

Dhaulchhina Ashram

The present writer, Swami Nirgunananda, had the opportunity to hear from the lips of Ma about her pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and Mansorovar during the summer of 1937 with a large group of people. Ma also described the last days of Bhaiji (who was a member of that entourage) on his way back from there. In those days one had to trek right from the road/rail head at Kathgodam to Kailash and had to encamp at different places along that difficult hilly track.

In general from Dhaulchhina the peaks are only occasionally visible (after rain) during summer and rainy seasons, due to mist and cloud covering them at those times.

On that particular journey, after a flash shower of rain while passing through Dhaulchhina, the wide range of snow-clad Himalayan peaks were clearly visible.



View of the Himalayas from the route to Mt Kailash at Dhaulchhina, near Dak Bungalow.

Bhaiji, who was walking at the front, was overwhelmed by the sight. He came running back to Ma who was on a palanquin and said, “Ma, please see what a

magnificent sight it is. I wish a spiritual aspirant should stay in such a secluded interior of the Himalayas and get immersed in sadhana, looking at the white snow line along the horizon.”

Ma just heard him without making any comment. After the pilgrimage on the way back, Bhaiji left his body at Almora and was given in Samadhi near the Patal Devi temple. The Anandamayee ashram at Patal Devi gradually came up around Bhaiji's Samadhi.

On some other occasion Ma described the same journey to an audience. Sri Hariram Joshi was also present there. Sri Joshi, a staunch follower of Gandhiji and an ardent devotee of Ma, had utmost reverence for Bhaiji, as to a spiritual master. Joshiji wanted Bhaiji's wish to be fulfilled and asked his brother Sri Damodar Joshi, a Divisional Forest Officer at Almora, to look for a place suitable for an ashram near Dhaulchhina. Ten acres of land, the present ashram at Tarathal Tok in the village of Kachula, was acquired by Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha on a 99 years lease from the then Government of UP in 1955.

One should remember that the present ashram is situated at a place almost one and a half miles away and nearly 1000 ft higher than the original Kailash Mansarovar track at Dhaulchhina. It is only natural that one would wish to find out how this spot was selected - a spot which is almost a plateau on top of a hill with a clear view of snow-clad peaks spreading across the whole skyline .



Skyline from Dhaulchinna Ashram

A few years back there was a startling revelation that Ma herself had thoroughly explored the area where the present ashram is situated.

Swami Atmananda (Known as Ms Blanca In those days), the Austrian lady inmate of our ashram, was regularly keeping track of Ma's movements throughout the length and breadth of India. She was an untiring correspondent and used to keep a diary, as also the letters she received from various people. (She had been writing regularly about Ma's movements in the then official magazine of the Sangha, Ananda Varta, first published in 1952).

After her demise Sri Ram Alexander, who was in possession of her diary, edited and published the diary in the form of a book entitled DEATH MUST DIE. A large bundle of the letters received by her came into the possession of Swami Bhaskaranandaji, who passed them to Christopher Pegler to sort out as best he could. This bundle was shown to the present writer on one of his visits to the UK, and in amongst the items was found an envelope addressed to Ramanandi (original name given to Atmananda by Ma) from Swami Paramanandaji. He took out the letter and was awe-struck to see that the letter was written from Dhaulchhina on 26th July 1945. The letter was scanned and photo-copied immediately. The present writer has one such copy, which is attached below.

Swami Paramanandaji wrote that Ma was staying at that place for the last 18 days and may stay some more days. This was quite a surprise as there was no reference to Ma's stay in Gurupriya Didi's diary and other available literature on Ma. It seemed just like any of the scores of places along the track to Kailash, so why should Ma select an insignificant place like Dhaulchhina to stay for so long? It was neither a place of pilgrimage nor were there any temples or rivers around. Unlike today the name of Dhaulchhina was not even on the tourist map of Almora. Furthermore it is reported (Br. Patun) that Sri Ma had not only visited the Dak Bungalow at Dhaulchhina on 12th August 1937 on the return from Mt Kailas, but had also had been there on 22nd November 1943.

After seeing that letter the present writer, who had been continuously staying in Dhaulchhina ashram since 1987, began to search for old men and women in the villages around who could personally authenticate Ma's stay there. After talking to dozens of old inhabitants, he fortunately came across Sri Nathu Singh from Colone, a nearby village, and now in his eighties. He described his childhood experience with Ma. He first saw Ma in the school from his house which was very close to the primary school at Dhaulchhina, where Ma stayed along with others in July, 1945. See this link for the interview.

<http://youtu.be/Tc5laUDYEG4>

Still today it is the daily routine of every household in the village to go to the

forest for grazing the cattle and goats. Tarathal tok, being almost a plateau, was known for its grass and was preferred by the grazers. Sri Nathu Singh was studying in a school in Nainital and very often used to come home. He said that as a child he used accompany the cattle and goat grazers to Tarathal. He also remembers that there was a very beautiful and fair complexioned lady in white, from outside the area, strolling in Tarathal for several weeks. The very sight of her was so enchanting that he felt a strong magnetic attraction towards her. He tried to converse with her but could not do so, as neither of them could understand each other's language. Sri Singh also recalls that the lady was not staying with any household but, along with a few others, at the primary school down the hill.

Sri Singh had the darshan of Ma in 1964 when she came to Dhaulchhina after the ashram had already been established. But he failed to recognize Ma as being the same lady he had seen 19 years earlier.

From this one can definitely say that Ma had taken a special interest in the area now occupied by the ashram at Dhaulchhina.

In 1964 there was a long gap between the solar date and the lunar date (Tithi) of Ma's birthday and the venue was fixed at Almora ashram for the celebrations covering both the dates. Ma, in her Kheyal, all of a sudden came to Dhaulchhina for a very short stay during the gap period, along with people such as Swami Paramanandaji, Udasji, Br. Nirvavanandaji, Br Maitreyiji, Br Pushpadi, Dr Priya Ranjan Ghosh etc. People from the villages around started pouring into the ashram to have her darshan. One day nine ladies, looking like village women, came in a group to see Ma. Ma asked their names. Astonishingly, each one of them was called after the nine different names of Goddess Durga.

Ma said, "See Nava Durgas (nine different forms of Durga) have come to give darshan." Ma asked Nirvananandaji to make arrangement for performing Arati to them and he did.

Ma described the place as "Tapobhumi" (a place for austere spiritual practice). She also said, "To stay in Dhaulchhina is sadhana by itself."

Very recently the present writer came to know that Sri Khim Singh (now in his mid nineties) who had been serving as one of the teachers of the primary school when Ma stayed, was still living in a nearby village. In an interview Khim Singh confirmed that Ma had shown great interest in the site of Dhaulchhina Ashram. He recollected that Ma had arranged for feeding the local people on the courtyard of the nearby Dak bungalow, where Ma had stayed overnight on her way to and from Kailash eight years earlier. See this link for the interview with Khim Singh

<http://youtu.be/7UJgp16WcMw>



Dak Bungalow (built 1837) with courtyard

Sri Singh was helping with the arrangements and began to make people sit for their food in separate rows according to their cast. (In those days cast distinction was very much prevalent amongst the higher cast hill-people.) Ma asked him not to indulge in such differentiation and made him, a Kshartiya, sit in the same row next to his deputy, a Harijan (the lowest cast). Despite his reservations he had no choice but to obey Ma, though feeling uneasy. Only later he was able to understand and appreciate the human values to which Ma was pointing.

Note: With Sw Bhaskaranandaji's permission the bundle of Atmananda's letters, with Sw Paramamnaandaji's original letter therein, was subsequently passed for safe-keeping to Br. Sri Patun, who is working meticulously on Ma's archives. A copy of this letter is inserted below.

Dear sister Ramanandi

Po. Bareillyna.
Vill. ~~Home~~ Dhabal Chaur
Dt. ALMORA.
20.7.45

Yours to hand and read out before
Mother. Mother has come here on the 9th July.
She is keeping good health here. I hope she will
stay here for some time. I think she will not
go to Benares or Sarnath now. Two ladies also
has written that they have reached safely
Benares. Patients are all well. Mukti Baba is
at Almora. Prabhudda Nanjee has come with
us. On hearing your letter Mother says - "Always

try to meditate upon God. Do not pass your
time in vain."

We are so and so and hope this
will find you in good health.
With love and namaskar to you.

Yours in the Lord
Paramananda