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Swami Paramananda, Ranchi, Bihar, India 1983. Photo: BP.

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

MY EXPERIENCES WITH
SWAMI PARAMANANDA

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI IN THE WEST

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PARAMANANDA'S SMILE

First meeting with Paramananda

After a train journey that lasted for two and a half days, from Haridwar in the North-West across almost all of India to Burdwan in the east, followed by a one hour bus trip to a tiny, desolate, stop named Jambuwi Danga, and then by cycle rickshaw for nearly half an hour because of the muddy road due to the heavy rain of the monsoon, I finally reached Banagram village and Paramananda Mission in Bengal on June 29th 1983. It was an idyllic, beautiful and inexpressibly peaceful place far out in the countryside among poor and simple people. Here it was airy and spacious with wide open rice fields as far as the eye could see in all directions, interrupted only by palm-encompassed 'islands' of small villages consisting of beautiful mud houses with straw roofs, dotted across the vast ocean of rice fields.

Sabyasachi Manna or "Sobbo", the poet, was the first to receive me when the rickshaw finally stopped in front of the little single storey office building where "Paramananda Mission - established 1978" was engraved on the cement wall. With a friendly smile he greeted me and said in excellent English that I was expected and that he had heard much about me from Saswati. Then Brahmachari Swarupananda, with a clean-shaven head and *gerrhua* robes, wished me welcome in his more modest, but equally friendly, way. He showed me into one of the three rooms in the building, asked me to sit, and gave me a glass of water to drink. From them I learnt that "Guruji", Swami Paramananda, was not then in the ashram, but that I could meet him at another place later that day. After a while Trishan appeared after coming back from an errand in Calcutta. Swarupananda informed me that he was their leader. Trishan radiated power and authority. He barely greeted me, saying nothing, but all the while watching me with a mixture of scepticism and wonder. Without me knowing anything about it at the time, the ashram had met with lots of severe challenges and difficulties on account of Saswati's unruly and wild whims arising from her mental health problems. And as she was a friend of mine from Norway, he was obviously concerned that I would also cause similar problems. Thus, Saswati had already managed to give Norwegians a bad reputation in the ashram.

A little later Saswati also appeared and took me to Paramananda's modest, but very beautiful, hut. It was constructed in the traditional Bengali way from compressed clay with a thick straw roof, just like most of the houses in the village. It had only one room with a win-

dow at each end at the same height as the bed to provide good ventilation when he was resting. There were also two doors - one in the eastern wall and the other in the southern wall. The elevated bed was moulded into the western wall in a north-south direction, brick built and covered with clay so that it was a part of both the floor and the wall. On top of it was a simple, thin mat of straw and a little pillow at the southern end, and above it an open mosquito net. On the floor there was a bigger and thicker straw mat, and on the walls there were big, nicely framed, pictures all around, of his guru, Swami Baulananda (the other of his two gurus), Jesus, Buddha, Shiva, Ramakrishna, Sarada Ma, Swami Vivekananda, Adi Shankaracharya, Guru Nanak, Prabhu Jagabandhu and Sri Chaitanya. Everything was very simple, but very carefully made and beautiful. Saswati then showed me a picture of Paramananda and explained that, in contrast to the photograph of him that we had received in Norway, now he had long hair and a beard. She added that there were very few pictures of him so that now I was here with my camera I must take many snaps of him.



Except from the one sent to Norway, this was the first picture of Paramananda that I saw, the same which Saswati showed me in Paramananda's hut in Banagram in June 1983. Photographer unknown.



The huge banyan tree in the Banagram Ashram as it looked in the early morning on the last day of June in 1983. To me it looked particularly wonderful in the early morning light and I was eager to imprint the sensual impression on film. I only got this one picture and then the camera locked up - nothing worked. When I later met with Paramananda in Ranchi, showed him my camera which was still not functioning and told him about the incident, he smiled and said that no electronic device would be working near that tree in the early morning due to the enormous radiation from the tree. He looked briefly at my camera and turned it a little in his hands, and then gave it back to me, all the while still smiling. Afterwards, to my great surprise, the camera again worked normally!

Please notice that at that time there were no other buildings in this view! The village is hidden behind trees in the background to the left. Photo: BP.

In the afternoon Devendranath (Swami Visuddhananda) also appeared and we conversed for quite a while as we strolled in the comforting shade of the big banyan tree in the middle of the open field, in front of the three buildings of the ashram: the office building (simply called "building"), Paramananda's hut and a little prayer room (puja place) with a small open kitchen attached. Devendranath was a very dynamic, mild and friendly person with a handsome appearance. He spoke fluent English, had a good sense of humour and was some years older than most of the others in the ashram. At that time there were perhaps 9-10 adults besides Paramananda in the ashram and two orphan boys, Pradip and Mana. Later in the afternoon Trishan, Devendranath, Saswati, Sobbo and I went by bus to Burdwan to meet Paramananda at the railway station. He was then on one of his usual tours in Bengal where he visited various families who had beforehand invited him to their homes, to stay with them for a few days and hold *satsanga*. On such occasions there was always open house and people from the neighborhood used to come to listen to him and to ask questions and to get advice or help for all sorts of things.

Paramananda had just spent a few days in a village called Raina further south in Bengal, and now he was on his way to a family in Ranchi, in the neighbouring state of Bihar. On the way he had to wait a few hours to change trains at the big railway junction of Burdwan, and that provided the opportunity for me to meet him that very

day. A police officer who guarded the railway station, Mr. Bongshi, was a friend of the ashram and had his office on one of the platforms. There we could cool down sitting under the electric fan while we were waiting for Paramananda's train to arrive. It took quite a while. The others went out on the platform while I was asked to remain seated. All alone in the room I was sitting on a chair with my back to the wall just beside the open entrance. Straight in front of me there were a few rows of chairs facing Mr. Bongshi's desk, which overlooked the room, perpendicular to my chair. I waited and waited.

Suddenly, without warning, an extremely powerful man dressed in *gerrhua* quickly entered the room. He had a beard and long hair which was coiled up in a knot at the neck. I immediately understood that this must be Paramananda, and full of expectation I became quite excited. For some reason or other inwardly I heard myself repeatedly saying to myself in English: "Will he recognize me? - Will he recognize me?" He passed right by me without looking to the side where I was sitting, went quickly straight ahead, turned left and sat on a chair in front of Mr. Bongshi's desk so that he sat in profile directly in front of me. Then he took a large glass of water, which had been placed there for him earlier, and emptied it in only a couple of seconds, put it back on the desk, and smiling turned his head to the left to look straight at me and said "Bjørn", with a most perfect Norwegian pronunciation which no other Indian is able to do. Spontaneously I smiled back,

dumbfounded, and thus we were sitting and smiling at one another for a long, long, while without saying a single word, and none of the others in the room dared open their mouths. It was a most wonderful feeling. Here, a complete stranger was sitting in front of me who I had never seen or met before in my life, but one who I immediately felt strongly knew me totally - better than any of my friends or family, nay, even better than I knew myself - and to whom, in a strange way, I felt indescribably close. His incomparable smile and loving gaze was incredibly friendly and reliable, full of the most exalted joy, love and blessing. Three very distinctive realizations became clear to me as I looked deeply into the eyes of Paramananda:

**I have always known you;
we have always been together; and
you know me better than I know myself.**

I felt ecstatic. He won me there and then, and for all time to come.

The others had followed close on Paramananda's heels and sat in the room without my sensing them, and after a while Paramananda broke the silence and perhaps said something to me or to one of them, but I remember nothing of that, only that a few words were exchanged between Paramananda and Mr. Bongshi, and that finally they all left the room and went outside on to the platform for some cool evening air. When eventually I regained my senses I ran out to see where they had all gone.

Everything had happened so spontaneously and so fast that there had been no chance for me to greet Paramananda in a proper, traditional, Indian way. From my time in Rishikesh I knew very well with what deep reverence and respect such persons as Paramananda would be greeted by their disciples and followers, who would be prostrating and touching his feet with their hands or even with their brows. And naturally I was prepared to greet him this way the very first time of meeting him. But everything had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that the mere thought of performing such a traditional greeting had vanished into thin air. Our first meeting had happened as the most natural thing in the world, blessedly free from all bonds of tradition and convention - just as I really like it, and, as I later came to know, he too likes it.

But out there on the platform arose in me the doubt that perhaps I hadn't behaved well or shown him the proper respect - that at least it must have appeared like that to the others. Eager to show him my respect I went straight towards him with my palms together, as is customary in the East, and in addition I raised them up to my forehead, like they greet the divinities in the temples. He immediately grasped my intention and, before I could bow down, he quickly walked towards me, and smiling, grabbed one of

my arms and shook it lightly but firmly, cutting short my attempt at a formal greeting, so as to tell me this formality was not at all necessary. And in this way he made me understand that our relationship should not be influenced by formalities.

As there were some hours before Paramananda's train to Ranchi would arrive, it was decided that we should all go to a friend's house nearby. There we were treated to various snacks and sweets, and while we were eating Paramananda made a sign to me to come and sit beside him. At that time he spoke almost no English, only a very few words, so Devendranath functioned as interpreter. Paramananda asked me about my travel plans and various practical things for my stay in India, and then invited me to accompany him to Ranchi. I was quite surprised by this spontaneous invitation to travel with him, just the two of us, from someone I had only just met, but without a second thought I happily consented. However, Devendranath and the others intervened, saying that it was necessary for me to go with them to Calcutta the next day in order to arrange a return air ticket for Saswati to go back to Norway. She was now forced to leave India as she had not renewed her visa, and she had only a one month extension on the ground of ill health now that her original standard three month tourist visa had expired. Knowing only too well that Saswati had nowhere else to go in Norway than back to Alvdal, and that her staying there alone was out of the question, I saw no other option than to go back to Norway with her. It was far from my own wish, but due to the pressing circumstances there was nothing else to do. Confronted with this situation Paramananda asked me if it was my will to leave India now. I answered clearly that it was not "but if she (Saswati) has to go, I also have to go." To this answer Paramananda chuckled and commented to the others in English: "Oh, he is very simple!" And all smiled and chuckled, except Saswati. Later it emerged that she had taken it negatively and thought that Paramananda had meant that I was a mean fellow, but from Paramananda's perspective it was absolutely positive: A spiritual person does what he has to do at any time, always ready to sacrifice his own wishes or plans.

So, given this new situation, it was decided that I should follow on to Ranchi with Devendranath as soon as the air tickets for both Saswati and myself were arranged, and then stay with Paramananda for the remainder of my time in India, which was now only a few days. All the time as we conversed it felt good to be so near him physically - a rather indescribable feeling of wellbeing and peace. Pretty soon we all followed Paramananda to the railway station and bade him farewell through the window of the train as it glided out of the station on the way to Ranchi in Bihar. It was now completely dark and rather late at night, so we all went to another friend's house in Burdwan where we spent the night. Early next morning we took the bus back to the ashram next to Banagram village.



Tripti Ma (right) in Banagram Ashram in November 1984 seen with the young Bul-Bul - eldest daughter of the Banagram village school teacher who was called back to life from death . Photo: BP.

Tripti Ma

I spent the whole day in the ashram and talked a lot with Devendranath who told me the life story of all the ashram members, and, of course, above all, stories from the life of Paramananda. All of these stories contained fantastic events, and mainly because of Devendranath's imaginative portrayals and way of narration, I could not immediately swallow everything. But they were still very remarkable and made a strong impression. By myself I had already understood that all the people there were highly unusual and special, and I found everyone that I met immediately appealing, in most cases as if I somehow recognized them.

However, there was one story in particular, which made a very strong impression, one in which Paramananda had raised a man in the village from death. The man, a school teacher, a very poor man with a family had one day, as he walked in the fierce sunshine on his way back home from school, dropped down dead from heat stroke. Somebody found him and with the help of others the dead body was brought to his home, taken inside and laid on a bench. Paramananda was quickly called from the ashram and when he entered the room, where lots of people had already gathered, he ordered everybody out of the room. Nobody witnessed what happened next, but when the

door to the room opened, the poor man was alive, sitting on the bench. I heard this story again from many different sources over the next years, including from the man himself, who became a good friend, so it was thoroughly verified to me. Even Paramananda himself mentioned this event to me many years later in Norway. He said that he had felt so sorry for the poor family with a wife and four young children, that he had no other feeling than a strong impulse to help them, and that in restoring the father of the family to life he had given him many years from his own life.

As Devendranath and I walked and talked under the great banyan tree, a messenger suddenly appeared with the news that Ramananda Avaduth, Paramananda's guru high up in the Himalayas, had left his body. He was then around 160 years old. Later Paramananda taught us that the normal lifespan of man in this age (Kali Yuga) is 147 years but because of wrong life style and food habits we die long before. The human body is fully grown at the age of 21, and when we multiply this number by seven, which is a natural period or rhythm in so many conditions of life, we obtain the average length of man's natural life span.

It was this day that I met Tripti Ma for the first time. Her sannyasi name is Samhita Prana, but everybody called her simply 'Tripti Ma.' I saw her first from a distance inside the ashram and noticed her because of her extremely powerful and dynamic radiance. She looked thoroughly strong and energetic, and at the same time mild and motherly. Her beautiful face had an exalted expression with noble features, which is rare to find in any human. She was what they in India call a 'lotus woman.' At that time she lived in a small room with that very family in the village where the husband had been raised from the dead, and she pursued a certain sadhana or personal exercises for truth-seeking, which meant that she spent most of her time in the room in meditation and isolation.

Earlier, she had also spent two years in a monastery for nuns in the Himalayas, and had then often visited Ramananda Avaduth during the day-time. I had already heard from Devendranath how once she had been hit by a landslide when she was living in the Himalayas, and carried several hundred metres down a mountainside. She had lost consciousness and when she regained it she found herself kind of coiled up inside the bent branch of a pine tree, as if it had protected her, and she was completely unharmed and just walked away from the scene. But the most extraordinary thing about this story was that at the very same time that the landslide hit Tripti Ma, Paramananda was sitting in a satsanga in a private home somewhere in Bengal, suddenly everybody present at the satsanga sees that Paramananda stops talking, looks up with a very grave face and exclaims: "She is falling, she is falling!". Then he closes his eyes and is completely silent

for a few minutes, until he again opens his eyes and just resumes talking on the same topic as before. Everybody felt very confused about what had just happened, but eventually they all heard about Tripti Ma's "accident" in the Himalayas. Other than Tripti Ma herself who knew nothing about the incident with Paramananda during the satsanga until one day, much later, when she happened to visit that particular family where the satsanga had been held. When they compared the points of time and it became clear that the incidents with Tripti Ma and with Paramananda had happened simultaneously, they understood how she "miraculously" survived the landslide without a scratch! On coming back to Banagram after her stay in the Himalayas, Paramananda told her that her lifespan actually had come to an end at that time, but that he had prolonged it by giving her many years of his own life. She told me this herself many years later in Norway.

My very first meeting with her, however, was at the office building of the ashram, where I was sitting outdoors in the portico. She came straight to me and greeted me respectfully, and in a particularly friendly way, from the very first moment, called me "brother". No woman had ever addressed me in this way before. She was so liberatingly natural and free in her manners and ways - very different from almost all other Indian women. When a little later we went together with Saswati and Sobbo to the village to see the private home where Paramananda always used to eat his evening meal, she held me by my hand to help me through the deep mud caused by the monsoon. We went barefoot as shoes would be useless in the nearly knee-high mire, and at places walking became difficult if you didn't already know where to tread. When we arrived and I got a dry place to sit, which was actually the usual sitting place of Paramananda, Tripti Ma washed my feet and legs free from all the sticky mud with her own hands.

Never had any woman, except for my own mother, done anything like that to me, and it impressed me deeply. After all the rigours with Saswati in Norway I had been thinking that actually perhaps all women, more or less, were like her, and that therefore I would have nothing to do with them in future. But the thoroughly good and motherly Tripti Ma totally eradicated this delusion in me, and gradually my faith in women started to emerge again. That evening Devendranath took me to the village where we visited Tripti Ma in her little room. She received us well and on request she sang several devotional songs for us, from Rabindranath Tagore as well as from Mirabai, accompanied only by two small cymbals which she struck together to keep rhythm. Tripti Ma sang with such purity of mind and heartfelt longing for God, with eyes shining like jewels in the dim light from the lantern, that it became an unforgettable night in a small mud house in a small village far out in the countryside of Bengal.



Paramananda at Ranchi, July 1983. Photo: BP.

Five days in Ranchi

Early next morning Trishan, Devendranath, Saswati, Sobbo and I travelled to Calcutta to arrange for the air tickets to Norway. Later that day Devendranath and I took the train to Ranchi in Bihar. We arrived at Ranchi Road station in the morning on July 2nd. On the way to the Bengali family where Paramananda was staying we made a quick halt on the road where Devendranath bought some mangoes in the street market for me to present to Paramananda when we met. In India it is a good tradition to bring fruits or sweets to a guru or a great spiritual personality, and now it was just the middle of the mango season. Devendranath knew, of course, that Paramananda was very fond of mangoes, so he bought four or five mangoes for me so that I should not come empty handed to Paramananda. Coming from Norway I had no idea about mangoes and had never bought a mango in my whole life, so there was no way I could understand that the mangoes were not properly ripe. So when Paramananda bit into one of them, and then immediately pulled a face with a grimace that could not be misunderstood, he exclaimed: "Oh, they are sour!", and didn't want to eat any more. And thus, among his followers, it became known for all time that Bjørn had given Gururji sour mangoes at their first meeting. All Indians put a lot of weight and symbolic value into happenings

like that, but Paramananda himself couldn't care less - he was refreshingly free of all such superstitions.

It was wonderful to be with Paramananda those few days in Ranchi. With Devendranath as an interpreter we talked a lot about my situation in Norway, and about my sadhana and other personal things. He gave me much good advice and encouraged me greatly as regards my sadhana. At dinner, quite untraditionally, we all sat together on chairs around a small kitchen table just like in the West, with many enjoyable moments and conversation. It was an intimate and nice scene full of laughter and fun. Paramananda most definitely had a good sense of humour. In the evenings people from near and far dropped in to ask him questions on philosophical and spiritual topics, or to get advice or guidance on practical matters, or just to pay him respect and sit silently by his feet and listen to him, as is the tradition in India. As we were in the state of Bihar, Paramananda spoke the regional and national language Hindi and not his mother tongue Bengali. But when he talked about highly spiritual matters, he had, as a matter of course, to use a lot of Sanskrit words, which belong to a common vocabulary for almost all the languages and dialects of India, and which I knew from the books by Sri Ananda and therefore could understand. I listened very attentively and observed Paramananda with utmost concentration of mind while he was talking, and on account of all the known Sanskrit terms, together with a common use of about 20 percent of English words in both Hindi and Bengali, I could follow the satsanga fairly well and partly understand what was being said. In addition it was a great experience to watch Paramananda speak on spiritual topics because he spoke with a power and sensitivity I had never witnessed before: It wasn't just words that came out of him, it was alive, from life.

In my childhood, by my daily evening prayer (I didn't grow up in a Christian or religious home, but my sister and I had always recited the Christian evening prayer together before going to bed), and especially in my youth at the time of my conscious investigation into Christian culture, I had felt a bond to Jesus. And when, as an adult, I came to Mt. Tron and moved in with Einar Beer, who liked to call himself a 'Buddhist', I also came to love the Buddha. The Buddha was to me the manifestation of infinite wisdom while Jesus was the manifestation of universal love. These two were clearly my idols before I met Paramananda, but after meeting him it was as if I experienced both of these two idols in one and the same person. It was a most wonderful feeling and experience!

On one occasion I saw him bare chested and he showed me a huge birth mark which was located on his left shoulder. I was quite astonished because its shape was an exact replica of the map of ancient India, i.e. the countries with Indian culture, also called "Epic India", includ-

ing present day Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Burma. It was a most amazing sight, and if that wasn't enough, he told me that when he was younger this mole had been further down on the arm, but over the years it had travelled up to the shoulder! Here was a man who obviously carried ancient "Bharatvarsa" on his shoulders! If I had not witnessed it myself I would never have believed it - if I had merely heard it from someone I would have instantly dismissed it as a typical 'Indian exaggeration'. But I knew the map and the geography of the Indian Subcontinent only too well, and here I could just ascertain exact details everywhere. Sri Lanka, for instance, had an accurate form and size compared to the rest, and was placed precisely at the right distance south of Kanyakumari, the southern end of today's mainland India. Completely incredible and fantastic! He also showed me two *chakras* or "wheels", one on each sole of his feet. They were lines in the skin in the same way as in the palm of the hand, and he explained: "Therefore I am always on the move and travelling a lot."

Paramananda was of medium stature compared with other Bengalis. His physical body was harmoniously built, and unlike most Indians he had well developed thighs and legs. When he moved from one place to another he always walked fast, almost so that one had to run a little to keep pace with him, but without appearing as if he walked fast. He moved calmly and rhythmically, with his feet aslant outward and with a light rolling gait. Always with determination, forward without turning his



Paramananda, laughing in the garden, Ranchi 1983. Photo: BP.

head to the sides. He compared himself to a rhino: “I am like a rhino - I always go straight ahead and never look back” (in both senses!). Otherwise, his body was somewhat compact and full, but not more than was becoming to him. His neck seemed especially powerful, and his face was full and pleasant. His eyes presented a chapter in themselves - they veritably shone and seemed full of bliss. Physically, they had a whitish, thick ring situated in the middle of the iris, almost like one can observe sometimes in people diagnosed with a high level of cholesterol, but that was hardly the case with him as he had exceptionally good health in every way. Besides, this whitish ring was encircled with a thinner, deep blue ring, so that taking into account his deep brown Indian eye colour, his iris had actually three colours arranged in concentric circles closely within each other.

When, on one occasion one and a half years later, in South India, I pointed out his special eyes, he answered with a smile that that was why he could always see the three bodies of any man: the physical body; the mental or astral body; and the spiritual or causal body. You would always feel that he saw “right through” you when he looked at you, and if you were to tell a lie, even if only a tiny and very innocent white one lie, he would immediately discover it. These rings on his eyes were not sharply demarcated, so that his eyes did not look at all odd or funny, but still they were distinct enough on close inspection. He had thick, black hair and was of medium brown complexion - neither very dark nor very light. His

appearance was not typically “Indian” or even typically “Bengali”. His facial features, and looks in general, could as well have been seen in the West. And thus, together with hair and skin colour, he was really quite “universal” in his appearance. Otherwise, in India, in Indian typology, I guess he would be said to have a *sasha* or hare body.

From the very first moment I met him there was already something recognizable about him - as if I knew him from before. Nay, even more than that - as if he were myself in a way. But there was yet another aspect of the physique of Paramananda - he was not distinctly masculine. He told me himself many years later that in his youth he had forced hair to grow on his face and on his chest and body in general so as not to look so feminine. By nature he didn't have any body hair and therefore felt a bit shy and didn't want people to tease him. He also had a tendency for having small breasts, and his thighs had the typical shape of those of a woman. Later I heard both from himself and others who were very close to him, utterances that could suggest that perhaps he was androgynous, but this he never disclosed to me so I cannot say it for sure. Another characteristic was that his age was completely indefinable - he was both young and old at the same time. “Old” because he radiated such wisdom, security and experience - a kind of spiritual weight like no one else. And then he was both static and dynamic at the same time, i.e. even if he was physically active he still radiated the bliss of the highest consciousness.



Bjorn and Paramananda by the entrance to the home we were visiting at Ranchi, Bihar, India, July 1983. Bjorn had a fever when the picture was taken. Photo: Devendranath.



Paramananda and Bjorn, Ranchi, India 1983. Photo: Devendranath.

GLOSSARY (simplified)

Adi Shankaracharya - the most famous of all the Indian philosophers, he lived in the 7th Century A.D. and consolidated the teaching of Advaita Vedanta.

Bharatvarsa - ‘the land of Bharat’; ancient name for India.

brahmachari - male performer of brahmacharya. See brahmacharya.

brahmacharya - apprenticeship (period of training), or the first of four stages in a Hindu's life; self-discipline, especially in relation to sexuality.

chakra - ‘wheel’ or ‘circle’; according to the Tantra philosophy man's astral body has seven *chakras* or centres alongside the spinal cord from bottom at the coccyx to the top at the crown of the skull.

Devendranath - one of the closest male disciples to Paramananda, sannyasi name **Swami Visuddhananda**.

guru - ‘from darkness to light’; spiritual guide who dispels ignorance and confers wisdom.

Guruji - loving address to spiritual guide.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) - the founder of the Sikh religion, which arose from a devotional milieu in Punjab, North India; which rejected Hindu rituals and the caste system, and tried to unite Hindus and Muslims.

Kali Yuga - the last and shortest of the four *yugas* or ages, which comprise a cycle and alternate in Creation; the present age, which is the heaviest, darkest and most material (least spiritual) of all the *yugas*.

Mirabai (1498 - 1546) - a famous female Hindu mystic poet and devotee of Krishna.

Prabhu Jagadbandhu (1871-1921) - Bengali saint who was born in Dahapara, Murshidabad, near to where the Satavisha Social Welfare Society (Paramananda's Centre for destitute women) is situated now.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) - world renowned, celebrated Bengali poet, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913.

Ramakrishna (1836-1886) - the most well-known Indian saint and God-incarnation of modern times, who lived in Bengal and who by his worship united all the Indian spiritual traditions, and all the great religions of the World.

Ramananda Avadhuta - Paramananda's sannyas-guru, who resided in the upper Himalayas, always completely naked, and who lived to about 160 years of age.

sannyasin - a dedicated truth-seeker who wears saffron coloured robes (*gerrhua*), usually with the title *swami* and *ananda* as suffix in the name, who has renounced family happiness and personal career to help people wake up spiritually.

sannyasini - female sannyasin.

Sarada Ma (1853-1920) - also known as **Sarada Devi**; the wife and spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, lived in Bengal.

sasha - the “Hare Man”; the finest and most developed of the four types of men treated in Indian Tantric literature.

Saswati - name in female form meaning ‘full moon’.

satsanga - ‘gathering for truth’; a popular type of company with questions and answers, between guru and disciples or spiritual head and audience.

Shiva - ‘in which everything rests’; the static aspect of the Absolute; “the transformer” and last part of the Divine Trinity, in which Brahma (the creator) is the first and Vishnu (the sustainer) is the second.

shivaratri - ‘Shiva's night’; the new moon of February when Shiva is worshipped and celebrated, traditionally accompanied by fasting and meditation, the sannyasa ritual is most usually performed on this date.

Sobbo - the nickname of **Sabyasachi Manna**, who became the author's good friend during many years. In an earlier life he had lived as the famous French poet Arthur Rimbaud.

Sri Chaitanya (1486-1533) - also known as **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu**; great Bengali saint who started a huge devotional movement, and who was considered the combined incarnation of Krishna and Radha.

swami - ‘master’; respectful title for sannyasins.

Swami Baulananda - Paramananda's guru in his youth, whom he never met in physical form but who used to come to him in his subtle (astral) body and guide him, and who lived in a small ashram deep within the jungle near the source of the Godawari river.

Swami Swarupananda - the sannyasin who received the author at his first visit to the Banagram Ashram in 1983; a cousin of Swami Paramananda.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) - famous Indian yogi born in Bengal who was the main disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and who brought Vedanta to the West. He inspires Indian youths all over the country to this today.

Tripti Ma - one of Paramananda's closest female disciples, born 1st July 1950, sannyasini name **Samhita Prana**.

Trishan - one of the closest male disciples of Paramananda, later took the sannyasi name **Swami Parameshwarananda**, born 19th April 1957.

Continuation follows in the next number next week.