Hindu temples, managed endowment lands, taught the monastery's Natha tradition and assisted the community in every way, even to the settling of disputes between neighbors. Most of those swamis lived during the time of kings who saw to the economic well being of the community.

But under the last two centuries of rule by invaders, the entire area had suffered both economically and spiritually.

Sri Swamiji set out to uplift the Vokkaligas community through creating access for the rural community to education and health care--the two most pressing needs. Even given the huge base of support, which includes a number of wealthy devotees, Sri Swamiji's accomplishments over three decades are astounding. As of 2005, he has built 350 government-recognized and highly regarded schools with 60,000 students, a significant number on full scholarship. The schools include what are now some of Karnataka state's foremost engineer and medical schools (both allopathic and ayurvedic). Sri Swamiji is involved in a number of other programs, including free feeding for 10,000 people a day, the planting of 20 million trees, the on-going construction of the Sri Bhairava Temple at the ancient monastery headquarters, and

the operation of the state's largest Sanskrit school, where Sri Swamiji was himself the first teacher.

Hinduism Today sent me to Bangalore in March, 2005, to report Sri Swamiji's story. The magazine's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, and Sri Swamiji had a long history of friendship, with Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami instrumental in helping with construction of the Iraivan Temple at the magazine's headquarters in Hawaii. The 11-acre carving site for the all-stone temple is located in Bangalore on property on loan from Adichunchanagiri Mutt.

Sri Swamiji's efforts have focused on the basic necessities--anna, akshara and arogya, food, education and health. Spirituality pervades his work and institutions, but there are limits to what can be done in government-recognized schools for teaching Hinduism. Nevertheless, there has been a decided impact on the religious life of the students and even the surrounding community.

Swami Nirmalananda, a disciple of Sri Swamiji, was my guide for a visit to the Jagadguru Chander Shekar school. It is about 50 miles from Bangalore and has about 700 students. He said, "Just opposite this school is a huge chunk of land which was acquired by Christian institutions. They were carrying out conversion-related activities, in a low-key manner, in the name of social service. But with the coming up of our institution, they have all but stopped their conversion work. And this is not just the case here. Wherever our institutions, managed by Hindu swamis, have gained strength and popularity, they have adversely impacted this conversion business."

I arrived in Bangalore on the evening of the 12th and spent the next five days racing from ashram to school to college to teaching hospital dumbfounded by the extent of Sri Swamiji's empire. He maintains such a schedule nearly continuously, circulating through his 30 monastic centers scattered across the state. The swami in charge of each center oversees up to several dozen institutions. When Swamiji's schedule became impossibly tight a few years back, devotees bought him a helicopter to use as needed, though mostly he goes by car.

I was rapidly introduced to Sri Swamiji's work by none other than the Hindu cab driver who drove me from the airport to Adichunchanagiri Mutt's Bangalore branch

in Vijayanagar. Learning my destination brought forth a torrent of praise. "The Mutt is a holy place run by an eminent guru," he said. After that, for one full hour he gave a nonstop lecture on the activities of the Mutt, Sri Swamiji and the good work being done for the downtrodden and the poor. The driver does not belong to the Vokkaligas farming community, who make up Sri Swamiji's core supporters. Yet, the remote village from which he hails has tremendously benefited from the Mutt's educational institutions. So at the outset it was clear that the Mutt's reach is much beyond just one community.

At the Bangalore branch I received a warm welcome from Sri Sivaraman, Public Relations Officer, Shri C. Hanumegowda, Former Director of Public Instruction with the Karnataka Government, presently working as the administrative officer of Sri Adichunchanagiri Mutt, and Dr. Dodda Range Gowda, an authority on Kannada literature and the editor of the Mutt's monthly publication, Shree Kshetra Adichunchanagiri. After an hour's briefing on the Mutt's activities, I had the privilege of meeting personally with Sri Swamiji. I found him affectionate, loving, charming and down to earth.

The next morning I interviewed him for two hours [see sidebar, page 22]. Though he has a good command over English, he would keep switching between Kannada and English. Ever-smiling Swamiji answered a wide gamut of questions, in his characteristic soft voice. He began by explaining, "I am the 71st Pithadhipathi (head of the Mutt). Our lineage is the Nath Sampradaya, connected with Matsyendranatha and Gorakshanatha (circa 9th century ce). My guru was Ramanand Natha Swami, though I also trained at the Kailash Ashrama of Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal for six years. Mahaswamigal created such an atmosphere that his disciples became very good sannyasins." Sri Swamiji himself has 35 sannyasin disciples from all castes and communities of Hinduism. "These sannyasins are educated in Sanskrit colleges in Vedas, Agamas and other scriptures. Most are well-qualified post-graduates."

Sri Swamiji took joy in describing his 20-day moral education program for rural youth which is given free of cost. To dates, 5,000 boys and girls have taken the course, learning religious songs, yoga, meditation and how to do social service. He said, "They are taught how to mingle with the poor, how to serve the nation, how to develop a feeling of devotion towards God and their parents and maintain good relations with their siblings. After the training, many are able to teach others, and they have started conveying my message to the masses all over Karnataka."

Once a year they celebrate a week-long festival, the Sarva Dharma Sammelan, attended by more than one million people, mostly from the rural areas. There are exhibitions, lectures on moral education and Hinduism, as well as a folk-art conference attended by 15,000 artists brought for the occasion. Swamiji added, "We have many plans to rejuvenate the temples and develop and promote Hinduism."

Sri Swamiji then described his community marriage programs in which 15,000 couples are wed each year. "Food, shelter and the wedding hall are all provided free to the families, saving them hundreds of thousands of rupees each. We set the most auspicious date. They have the additional advantage of the divine presence of the satguru who is there to bless the newly married couples."

I asked Sri Swamiji for his observations on Hindus' living abroad. He said that at first they are happy, they make money. Their children do well, but then go out of hand in their teenage years. "The parents lose their own youthful vigor, brightness and all those things, and ultimately they lose their children also. With empty hands they return to their homes. This is their situation." In response, Sri Swamiji started BGS International School in Bangalore, and later added one in Delhi and Mangalore. These schools cater to the children of parents living in the West, and to the well-off in India. "BGS, " short for "Bala Gangadharanatha Swami, " has become a trademark for top quality education. "From five years old and up, " Swamiji beamed, "they can study in our school, learn about India and maintain a touch with our ancient wisdom, tradition and culture. We give free education in villages. In rural areas we collect money according to the local standards. In cities like Delhi we charge fees according to the standard of the people living there. After all, we have to bring money back to the rural areas. We maintain 12,000 employees all over India, mainly in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu."

Though Swamiji is a strict vegetarian, as are most other Hindu saints, he does not aggressively advocate vegetarianism for his devotees. He says he would like them to exercise more control over their thoughts rather than just focusing on what to eat and what not to eat. But if at any stage one feels a particular diet does not suit him, the person should amend his dietary habits.

He complained of "double-talking " politicians. "For the sake of votes, they come seeking our blessings. But when they get on the stage, they speak another language. There is no ethics or dharma in politics today. Dharma should be in

politics and not politics in dharma, just as milk should be in a glass and not the glass in the milk."

As our interview concluded, Swamiji directed visit various educational institutions around Bangalore with Swami Nirmalanandaji, who is in charge of Chikkaballapura Mutt and many educational institutions under the Mutt's jurisdiction.

Our first destination was Jagadguru Shri Chandrashekharnatha Swamiji Rural English School [named after the 69th pontiff of the order] located in the lap of nature at Melekote Village, 50 km from Bangalore. Everywhere I went there was an instant rapport with the swamis as each one had met Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. I was amazed to see the well-maintained building and lush green lawns of SJC. This school matched the best of public schools of Delhi in terms of infrastructure and facilities. What was most surprising is the extremely low tuition fees. Just \$45 takes care of one year's expenses for a child. I pay as much each month for my two children to attend a well known public school in West Delhi as they charge for a whole year at SJC. Various scholarships are also available. Twenty-five percent of the children, from poor and disadvantaged families, study free of cost.

At the SJC Institute of Technology's ladies hostel and the BGS Rural English School, Agalagurki, situated on the same campus, again the buildings and ground grand, well maintained and spread over a huge area. Swami Nirmalanandaji told me that Shri Balagangadaranatha Swamiji takes personal interest in finalizing the layout plan of each and every institution. "If you ask him, he can tell you the exact measurement of any of the pillars that you see in the buildings."

We spoke to many students about life at college and the hostel. Most noted how important the weekly Monday morning prayers are in helping them remained focused on their studies. They were happy to add that a lady yoga teacher teaches them meditation and hatha yoga. In the evening, the girls enjoy watching television with evening snacks and coffee served from a high-tech kitchen.

A few kilometers away is Chikkaballapura Mutt, our final destination for the day. The Mutt and the engineering college are spread over one-hundred acres of lush, green surroundings. We reached there around 7 pm and participated in an hour-long

session of devotional songs and worship, an everyday affair at the Mutt performed by students of the engineering college led by Swami Nirmalananda. Each of Swamiji's 40 Mutts has a temple honoring a different Deity. At Chikkaballapura Lord Hanuman presides. The present Hanuman Temple is small, but work on a huge temple spread over several acres is about to begin.

After seeking Hanuman's blessings, we proceeded the next day, March 14, to Sri Jagadguru Chandrashekharnatha Swamiji Institute of Technology, situated on sixty acres of land 50 kms from Bangalore. The huge buildings, hi-tech laboratories, and 40,000-book library left me mesmerized. Everything is professionally managed. The highlight of our visit was the welcome given to me (as a representative of Gurudeva) by 2,000 students and faculty members in their morning assembly. It was a pleasant surprise when Dr. Ningappa, the principal, announced that Gurudeva had visited the institute and had laid the foundation stone for an important building.

Shri Ningappa reported, "We have morning prayers every Monday, as we had today, when all students and faculty members assemble to pray and chant Vedic mantras. We have pictures of Swami Balagangadaranathaji displayed prominently at important places. Swamiji visits frequently and interacts with the faculty and the students. Swami Nirmalananda, who is looking after the functioning on a day-to-day basis, shares his views with the faculty and students every now and then. As the saints are visiting our institution frequently, we are always getting charged spiritually and have strong holy vibrations all around. The faculty, students and parents know they are associated with a spiritual body headed by a distinguished saint and therefore have high expectations of us," says Swami Nirmalananda.

The formula for running the institutions and the branches of the Mutt is clear and simple, say insiders at the Mutt. Raise the money with the financial help and support of the rich and spend it on providing education, food, shelter and health care to the poor. The work of hundreds of BGS educational institutions has resulted in the whole community being educated over the last two decades. Prosperity has followed. Graduates of the Mutt's engineering and medical colleges have good jobs. Some are settled abroad. Many of the educational institutions run at a loss, but others make a profit. For instance, at the engineering and medical colleges 15 to 20 percent of the seats, known as management quota seats, are allocated at the sole discretion of management. For these, the institutions are able to get hefty donations by accommodating qualified children of the affluent who do not mind paying high fees. The money raised is used to support the low-income schools for poor and the needy students. In addition, the Mutt receives abundant offerings from devotees and income from agricultural lands.

It is generally maintained that no government financial aid is taken by the Mutt for running the educational institutions. However, the government has been generous in providing land for the schools at preferential rates, a policy which applies to all social and charitable organizations that run schools and health care facilities. For example, in Delhi the international school was allocated four acres of land at much less than the prevailing market rate.

From Chikkaballapura we rushed to Hoskote, on the outskirts of Bangalore, where Swamiji was inaugurating a new building at a private trust school. Here I witnessed the deep reverence people in Karnataka have for Swamiji. This was not a function organized by his devotees, but even here he was the center of attraction and people were queuing up to touch his feet and seek his blessings. The education minister of Karnataka was there to receive Swamiji. Other prominent saints were also on stage, but Swamiji was given the central place. Over one thousand people listened to his speech in pin-drop silence. While some religious leaders criticize the trend of computerization, Swamiji spoke for the judicious blending of the ancient with the modern. The crowd seemed to agree with his approach and acknowledged with applause. The organizers had also ensured that Swamiji's pet project of planting saplings was a part of the ceremonies.

Swami Nirmalananda told me that because BGS stands for success, quality and spirituality, Swamiji is the most sought-after figure for launching new and renovated temples and schools. His is believed to be a magic touch, a touch that has the blessings of Lord Bhairaveshvara Himself.

We proceeded to Shri Jagadguru Balagangadharanatha Swami Institute of Technology, a 27-acre haven with its canopy of trees and lush green lawns. Nearby, a medical college is coming up. Dr. Putta Raju, Principal, showed us around the magnificent campus, pointing out that they have 20 to 30 percent more classroom and laboratory space and equipment than is considered the norm.

Next we saw the BGS International Residential School, a marvel of architecture on 100 acres of in a lush valley. With 450 students, it is a part of Swami's commitment to keep children of non-resident Indians in touch with their cultural heritage. It was inaugurated in 2001 by the then prime minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Sonia Gandhi, Sai Baba and the Dalai Lama are some of the dignitaries who have visited. It has state-of-the-art laboratories and computer centers for the students. The residential facilities are fairly luxurious, designed with the affluent non-resident

Indians in mind, who are the school's main patrons. Whereas the ordinary rural school fee per annum, inclusive of transportation, is \$47, here it is \$4,545 per child--slightly more than the average cost of a private day school in the US.

Most of the students I talked to were happy with the disciplined life they were leading in the BGS institutions whether they were studying as day students or living at a hostel.

Each institution is under the direct charge of a swami disciple of Swami Balagangadaranathaswami. Each swami has an office in the institution and interacts with the faculty and the students on a daily or a weekly basis. "The management and supervision of our temples of learning by the saints is what makes them stand apart from the other educational institutions," Swami Nirmalananda pointed out.

Moral education, though not a part of the official school curriculum, is taught by the administering swami, along with meditation, chanting and yoga. At these sessions, mantras such as "Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru Devo Maheshwara" are chanted by thousands of students and their teachers. At many schools, huge halls have been constructed for teaching meditation and yoga, and holding satsangs and singing bhajanas.

At some schools, the teachers live in staff quarters not far from the student hostels. In such cases, they monitor the after-school activities of the children. I often saw children engaged in serious study even after hours, preparing for their upcoming exams.

Swami Shraddhanatha said, "We mostly get children from big cities, like Bangalore and Mysore. They are used to watching cinema and television in their spare time. But after staying with us for a while, they leave their old habits and pick up good ones. They participate in the temple, in prayer and meditation classes. It brings a sort of revolution in their personalities and they become different from children of the cities, more humble and straightforward."

I heard collaborating testimony from the students. B.S. Sudeep, 15, at BGS

International School, Bangalore, said, "The school is peaceful, with good surroundings. We receive moral education and learn to be disciplined. After joining this school, I have improved in the areas of discipline, sports and academics." Barsha Raja, 14, said, "Here the teachers lay emphasis on understanding the children. Swamiji comes to visit often. My attitude has changed, I have grown responsible." Fellow student Pretina Shrestha, 15, confided, "I was brought up in London. There I did not focus on Hinduism, because my surroundings were all Christian. I never used to fast, but here we all fast on Sivaratri. Now I am learning Indian culture." At one of the engineering colleges, Shubhalaxmi told me, "I am now a different person altogether. Earlier, I did not pay attention to prayer, God or spirituality. I now realize these are the necessary parts of an education. The faculty here is very friendly and helps you in the overall development of your personality. Sri Swamiji visits frequently and blesses us all."

On the 15th, we left the Bangalore Mutt at 7 am and visited Guru Bhavan, the birthplace of Sri Swamiji in Banandur, then proceeded to the Sri Jagadguru Balagangadharanatha Swamiji Residential Blind School at Archakarahalli, Ramnagar. It was a heartrending experience for me to be in the midst of hundreds of blind children, who staged an excellent cultural show which included recitation of Bhagavad Gita verses by a Muslim boy. I was given the honor of addressing the assembly of blind children and the teaching staff. They looked blissful, and the auditorium was charged with high spiritual vibrations as they sang songs praising their satguru, Balagangadharanatha Swamiji Maharaj.

Later, at the Vishwamanava High School in Mandya, I spoke with Swami Shradhanatha, a senior disciple of Swamiji. He said this school caters to the common folk, and its students achieve high marks each year. Swamiji expressed distress at the fact that these days parents place no emphasis on their child's spiritual development. They look only for their son or daughter to do well on exams and become an engineer or a doctor. In fact, many consider spiritual and moral education and activities as a waste of time. .

Moving onward, we arrived at the hundred-acre Adichunchanagiri Hospital and Research Centre, one of Swamiji's favorite projects, which provides medical treatment to the rural people. Three to four hundred patients are treated every day free of charge by the out-patient department. The hospital has facilities to treat 750 in-patients.

Finally, we reached the 250-acre grand township project, Sri Adi Chunchanagiri Kshetra, the ancient seat of Natha Sampradaya, 110 kilometers in the granite hills west of Bangalore at an altitude of 3,300 feet. Here the \$11.3-million Kalabhareshwara Temple project, under construction, will likely be completed 2006.

Upon reaching Sri Kshetra, we were rushed to the huge dining hall where a thousand students were about to dine. They were all smartly dressed in white dhotis with blue tops and a red sash on their shoulders. The scene was colorful and breathtaking. Amid the chanting of Vedic mantras, food was served to the children by other children. For some time I felt transported back to the Vedic age, the age of gurukulam schools. How efficiently the small children were serving food to rows and rows of students with the help of small trolleys. It spoke volumes about their commitment and dedication towards their fellow beings.

Recently, Sri Swamiji conducted 15-day programs for 2,500 rural ladies at Kshetra. They were trained in Hindu lore, devotional singing and yoga.

Kshetra is a sacred place in Hinduism. It is said that Lord Siva Himself meditated here. With His divine power He created a "Siddha Yogi " and blessed him as the first pontiff of this Mutt. As this pontiff had the authority to appoint the heads of India's twelve cardinal mutts, the name Adi ("first ") was given only to pontiffs of this Mutt. Adichunchanagiri is a part of the folk lore of the local people of Karnataka. I experienced its sacredness when I entered one of the ancient caves where the Natha Siddhas performed penance and meditated in olden times.

From my room I had a breathtaking early morning view of Kshetra, with small ponds and greenery all around. A cool breeze was blowing as if welcoming me to this divine destination. I witnessed the multitudinous workers on the temple project. Masonry and stone-cutting work was going on at a blistering pace. Sri Swamiji said, "In ancient times, four or five kings over a period of a hundred years could complete a temple like this. Today, with modern equipment, the same can be done in ten years time."

The present Sri Kalabhareshwara Temple at Sri Kshetra was constructed long ago. It has been a long-felt need of the Math and devotees to construct a new temple in

place of the existing one. The temple is being built according to the Saiva Agamas under the direction of Sri Muthaiah Sthapati. The main sanctum is near completion [see photo inside the front cover].

The next day we started with a visit to the 35-year-old Sanskrit pathashala (priest school) run according to ancient traditions. As we entered, the building was reverberating with Sanskrit verses chanted by the students of different classes. Here the religious rituals are taught in a scientific manner, and the library is a treasure-house of rare Sanskrit literature and texts. Sri Swamiji himself once taught Sanskrit here.

At the nearby Kalabhareshwara Temple, a stream of devotees and visitors were pouring in to worship the main Kal Bhairava Deity, which will eventually be shifted to the new premises.

On the 17th we visited Adichunchanagiri Institute of Technology in Chikmagalur, 240 km from Bangalore. The weather here is so pleasant throughout the year that it is called the Kashmir of Karnataka. It has world-class facilities. Engineering students not only from India but all over the world ply for admission. Over the past 25 years, this institute had produced thousands of engineers who now enjoy eminent positions in the government and private sectors in India and in many parts of the world.

On to Mysore, we stopped at the BGS Apollo Hospital, a 200-bed hospital and landscaped campus at Kuvempunagar in Mysore with advanced equipment for specialized treatment. It is being expanded shortly by 400 more beds.

On the last day of our sojourn, the 18th, we drove 200 kms to Bangalore's Sri Kalabyraveshwara Swamy Ayurvedic Medical College Hospital and Research Centre. Here, again, wonderful work is being done. Nature cure and yoga are an integral part of the ayurvedic treatment that is being given to the needy at affordable prices. Asked about the prospects for graduates, Dr. H. Namish Prasad, principal of the institution, affirmed they are quite good. He said, "The government of India has made it national policy that every primary health-care center should have a third doctor from India's ancient systems of medicine, especially Ayurveda."

After a quick visit to the Iraivan Temple carving site, I departed for Delhi. One week was far too short to cover the 350 BGS institutions, but I had managed to visit about two dozen. It was beyond my comprehension how Sri Swamiji could be taking care of 350 institutions and 40 mutts spread all over Karnataka. Yet, everywhere I went, every swami and student of these institutions told me that Sri Swamiji visits frequently. He takes care of every expansion plan. Everywhere I went, I saw new construction work taking place. All this is indeed a miracle which is shaping the future of the state of Karnataka.

INTERVIEW

On Praise, Youth, Science, Guru & More

Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami shares the wisdom of his ancient Natha lineage

Hinduism Today's correspondent, Rajiv Malik, interviewed Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami. Here are some excerpts:

God is everywhere. god is found even among children, wife, mother and sister. We appreciate God through hymns and uttering His names. If we praise those close to us as well, definitely it will lead to a peaceful life. When we appreciate them, they also will take care of us. If you praise your wife, she will make two additional dishes for you, out of sheer happiness. Say some good words of appreciation to your parents and children, and you will make them more happy. Your home will become a svarga, heaven, just by speaking good words and genuinely praising others. When it can get you such wonderful results, why should you be a miser in using good words or appreciating others? So my message is to always be happy and cheerful and say good words to others.

Over the years we have trained our youth in a wrong way. Today the youth have become addicted to computers and television sets. It is our fault. The minds of our youth have been badly damaged. It is our duty to correct the youth, but it is very difficult to make this correction now. That is why we have to forcefully take them to the centers of devotion, such as temples, and then give them training with love and

affection. It is sad to say that it all started with both the parents going to the office in the morning and coming back at night without bothering what will happen to their children. They put their children in the hands of people who do baby-sitting. If our whole family cannot maintain one child, how do we expect that just one or two ladies will properly maintain 20-50 children who are left in their custody? In the past we used to have a joint family system, and such problems were not there. Today we are just going after money. Children are suffering as the working parents get to spend very little time with them. If grandparents are there, they can also look after the child. But, unfortunately, the joint family system is vanishing. In the olden days, they used to say that every house must have an old family member. It is unfortunate that we are pushing the old people out of homes and putting them in old-age homes.

After studying science, youth start getting confused. We are not using science to learn how to live life in a better manner or to understand religion in a scientific way. Scientific knowledge today is devoid of devotion. It is a dry subject and does not give happiness or peace. Unless materialism blends with spiritualism, there cannot be restoration of peace and tranquility on the Earth. Therefore, science should be for the benefit of man and not for the destruction of the Earth.

My guru used to narrate this story: "Once there was a disciple who wanted to know the truth. His guru told him to go to a pond, look inside it and then report back what he had seen. The first day, he went there and reported that he only saw fish. The next day, he came back and told his guru that again he saw only fish, and that the pond only has fish. He was sent back a third time and told to observe more keenly. This time he came back saying he had seen diamonds and some other precious things in the pond. Again he was sent back. This time he said that he saw many images on the water, such as of birds flying over the pond, clouds and more. And on the last day he went to the same pond and came back with the answer that he saw only the water." Truth is like this. So many obstacles would be there in the beginning but ultimately truth will be realized just as that disciple finally saw the water. Without being blessed by a guru, we will not be able to see many things. The guru is a bridge between the devotee and Lord Siva. There is "God " and there is "Atman, " the soul, and in order to know this, the assistance of a guru is quite necessary. The way of devotion, bhakti marga, is the only way by which we can get to the truth.

People come in your life to settle the past-life relationships they have had with you. The cause and effect theory is very much applicable in such cases. Without a cause, there is not an effect. Some reason behind the association has to be there.

Interestingly, once the past relationship account is settled, such people can simply vanish from your life. One should not grieve the loss of such people, as they are bound to leave us once the purpose of their relationship is served. For example, when the sun sets in the evening a multitude of birds come to a big tree. They spend the night at the tree, and when the sun rises they fly away, leaving the tree behind. For that, why should the tree grieve? Our Mutt is like a big tree to which students, disciples and devotees keep coming, but they leave us when the work is over. Why worry over their leaving? Is it not the duty of the tree to provide shade and shelter to everyone who comes under its branches? It provides shade and shelter without expecting anything from those who come to it. And when they leave, the tree does not worry.

When the fruit or leaf is ripe, it attains the saffron color, the color worn by sannyasin monks. This color is the sign which declares that the person wearing it has no attachment to any worldly object. He is not attached to name and fame. Just as when the leaves and fruits also attain this color, they automatically fall from the tree, so the sannyasin walks away from or renounces the world. At that stage no one will cry or suffer a loss--neither the one that is leaving, nor the one who is being left, because no attachment is there on either side.

When an orange flag is waved before a train or a bus, what happens? The driver stops, because he recognizes the color as a symbol of warning, a symbol of danger. Today the human race is speedily running after so many things. The sannyasin in saffron robes serves as a sign of caution. The moment people see this color worn by a sannyasin, they must stop and ponder their lives and consider in which direction are they heading?