

Dhaulchhina Ashram

The present writer had the opportunity to hear from the lips of Ma about her journey to Mount Kailash and Mansarovar during the summer of 1937 with a big group. 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 the long distance to Kailash right from the road/rail head at Kathgodam and had to encamp at different places along the difficult hilly track.

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

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

Bhaiji, who was walking in 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 gets 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 Bhajji left his body at Almora and was given in Samadhi near the Patal Devi temple and the Anandamayee ashram at Patal Devi gradually came up around Bhajji'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 Bhajji, like that to a spiritual master. Joshiji wanted Bhajji'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 of the present ashram at Tarathal Tok in the village of Kachula, was acquired on a 99 year lease from the then Government of UP in 1955 by Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha.

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 about the person who had selected this very spot, which is almost a plateau 1000 ft on top of a hill with a clear view of snow-clad peaks spreading across almost half the horizon.

A few years back there was a startling revelation that the selection of the area of the present ashram was made by none other than Ma herself.

Swami Atmananda (Known as Ms Blanka In those days), an 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 different persons. (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 titled 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 in 26th July 1945. The letter was scanned and photocopied 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 such reference of Ma's stay in Gurupriya Didi's diary and other available literature on Ma. It appeared just like so many other places along the track to Kailash, so why should Ma select an insignificant place like Dhaulchhina to stay for such a long period of time? 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, apart from

visiting the Dak Bungalow at Dhaulchina on 12th August 1937 on the return from Mt Kailas, also had been to Dhaulchhina on 22nd November 1943.

After seeing that letter the present writer, who had been continuously staying in Dhaulchhina ashram since 1987, was searching for elderly men and women in the villages around who could personally authenticate Ma's stay here. Fortunately, after talking to dozens of old inhabitants he came across one Sri Nathu Singh of a nearby village Colone, now in his eighties, who described his childhood experience with Ma.

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 said that as child he used to take his cattle and goats to Tarathal. He also remembers there was a very beautiful and fair complexioned young lady in white, from outside the area, strolling all alone in Tarathal almost every day 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 as neither of them could understand each other's language. Sri Singh also recalls that the lady was not staying with any household in and around the villages. She was staying at a primary school down the hill along with a few others, as it was vacation time for the school.

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 the selection and suggestion of the area of the ashram at Dhaulchhina was made by Ma.

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

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

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

PO. Bareilly.
Vill. ~~Some~~ Dhabal Chaur
Dt. ALMORA.
20.7.45

Dear sister Ramanandi

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. Prabuddhanandji has come with
us. On hearing of our little 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.

Click here for a panoramic view of the skyline. <http://www.anandamayi.org/ashram/Dhaulchina.fly>