



KANYA PUJAN

EXALTING AN ANCIENT TRADITION



Rikhiapeeth, Jharkhand, India

KANYA PUJAN



Swami Satyananda Saraswati
100 Years of Spreading Peace, Plenty and Prosperity
1923 - 2023 and beyond

With kind regards, ॐ and prem
Swami Satyananda

Amrit Lahari - Waves Of Nectar Series

Kanya Pujan

Exalting An Ancient Tradition



SATYAM CENTENARY
100 YEARS OF SPREADING PEACE, PLENTY AND
PROSPERITY
1923 - 2023

WITH KIND REGARDS, ॐ AND PREM

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Kanya Puja is an offering to Paramguru Swami Sivananda and our beloved Puja Gurudev Swami Satyananda.

It is compiled and published by the sannyasin disciples, devotees and well-wishers of Paramahansa Satyananda, as a part of nishkam seva, selfless service.

Kanya Puja is produced to share the life, teachings and inspiration of Swami Satyananda, whose light blazed on earth from 1923 to 2009 and beyond.

Kanya Pujan



Rikhiapeeth is situated in a remote village, twelve kilometres from the renowned temple town of Deoghar, Jharkhand. It is the tapobhumi of the great spiritual luminary and exponent of Yoga, Paramahansa Satyananda, who is renowned world-wide for his specialised and unparalleled contribution to Yoga, Tantra and the spiritual sciences.

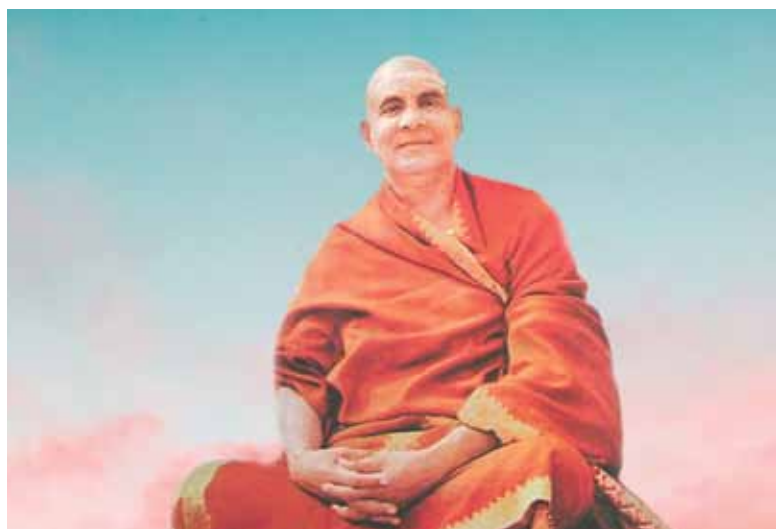
Rikhiapeeth is where Swami Satyananda lived the life of a Paramahansa Yogi, for twenty years performing long and arduous yogic sadhanas before taking Maha Samadhi here in 2009. In keeping with the yogic and spiritual legacy he left behind, the sprawling ashram has evolved into a vibrant epicentre where serious yoga lovers and sincere spiritual seekers from all walks of life, can experience the peace, harmony and true joy of living a Yogic lifestyle.



Ideal for those who wish to live yoga rather than just practise it, Rikhiapeeth caters to sincere aspirants looking for a wholistic approach to Yoga. Rikhiapeeth has also been the centre for the relief activities of Sivananda Math and Sivananda Ashram. Under the umbrella of these organisations the ongoing activities vary from Yoga courses, Yoga sadhana retreats, Yajnas, Discourses on Yoga, Tantra and Philosophy to extensive seva (service) of the rural communities. Swami Satyasangananda, the Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, guides its multifarious activities which are based on the teachings of Swami Satyananda and his Guru Swami Sivananda.

The uniqueness of Rikhiapeeth also lies in the fact that it is set in a pure, serene, rural environment which lends fullness to the yogic life emulated here. A great place to simply detox and inhale Yoga while being of service to others.





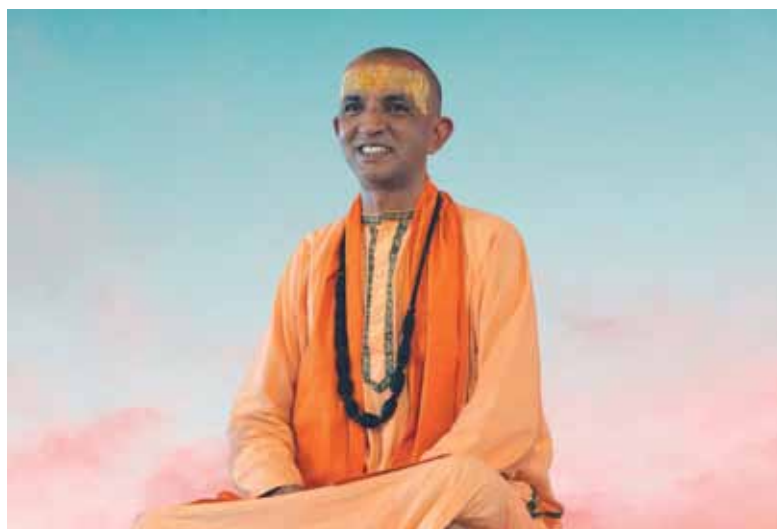
Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh is the inspirer of the Bihar Yoga tradition. A great spiritual luminary of the 20th century, Swami Sivananda developed yoga as a practical, integrated subject which everyone could apply in their lives. He wrote hundreds of books and articles on yoga and spirituality to maintain and introduce yogic values in the minds of the general public. His emphasis was on bringing the spiritual and yogic teachings to all without distinction. Embodying the spirit of service to humanity, he inspired and guided thousands of spiritual seekers to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda inspired research into the ancient traditions to investigate the benefits of yoga for the development of the human personality, thus instigating the integration of traditional yogic wisdom with modern scientific knowledge. His eightfold path: serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize, be good, do good, became a roadmap for spiritual aspirants worldwide. Today his light spreads far and wide for the spiritual upliftment of everyone, everywhere.



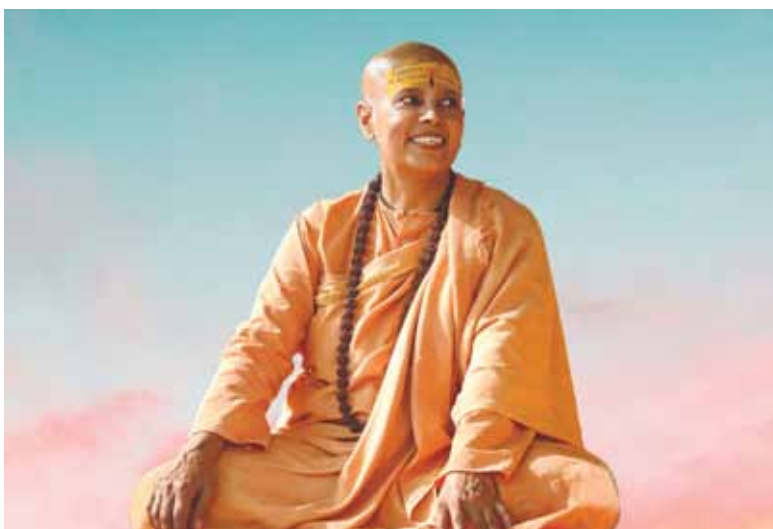
Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Swami Satyananda Saraswati, was entrusted by his Guru Swami Sivananda with the mission of spreading yoga from door to door and from shore to shore. Swami Satyananda Saraswati became the foremost inspirer of yoga in the 20th century. In 1963, he founded the Bihar School of Yoga to impart yogic training to all. He authored many major texts on yoga, tantra and spiritual life, which are now accepted as textbooks in schools and universities throughout the world. A modern day sage and visionary, he established yoga as part of mainstream society, making the ancient systems of tantra and yoga accessible to people of all faiths and nationalities for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual evolution. In 1988 he renounced his mission, and in 1989 he came to Rikhia to live the life of a paramahansa sannyasin. With the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity for all, he performed long and arduous yogic sadhanas, thus inspiring sannyasins and householders in their spiritual journey to develop a universal vision. In 2009, he wilfully entered into Maha Samadhi at midnight on the 5th December and merged into Siva consciousness.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

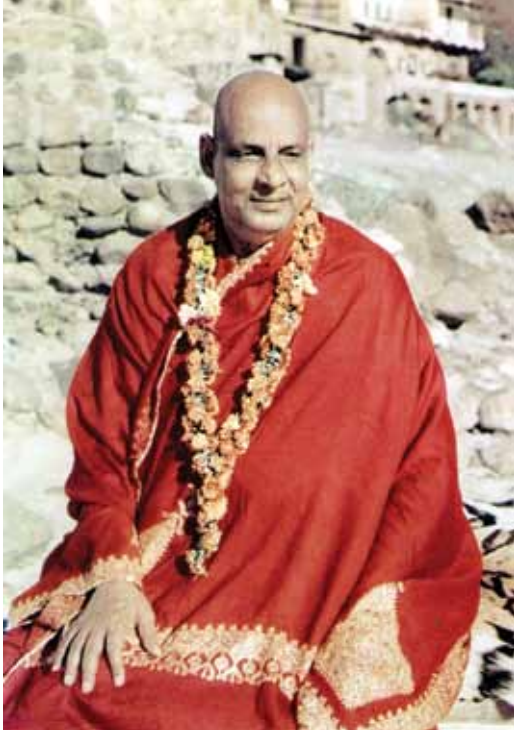
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati continues his Guru's mission of spreading yoga around the world. He joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 at the age of four, and as President guided the activities of BSY from 1983 to 2008. Initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin at the age of thirty, he was anointed preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda by the leading luminaries of the sannyasa tradition in 1993. Author of many classical books on yoga, tantra and the Upanishads, Swami Niranjanananda toured extensively nationally and internationally. Swami Niranjanananda is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. In 2008 he relinquished the presidency of the Bihar School of Yoga and all institutional responsibilities. Before his Maha Samadhi in 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda gave Swami Niranjanananda the mandate to explore the sannyasa lifestyle and to revive and expound the classical yoga vidya. In 2017, he was awarded the third highest civilian award of India, the Padma Bhushan, by the President of the Republic of India for meritorious work in yoga.



Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, also known as Swami Satsangi, is the Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth as appointed by Swami Satyananda. From the age of twenty-two, she experienced a series of inner awakenings which led her to her Guru, Swami Satyananda. She was initiated into the Dashnami tradition of sannyasa on 6 July 1982 at Ganga Darshan, Munger. Thereafter she travelled extensively with Swami Satyananda on his tours in India and abroad which gave her immense exposure and contributed to her development into a scholar with deep insight into the yogic and tantric traditions as well as modern sciences and philosophies. A truly inspirational teacher and gifted writer, Swami Satyasangananda is the author of major texts on yoga and tantra. As the Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, she received the mandate from her Guru Swami Satyananda to implement Sri Swami Sivananda's three precepts of serve, love and give and she works tirelessly for the material and spiritual upliftment of the local community. She travels nationally and internationally carrying the light of her Guru's teachings to all.

Offering



In humility we offer this compilation of teachings on the most ancient and sacred tradition of Kanya Pujan to Sadguru Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated PujyaGurudev Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.

Dedication



गुरु गोविन्द दोउ खड़े, काके लागूँ पाय ।
बलिहारी गुरु आपनो, जिन गोविन्द दियो मिलाय ॥

— कबीरदास

Guru and Govinda are both before me, whose feet shall I venerate first? Undoubtedly I shall choose my Guru, thanks to whom I was introduced to Govinda.

— Kabir Das



The first batch of Rikhia Kanyas with Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

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Guru is the Touchstone

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

There is a saying that Guru is the touchstone, who can turn raw metal into gold. This I have seen happen here first hand at Rikhia. When we first arrived here at Rikhia in 1989, the kanyas could easily have been described as raw metal. As raw as it comes, no refinement - pure raw material. And through the loving glance, or drishti, of Guru, that raw metal turned into something pure, brilliant, enchanting, graceful, beautiful, joyous and something that one can only admire. Sri Swamiji made them ready for the descent of the Divine.

How did it all happen? It wasn't as if Swamiji met the kanyas! He did not even know them, he never saw them or spoke to them. This is where the art and mastery of Guru manifests. Without any meeting, the transference of energy took place within their pure hearts, and they became fit and ready for the descent of the Divine.

Kanya Puja is a very ancient tradition in which it is believed that through worship and adoration the Divine can descend. And when it descends it looks for a medium. Of course, symbols like the Sri Yantra and Sivalingam, are symbols for this descent. But a living medium can only be a kanya because in them there is the purity which is required. They do not live in the world of duality as adults do. Duality has not yet touched them and so they are absolutely fit mediums for the descent of the Divine.

The kanyas of Rikhia, who gradually grew in numbers from one to thousands, are worshipped every year in the Sat Chandi Mahayajna with all the ancient rituals by the pandits from Kashi. They are worshipped with the chanting of the mantras, and they are offered a sumptuous meal, they are dressed and adorned with beautiful clothes and jewellery and then they are bid farewell with a lovely bag full of goodies. That is the way to worship the kanyas.

Swamiji used to say that fifty per cent of the population is female, and if half of the population is crippled without education, without means, without facilities, without any hope, without any dreams, then how can we progress. The girls have to be made strong and capable to stand on their own two feet and to meet the challenges that society faces today. They are also the ambassadors who go into different families all over the world and from there they spread the peace and the goodwill that they received from Gurudev in the form of kanya puja.

Today all the activities of Rikhiapeeth are conducted by the kanyas of Rikhia. I could hardly imagine this when we first arrived here and when I saw the condition of the young girls. I could hardly imagine at that time that one day they would be doing all this. In fact, this year when I went to the Navaratri aradhana and I saw how expertly the kanyas were conducting that event, I just took a step back and asked myself are these really the kanyas of Rikhia? It seemed they had come from London. They have become so elegant, so well dressed, so smart, so chic. I could hardly believe it. And then I realised the truth of that saying that Guru is a touchstone that can turn metal into something that is really valuable and that can be cherished.



Worship of God in Human Form

“Can you think of your little daughter as the replica of the Divine Mother? Can you see the Goddess in the kanya?”

- Swami Satyananda Saraswati -

Paramahansa Satyananda, recognized the divinity in the kanyas and worshipped them in their highest form, as a manifestation of the Divine Mother. He taught us that the kanyas represent that pure spirit or virgin soul within us all and that the kanya or ‘virgin’ is the true embodiment of the Cosmic Mother, a living manifestation of the Divine.

The kanyas are pure, innocent and simple and it is these innate qualities which make them perfect channels for Devi’s shakti, as they can contain the energy and power of Devi. They laugh, cry, learn and play. Yet according to the ancient wisdom of Shakta Tantra, revealed by the Rishis, they are the embodiment of divine energy. They are a medium to invoke Devi and are a pure channel for us to worship God in a human form.



I feel very happy and I want you to feel very happy also, because you are being presented with a new concept. You are being initiated into a new philosophy of life where a little girl can be replica of the Devi.

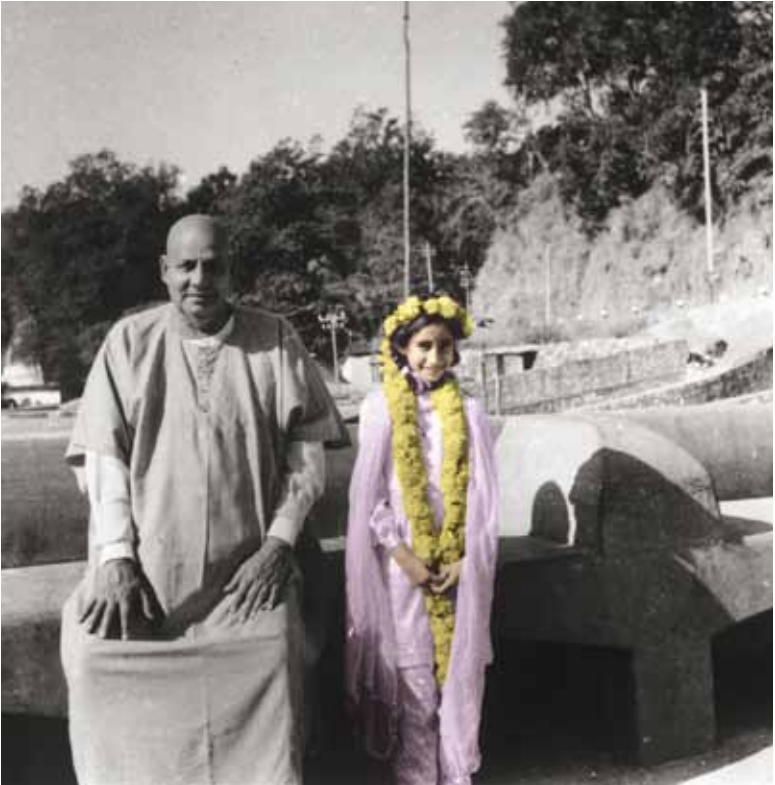
- Swami Satyananda Saraswati -

PART I

Shakti Worship

Shakti - The Power of God

Swami Sivananda Saraswati



As with the individual, so with the cosmos - nothing is possible without the Mother. Man's progress, material and spiritual, is bound up inextricably with his Mother, human and divine. The human part of man is moulded almost

entirely by his human mother; his character, mental make up, intellectual faculties, his being, is shaped by mother; that is why Shruti enjoins on man to treat his mother as God.

This is even more so in the spiritual field. Without the help of the Divine Mother, no spiritual progress is possible for man.

Devi assumes many aspects, according to the tasks to be performed by Her; sometimes sweet and tender, and at other times terrible and devouring. But She is always kind and gracious to Her devotees. Devi is the deluding power, which binds man to the relentlessly moving wheel of samsara; She deludes even the wisest men. Yet, She is the one who bestows moksha on the devotee, who pleases Her. She bestows all prosperity on a devotee, with whom She is pleased and withdraws Herself from the one who displeases Her.

If you pray to Her earnestly, She will soon appear before you and grant you all boons, including moksha. There is no doubt about this. May Parashakti or Devi, bless you all with wisdom, peace and immortal bliss.

The Mother that Protects

Shakti may be termed as that by which we live and have our being in this universe. In this world, all the wants of the child are provided by the mother. The child's growth, development and sustenance are looked after by the mother. Even so, all the necessities of life, life's activities in this world and the energy needed for it, depend upon Shakti or the Universal Mother.

The first syllable which a child utters is the name of the beloved mother. Is there any child who does not owe its all to the affection and love of its mother? It is the mother who protects you, consoles you, cheers you and nurses you. She is your friend, philosopher, preceptor and guide throughout your life. The human mother is a manifestation of the Universal Mother. All women are forms of the Divine Mother.

Tradition of Devi Worship

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

The worship of the Divine as Mother can be traced back to the most ancient times that predate even history. The Gayatri mantra and early Vedic hymns in worship of Shakti, personified as Usha, the dawn, indicate the existence of Shakti worship from the earliest times. Of all the images of Shakti, perhaps the dawn, the exact moment when the sun comes up over the horizon, showering the earth with prana, is the most striking.

This significant display of Shakti's splendor and power has been forever enshrined in the Vedas. Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga also find a significant place in the Vedic hymns. In early times, the Vedic culture was matriarchal, not patriarchal. It spoke of matri bhoomi, the motherland and



not pitra bhoomi, the fatherland. People conversed in their matri bhasha, mother language, not pitra bhasha, father language. Son's were addressed by their mother's name, and belonged to the mother, not the father. Krishna was called Yashodha nandan, son of Yashodha, and Devaki nandan, son of Devaki. Similarly Arjuna was addressed as Kaunteya, belonging to Kunti. Such examples are found throughout the Vedic literature.

The Vedic literature was a progressive tradition. The women had an important role in society and entered all fields of life, whether warfare, governance, acquisition of wealth, romance, art, dance, literature, music or even the spiritual quest. As recorded in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the great female rishi, Gargya, in the presence of a full court of intellectuals, openly asked Yajnavalkya, "What is that imperishable government that remains when everything else is vanquished?" To which he replied, "Yes, there is an imperishable government of Self that exists even when the sun and moon cease to exist".

In the Satya yuga, the devas invoked the power of Devi before they entered into battle with the daityas, or demons. In the Treta yuga, Sri Rama performed the Navaratra, nine days worship of Devi, to invoke the power of Shakti before he set foot on Lanka. Later, in Dwapara yuga, Arjuna invoked Devi before entering the Mahabharata war. In the Kali yuga, Adi Guru Shankaracharya invoked Devi in his time of distress to avert an illness, so that he could accomplish his mission.

In the Kali yuga, at Rikhia Swami Satyananda worshipped and invoked the power of Devi to fulfill his sankalpa for universal peace, plenty and prosperity. His example shone light onto an ancient tradition, as the love and compassion of the Cosmic Mother is the need of the hour for humanity in these turbulent times.





Shakti Worship

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Shakti worship is a very ancient form of worship and its basis is Tantra. Tantric worship is more ancient than Vedic worship. Tantric was the first, then Vedic, then Zoroastrianism and Judaism, then Christianity and then Islam. The first thing that man saw and began to worship, adore and revere was the Mother. The worship of Mother is shakti worship. Shakti means energy, capacity, ability and potentiality.

Those who follow the rituals and traditions of the Vedas have conceived of God, have perceived God, have worshipped God and have believed in God in many forms. In the form of animals, in the form of divinities, in the form of human beings, in the form of air, water, fire, and so many other forms and also the formless.

They say that if you have any difficulties in life, just forget everything and go to Mother. Go to your Mother. Go to your God, God as Mother. Mother will never consider your sins. A child may become a bad child, but Mother never becomes a bad Mother. Mother is always kind and Mother is always compassionate. She does not punish Her children. My Mother, my God is not a jealous God.

Devi Bhagavatam

Devi Bhagavatam contains a lot of debates as to who is the creator - Vishnu is the creator, Shiva is the creator, or any male god is the creator. Finally, they come to an agreement that the primal creator is Shakti. But how can Shakti create the whole universe out of herself? Is this immaculate conception possible? Ordinarily a woman cannot conceive a child without the help of a man, but it is said that Devi has both qualities within her. She can create anything within herself.

Matri Shakti

Concentration, meditation, worship, faith and devotion to Devi are said to give results very fast. This is because Devi is Matri Shakti. Matri means motherly, maternal. Matri Shakti implies unselfish love, and this we can find in our daily life also. It is not only in Devi, but also in our womenfolk, that more tenderness, love and compassion are exhibited. Naturally, such a person will grant whatever you ask.

In India the children, especially the boys, go to their mother and not to their father to ask for money. This is not because the mother is foolish or weak. She knows what he is going

to get up to, but still she will grant his request because she loves him.

So, in Devi Bhagavatam it is said that Shakti is the granter of all boons. You do not have to waste a lot of time in pleasing her. There are thousands of stories about devotees who worshipped her, how they worshipped her, and in what manner their impossible wishes were granted.

Aspects of Shakti

In Devi Bhagavatam it says that: "If Shiva be deprived of Kula Kundalini Shakti, He becomes a lifeless corpse. She is present everywhere, in everything, in this universe, from highest Brahma to the lowest blade of grass. Verily, everything becomes quite inert, if deprived of force. Thus the omnipotent Shakti, the wise call by the name of Brahma".

Devi Bhagavatam then goes on to tell you how to worship Devi and what her qualities are; in her benign form and in her angry form. Lakshmi is very beautiful; you can say 'Miss Universe'. Once you look at her you are finished. That is how she is described. It is said that even demons, ghosts and monsters who look upon her, are hypnotized.

Saraswati is very learned, she is a scholar. She likes to sing and to read. She dresses in white and you will always find a veena in one hand and a book in the other. The book denotes knowledge and learning. In India all the school children, from primary to university, repeat the mantra of Saraswati in order to pass their examinations. There is a special day when all the students in India make a statue or idol of Saraswati and carry it through the streets singing the name of Saraswati. If you were to ask them why they do this, they would say, "to get the best marks in the examination".

Then there is the aspect of Durga. She is the remover of all obstacles. If you are facing a murder charge, if you are being

arrested for tax evasion, or if your business is going downhill, they say that if you worship Durga, everything will be alright. Kali is another aspect - a terrible one! She is the remover of all obstacles. She is very black. They say you can please her very quickly, but only those who are spiritually minded should evoke her blessing. Besides these, there are many other aspects of Shakti or Devi.



Sadhana for Devi

Now, how should Devi be worshipped? How to awaken her? How to communicate with her? For this, there are also sadhanas written in the Devi Bhagavatam. These sadhanas are so many that I cannot tell you all of them. In the book it is written how you should do pranayama, what kind of mala you should wear, what mantra you should repeat, how you should start the practice, and for how long you should practise the mantra.

Devi Bhagavatam is a combination of spiritual practices, with interesting and impossible stories, with all types of metaphors and allegories. By the time you finish the book, you will never say God is the Father, you will say God is the

Mother. And, even if God were a Father, you would replace him and put Mother there, because you need someone who loves you and who listens to you. In history also you will see this. Matriarchal religions have always been very compassionate and harmonious while patriarchal religions have been aggressive and militant.

What is Puja?

The word puja means 'worship'. In the texts it is described as a systematic ritual. There is a method, a specified procedure in Puja. In ritual, everything is very precisely specified. Prayers, lamps, incense, flowers, everything down to the minutest detail has an order. This sequence of rituals is prescribed differently by various sects. For example, classical texts have their own way; Shaivites and Vaishnavites have another way. Currently only three sects exist. Previously there were five: Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta, Saurya and Ganapatya, out of which two have become obsolete.



Tantra means a method of puja, a technique of worship, by which you can awaken the divine forces. The method of worship by means of puja is unique to Tantric and Vedic culture. It does not exist in any other religion. You can find detailed literature on it in the Tantras and Vedas. Puja is done to focus the mind for the attainment of samadhi.

In the Shastras there is a complete and detailed description of which mantra is to be chanted, where a specific procedure is to be undertaken, which kriyas that ritual involves, and which method of pranayama is performed with specific mantras.

Rules of Devi Puja

There are certain rules for Devi puja but not for Siva. This is natural. Even in ordinary life there is maryada or a code of conduct with the mother, not with the father. You can worship Siva in any way. You can even do his puja with dirty hands, but sometimes with your mother you have to follow rules. No rules work with the father, but there is a code with the mother, even for her own son. This is the first point. The second point is that anything which bears fruit quickly requires greater restrictions and stricter rules. When you go to the bank, there are restrictions. You get a signature here, you put a signature there, you are given a token and then you receive your money. The process of worship is similar. All worship is coded under the title of Tantra. In Tantra the aspects of mantra, kriya and upachara have to be accurate, because these processes influence the mind, emotions and psyche.

Devi belongs to Shakta Tantra. In Shakta Tantra the worship of Devi is performed according to various designs, purely Vedic as well as purely tribal. There are many tribes in India and in other parts of the world which have their own forms of worship. They may not worship Devi strictly according to the rituals of the Tantras or the Vedas, but they still perform

ritual worship. Rikhia is the tribal area of the Santhalis and they have their own forms of worship.

Therefore, in Tantric worship, you should remember that you are dealing with a power which is mysterious, which is hidden, about which you know nothing. Shakti has three forms: the benign, the destructive and the creative. I am using the word Shakti, but you can also say Devi, Goddess, Madre and so on.

If you awaken her aspect of destruction, you know what is going to happen. If you play with your mother as you play with your wife, that is a negative approach. Similarly, there is a negative approach in Shakti worship and if you take that approach the Mother will give you back a kick, you will be cursed - Namō Narayan!

So, worship of Shakti has to be done only to awaken her benign powers. You must love and respect your Mother. That is why the rules are very similar in mantra, kriya and upachara. The worship of Devi gives quick rewards, therefore, there are rules regarding all aspects of diet, mantra, kriya and procedures of worship.





Women as Mother

Whatever I am doing here in Rikhia for the women and girls is in repayment of the debt I owe to a woman. A sannyasin owes his mother the biggest debt. Adi Shankaracharya had to discontinue his world-conquering tour to discharge his duty towards his mother by performing her last rites when she died. All other debts recorded in the register of Chitragupta can be written off except that owed to one's mother.

A woman comes into your life as mother, as a daughter, as a sister, as a wife or as a partner. The strongest manifestation of God in this world is the woman as mother. She is the best of his beauty, the best representation of his benediction and grace. Therefore, as a sannyasin I am freeing myself from the debt to my mother.

Years ago I realized that all the women in the world, including young girls, are my mothers. All women represent your mother, whether eastern or western, modern or traditional, young or old, companion or secretary, urban dweller or villager. I have not forgotten this even for a moment.

In India women have been exploited, ill-treated, dishonoured and weakened. If a sadhu does not support the woman deprived of everything, who else will? This is of primary importance to the spiritual aspect of woman as mother. People say that sadhus and sannyasins should have nothing to do with female sex, that they should not even talk about woman. I say, "Why not?" You must remember that the race, the tradition, the people who do nothing to uplift their downtrodden womenfolk can never rise. No society can progress without giving their dues to women. Even India will never enjoy prosperity until it makes its womenfolk stand on their own two feet, makes them great and learned.

What are you people worth? You are just like a heavy road loader, a dead weight lying by the roadside, but woman is a precious gem, she is a pearl, a diamond. You should have realized her value, yet such a worthy part of society is reduced to a non - entity. Women cannot go to school, cannot mix freely in society, cannot take a lift from a boy on their way to college. This is their helpless state, specially in villages.

Therefore, I have started helping women out, and I will continue to do so with God's grace. Each girl will be called Kanya and will be the symbol of my mother. I do not care about or pay any attention to whatever slander and abuse is spread against me. I will go ahead with my plan.

"Deoghar is the cremation ground of Devi, the place where her heart fell millions of years ago. It is also the birthplace of a new Devi. The message for the awakening of women will go out from here."

- Swami Satyananda Saraswati

PART II

The Divine Kanya



Honoring the Divine Principle as a Kanya

There are numerous scriptural references to the concept of Kanya and Kanya worship. In some scriptures the references are ambiguous but there can be no doubt that the concept of Kanya and the tradition of Kanya Pujan, also known as Kumari Puja, is an ancient one at the very heart of Shakta Tantra and Hindu philosophy and culture. While Kanya Pujan may not have explicit scriptural instructions, its essence can be understood from the numerous ancient texts that emphasize the worship of the divine feminine and the importance of respecting and honouring young girls and women.

Kanya Pujan holds great significance as it embodies the belief in the divinity of women and the recognition of their crucial role in society. It is believed that young girls embody the divine feminine energy, and their worship represents the adoration of the Goddess herself, and invokes prosperity, well-being, and good fortune.

While invoking and worshipping the Parashakti in a human form, purity of mind, body and spirit is required, and this is fulfilled by a girl before reaching puberty. Within a Kanya the great feminine potential is known to be at its peak. A female child is considered the most auspicious, most jagrat, awakened, and the most clear minded and clear souled individual.

During the Vedic period (1500 - 500 BC), there were certain rituals and practices that were performed during that time, which could be considered precursors to the concept of Kanya Pujan. The Rigveda, the oldest of the four Vedas, contains hymns and prayers dedicated to various deities. In some of these hymns, there are references to the importance of women in society and their role in religious ceremonies. For example, in the Rigveda, there are hymns dedicated to Goddesses such as Ushas (the personification of dawn), Saraswati (the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom), and Aditi (the mother of Gods). In some instances, young girls were symbolically associated with divine qualities and were considered representatives of Goddesses. They were regarded as pure and divine. The worship of young girls and the recognition of their significance in rituals and ceremonies can be traced back to that era.

Devi in the form of Kanya Kumari has been mentioned in certain versions of the Ramayana. In the Tamil version of the Ramayana called the "Kamba Ramayana," there is a reference to Kanya Kumari. This episode portrays Kanya Kumari as a divine form of the Goddess who is worshipped by Lord Rama himself. It highlights the significance of the Kanya Kumari temple in the region, which is considered a sacred site associated with the Devi in the form of a kanya.

Reference to Kanya in various contexts can also be found in the Mahanarayana Upanishad, a Vaishnava Upanishad in the Taittiriya Samhita of Krishna Yajur Veda, as well as in the ancient epic of Mahabharat. In the Taittiriya Aranyaka, which is within the Yajur Veda from the third or fourth century B.C., Rudra's (a form of Shiva) spouse is called Ambika and is also named Kanya Kumari. Ambika is a name associated with the divine feminine energy. This epithet suggests a youthful and pure form of the Goddess.

The many different manifestations of Devi, and ultimately there is one Devi who assumes various forms for fulfilling various purposes. Sometimes She assumes a malignant form and sometimes a benevolent one. Sometimes She assumes form of a Kanya and at others as a Mother Goddess.

Durga Devi as a Kanya

It has been generally assumed that Durga is the consort of Shiva and Shiva alone. However, it can be understood that Durga is a common title of the Cosmic Shakti, Devi, in general. Goddess Durga represents the divine power in this universe. Goddess Durga was formed by combining the power of all the Gods and Goddesses, and is associated with protection, strength, and destruction of evil forces. In various mythologies and traditions, the Goddess Durga has been depicted and revered in the form of a kanya.

During the festival of Navaratri, which is dedicated to the worship of the divine feminine, the form of Durga as a young girl or kanya is highly celebrated. This aspect of Durga is particularly honored on the eighth day of Navaratri, known as Durga Ashtami or Maha Ashtami. Young girls are worshipped as representations of the Goddess herself with Kanya Pujan. Their feet are washed, they are adorned with new clothes and accessories, and offered prayers and food as a form of reverence.

The idea of Durga as a kanya signifies her purity, innocence, and divine energy. It represents the primal and untamed power of the Goddess, free from any worldly attachments. This portrayal of Durga as a kanya highlights the importance of feminine strength and the inherent divinity present in women of all ages. It's important to note that the symbolism and rituals associated with Durga as a kanya can differ, but the essence of honoring the divine feminine energy remains consistent.

The Sri Durga Ashtottarshatnam Stotram, also known as the 108 Names of Goddess Durga, is a hymn that praises and invokes the various aspects and forms of Durga. It includes different names and epithets associated with the Goddess and invokes her divine qualities and blessings. Some of them include Kumari, Ek kanya, Kaishori, Yuvati, and Yati. These names reflect different stages of a woman's life and represent the different aspects of the divine feminine energy embodied by Goddess Durga. 'Kanya' is one of the names used to describe Her as evident in the extract below:

अनेकशस्रहस्ता च अनेकास्रस्य धारिणी ।
कुमारी चैकन्या च कैशोरी युवती यतिः ॥



These references highlight the multifaceted nature of the Goddess Durga and the diverse ways in which she is revered and worshipped. The use of the term 'Kanya' in relation to Durga emphasizes her youthful, pure, and powerful aspect, symbolizing her divine qualities and the divine feminine energy she embodies.

Durga Gayatri Mantra

The term 'Kanya' is also used to refer to Goddess Durga in the Durga Gayatri Mantra. This powerful is mantra dedicated to Devi Durga, and it is chanted to invoke her blessings and protection. The reference to Durga as a Kanya signifies her primordial and powerful form.

**Om Kaatyaayanaaya Vidmahe
Kanya Kumari Dheemahi
Tanno Durgih Prachodayaat**

*Om, let me meditate on the Goddess
who is the daughter of Katyayanaaya,
Oh, maiden Goddess, give me higher intellect,
And let Goddess Durga illuminate my mind*

Durga Saptashati

The origins of Kanya Pujan can be traced back to the Devi Mahatmya or Durga Saptashati. This text narrates the story of the Goddess Durga and her battle against the buffalo demon, Mahishasura. According to the legend, the Gods, unable to defeat Mahishasura, invoked the power of the divine feminine and created a powerful Goddess known as Durga. Each God contributed a part of their energy to create her. After a fierce battle, Durga triumphed over Mahishasura, symbolizing the victory of good over evil.

The Devi Mahatmya, also known as Sri Chandi, is considered one of the most important texts of Shaktism tradition. The Devi Mahatmya forms part of the Markandeya Purana, and was composed in Sanskrit around 400 - 500 CE. It contains 700 verses arranged into 13 chapters which bring together various mythic, and theological elements relating to female divinities and has been described as the 'crystallization of the Goddess Tradition'. The text describes the Goddess as the supreme power and creator of the universe. In this text the Goddess is said to have declared that she resides in all females living beings in this universe.

This ancient text has particular significance at Rikhiapeeth as Durga Saptashati is the ritual text for performing Chandi Homa. It is chanted each year by the learned pandits from Varanasi as part of the sadhana and sankalpa of Sat Chandi Mahayajna, the grand scale yajna initiated by Swami Satyananda Saraswati and conducted at Rikhiapeeth annually since 1995. Swami Satyananda Saraswati emphasized the importance of traditional spiritual practices and through Sat Chandi Mahayajna he exalted the ancient tradition of Kanya Pujan by honoring the divine principle in human form of kanya.

The Devi Mahatmyam and the tradition of Kanya Pujan are linked as the main purpose of a Kanya Pujan is to realize that the worship of the Goddess in a young girl represents the worship of divine consciousness spread throughout the creation. As the supreme Goddess is thought to have manifested this entire cosmos out of Her womb, She exists equally in animate as well as inanimate objects. While worship of an idol represents the worship and recognition of supreme through inanimate materials, worship of a human represents veneration and recognition of the same supreme in conscious beings.



Shaktism views the Devi as the source, essence and substance of virtually everything in creation, seen or unseen, including Siva himself. In the Devi Bhagavata Purana, a central Shakta scripture, there are descriptions of the divine manifestations of the Devi, and she is depicted in various forms, including that of a kanya. The text emphasizes the divine qualities and purity associated with the Devi in her form as a young girl. In the Devi Bhagavata Purana, the Devi declares:

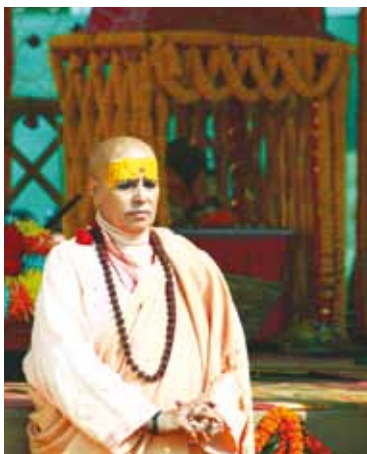
“I am Manifest Divinity, Unmanifest Divinity, and Transcendent Divinity. I am Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as well as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati. I am the Sun and I am the Stars, and I am also the Moon. I am all animals and birds, and I am the outcaste as well, and the thief. I am the low person of dreadful deeds, and the great person of excellent deeds. I am Female, I am Male.”



The references to Devi in the form of kanya serve as a reminder that the ultimate power and energy of the Goddess is inherent in all girls and women, irrespective of their age or social status. Worshipping the young girls as a medium of divine energy, is a potent means to honour and appease the Goddess herself. It is important to note that the practices and rituals of Kanya Pujan may vary across different regions and communities, but the core intention of honoring young girls as embodiments of the divine feminine remains consistent.

By exalting the ancient tradition of Kanya Pujan Swami Satyananda has shown us the way to recognize and honor the divine feminine energy present in all beings, particularly within kanyas. It is a way of acknowledging the potential for spiritual growth and enlightenment that resides within everyone, regardless of age or gender.

Swami Satyananda's approach to the worship of kanyas was rooted in his deep spiritual understanding and his belief in the divine presence in all aspects of life. By reviving this ancient tradition, he inspired a sense of reverence and respect for girls and women and encouraged the recognition of their inherent divinity.





Reviving the Concept and Tradition of Kanya

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati



In 1995 Sri Swamiji introduced us to Devi. Of course I had heard about Her, we had all heard about Her, we had read about Her. We knew that there was this magnificent force, we had heard stories, we had seen Her in different forms. I mean, if you live in India you grow up with that culture. You see it at your door step, the image of Kali, the image of Durga, the image of Lakshmi, the image of Gauri, Amba, so many forms, so many images. But it was in 1995 that Swamiji introduced Her, see it makes a difference, when you just know something. and when it becomes a living reality. Knowing is not enough. Swamiji introduced Her to us and an introduction by Guru is a very big thing.

He began to tell us about this energy, this force and how to attract that energy into your life, that is what he taught us, it is a science in itself, how to attract that which is timeless, how to attract that which is eternal, how to attract that which is formless into a time frame and how to make it manifest. He said, "Look all you have to do is make the environment a place where She will like to come. It is as simple as that; when you have a party, you draw a guest list right, and then according to that guest list you prepare the place, what do those people like, why will they come to your party there has to be something to attract. In the same way he made us familiar with the things that Devi likes.

I remember in 1995 we planted almost 1500 trees here of java, hibiscus because Devi loves java flowers, this red hibiscus, so we can offer it to Her. What does She like, what are the colours She likes, the sounds She likes, what are the forms She likes, what are the smells She likes. We prepared the place like that and we turned the whole ashram upside down, it was very exiting and - She came. We did everything, even changed the colour of the furniture, everything turned red and gold, I had never thought of red furniture but because Devi likes red, so everything turned red. We all joined in that seva because we are actually in Her service, we have not come here to observe Her, we have not come here to enjoy, we have come here to be in Her service.

We prepared the whole ashram for Her and She came, and Swamiji said, "If you invite Devi, Siva is bound to come because He is going to say, She is going to earth where all those hoodlums live I better go with Her in case She needs me". Of course She is not going to need Him, but that is what He thought - male ego. So Siva also came along. You see when you have a party you must have a leader at your party, so Siva also came and if Siva comes, Ramji will also definitely come because He is the great admirer of Siva and

wherever Siva is Ramji will definitely come. If Ramji will come and then of course Sita, Hanuman, Lakshman will also join. Then when all of them are there, definitely Krishna is also going to come, Radha is going to come. Swamiji explained it to us like this and said, "You are going to have a great guest list."

Every year Devi comes, every single year She comes and so much so that now we are good friends and She said, "Well now that we have become good friends I don't mind even staying here."

You see that is how Swamiji has led us to the point of progression, because everything that we do in life we must progress, there must be a change in our thinking, in our attitude, in our perception. If I attend yajnas, if I practice yoga day in and day out, if I meditate, there should be some transformation or I still go on in the same orbit, crying about the same things, feeling anxious about the same thing.



By introducing us to Devi and showing us how to worship Her most beautiful form of Kanya, Swamiji initiated us in to an ancient tradition and powerful means to connect with the divine energies and to invoke their benevolent grace into our lives.



Kanyas - Medium of Devi

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



A relatively common Tantric ritual of worship is Kanya Pujan, where the cosmic principle is invoked through mantras into the body of young girls and they become the representative of that cosmic power for the particular period of worship. It is often performed during Navaratri, the nine days of worship during autumn and spring. A grand-scale performance of this ritual is seen in Rikhiapeeth, the tapobhoomi of Swami Satyananda, on the last day of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna

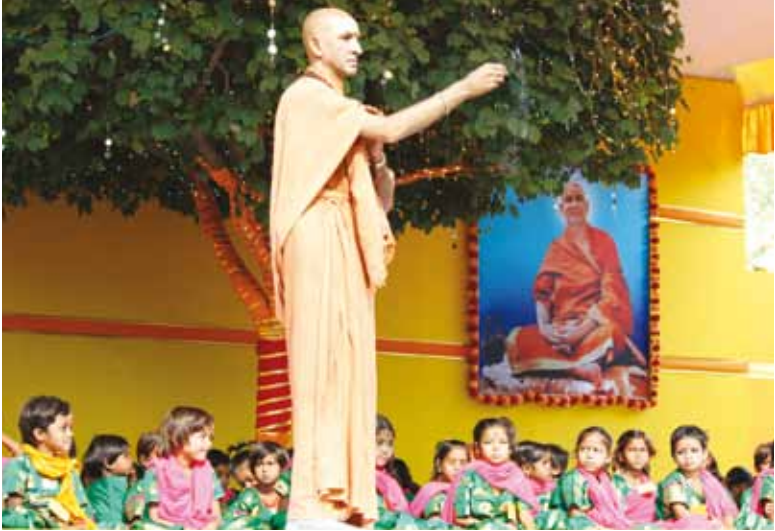
with the feeding and worship of kanyas, virgins. This is one form of aradhana.

Swami Satyananda said, "The worship of kanyas, Kanya Pujan, is a very sacred tantric ceremony in which the kanyas are worshipped as the living, breathing manifestation of Devi. They are not Devi, they are the medium of Devi, through whom She manifests and blesses us all. Through worship, the kanyas become the medium for the descend of the refined and luminous energy of Devi and through them we receive Her blessings."

Generally, Kumari puja is understood to be the worship of a young girl. There is a tradition behind this sadhana. The sadhaka has to visualize a mother form in the girl and then dedicate himself to that form. The sadhana of Kumari puja originates from the goddess Tripura Sundari, who has also been seen as a bala, young girl. The Tantric traditions use several forms of Kumari puja. Different instructions regarding sadhana have been given to the sadhakas with different bhavas. Kumari puja is strictly prohibited for a sadhaka with pashu bhava.

Only sadhakas with divya bhava have been authorized to perform Kumari puja. Their mind is free from all deception, fraud, hypocrisy, attachment and passion. They are full of divine and sattwic qualities. For these sadhakas, the worship of Shakti is essential before beginning kumari puja. At the time of Shakti puja, Shakti is invoked in the body of a kumari, then the chants and mantras related to this puja are contemplated on.

One can worship a girl of any age. The worship of a girl may begin from the age of one and continue until she attains the age of sixteen. Generally, the custom of the worship of a girl of eight years is most common. An eight-year-old girl is known as kubjika. The girls of different ages have been given



different names. These are: one year, Sandhya; two years, Saraswati; three years, Trimurti swaroopa; four years, Kalika; five years, Suryaja; six years, Rohini; seven years, Malini; eight years, Kubjika. A twelve-year-old girl is called Bhairavi. A sixteen-year-old is known as Shodashi. Shodashi is another name for Tripura Sundari.

Girls of eight, twelve and sixteen years are usually selected for Kumari puja. They are worshipped according to the prescribed methods. Food, clothes, jewels and ornaments are offered to them and the descent of the Mother form in them is perceived. The bhava generated by this sadhana is bala swabhava, the nature of a child. For a Tantric sadhaka, it is important to have the nature of a child in divine bhava. The learned, wise people have said that, for the attainment of virtue, a sadhaka should become pure and simple like a child.

Tripura Sundari is seen as a bala, a kumari, and one must have the bhava or feeling that, "I am dedicating myself to Tripura Sundari who is the Universal Mother." No sadhana can succeed without this bhava.

A child sucks the milk from the breast of its mother with a pure passionless feeling. There is no negative feeling in the child's mind at that time. Instead, the child feels close to its mother and this generates a sense of security within. The feelings of intimacy, love and affection arise. Such bhavas or feelings are essential in Kumari puja also. Only when the divya sadhaka achieves the state of total dedication in the last stage of sadhana is kumari puja prescribed. He is expected to offer himself completely to Devi and see Her form in all beings.

Traditionally, Kumari puja should not be performed in the house. It should be performed in a shrine, temple or place of pilgrimage where the environment is spiritual and conducive to the awakening of consciousness. At the time of Kumari puja, one should feel that the effulgence and splendor of both fire and the moon have entered into the girl's body and spirit. When these feelings arise, the kanya is seen in the form of an omniscient Mother or the Universal Goddess, not as an ordinary human girl. The sadhaks worship the great Shakti in that form.



Swami Niranjanananda during Kanya Puja, Sat Chandi Mahayajna, 2021

Kanya - Medium of Cosmic Power

The purpose of all worship is to connect with the higher force in manifest form. During the Sat Chandi Mahayajna, manifestation of the cosmic power takes place in one inanimate object and one animate element. The inanimate object is the yajna vedi and the items, symbols and yantras placed inside. By the chanting of powerful mantras the Shakti is invoked. The objects become like magnets to attract the cosmic Shakti.

When the cosmic power descends it manifests as a tattwa or element. In this yajna the animate form of the tattwa are the kanyas. They become the medium for the descent and manifestation of the cosmic power that is generated in the yajna vedi. The kanyas become the medium for the flow of shakti. You can see them glowing and the innocence flowing through them. You can feel that they are the mediums of a form of energy. Each one is like a small lightening rod, attracting the current to itself.

The Sat Chandi Mahayajna is from the Devi Tantra. The activities and events of this Tantric yajna unfold at many levels. Firstly there is the worship, the ritual, which is being performed by the experts, the pandits, who have come from Varanasi. Secondly, there are the kanyas who have been chosen by Sri Swamiji to guide the proceedings of the yajna. Their name is Bal Sundari.

Bal Sundari is one of the manifestations of the Cosmic Mother. Sundar means 'beautiful', bal means 'young'. Only virgins are called Bal Sundari. In Tantra, virginity means purity of heart, the heart is without any taint. One is innocent, without the intellect superimposing itself.

When you function from the heart and when you are innocent and pure, that is the state of the Devi, the Cosmic Mother. That is also the state of the spirit, the atma. The divine manifests only in this virgin nature.

We have the example of Mother Mary, the Virgin Mary. She was pure, and Christ came into her womb through immaculate conception. That is purity of heart, purity of spirit, purity of nature. The Bal Sundaris represent that aspect of the Cosmic Mother. They are the manifestation of that cosmic purity. They represent the manifest form of the power which has been invoked here.

The kanyas represent the highest power of this creation during the yajna, and on the final day you will witness in them the grandeur and the glory of the Cosmic Mother.

On the last day of the yajna, a very important event takes place - Kanya Pujan. The transcendental Shakti, the transcendental cosmic energy, has been invoked by the mantras and the manifest form of that cosmic power, of that Cosmic Mother, can be seen in the kanyas.

Swami Satyananda loved this event very much. Even if he was not present for the other aspects of Sat Chandi Mahayajna, he was always present at this worship, because he saw his aradhya, or personal deity, in the kanyas. He saw the cosmic energy in the kanyas. We dressed them, fed them and washed their feet, and superimposed the concept of Devi on them. After that they were given gifts and sent off with the prayer, "Shower your grace upon us."



Tradition of Kanya Puja

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



What do you get from coconut? Coconut water, oil and also liquor are made from coconut. They are all made in different stages. Similarly Kanyas till the age of twelve are like coconut water and oil. Beyond that age they become liquor. Women are liquor but Kanyas are not. What are Kanyas? They are like coconut water and oil. In that stage of coconut you can extract oil from them. From mustard also oil can be extracted but it also releases a very poisonous gas, mustard gas. I will give you another example. Uranium is a mineral. In its first stage of enrichment it produces energy and in its second stage of enrichment weapons of mass destruction are produced. Kanyas are like the uranium in the first stage of enrichment which produces energy, light and electricity. Women are

like the uranium in the second stage of enrichment. I am not commenting on women but complimenting the Kanyas.

I have given you three examples, coconut, mustard and uranium. Do not see the gross matter but see the consciousness hidden within the matter. Why do you see them as girls? Consciousness is the form of God. Some call it consciousness, some call it atma or paramatma. Everyone calls it differently.

Our consciousness is limited. It is not able to get out of the cage of intellect, buddhi and ego, ahamkara. Intellect has no doors. We are all intellectuals. We think that we know everything and can argue on any subject, this is the quality of intellect. Experience is something different. One has to have experience. Small children, who are the subject of our conversation, do not have this intellectual component active. This hormone is not produced till the age of twelve. After the age of twelve their intellect gets activated. Once the intellect gets activated one starts experiencing duality this is right, this is wrong, truth and falsehood etc. and they also learn to deceive but not before that. This is the reason why it is said that saints are like children like Ramkrishna Paramahansa and Ramana Maharishi. There have been many such saints who were like children without any deceit. What does deceit mean? Duality. When one is devoid of deceit like a child then he is a saint. One does not become a saint just by wearing the garb.

As per the Vedas there are five sampradayas or traditions. One, Vaishnava tradition which includes the sub-divisions of Ramanuja, Ramanandi, Bhagavata etc; two, Shaiva tradition which includes the sub-divisions of Pashupata, Bhairava, Ashta Bhairavas etc; three, Shakta tradition. The remaining two traditions are almost non-existent, they are Saurya tradition related to Sun and Ganapatya tradition related to Ganesha.

In the puranas of Shakta tradition especially in Devi Bhagavat it has been mentioned that Kanyas are worshipped and that

through their worship the divine energy can be invoked. With the invocation of the divine energy one receives divine grace. Just as you extract oil from coconut and use it, just as you convert the energy from uranium into electricity, similarly through the worship of Kanyas you can manifest the Devi tattwa.

There are many systems of Kanya worship like the worship of nine Kanyas during Navaratri, which many people in India perform. Worship the Kanyas, feed them, offer them ornaments and betel leaves. This has been mentioned in the Devi Bhagavat and the Tantra shastras. Swami Satyananda is reiterating what has already been mentioned in the scriptures.

In the Vedic religion the word Kanya signifies purity and divinity. Just as coconut oil is the manifest form of coconut similarly Kanya is the manifest form of God. The worship and service of Kanyas in return bring many dividends. This is my belief. You see Swami Satsangi is receiving so many dividends. She has already spread the ashram over three kilometers and each and every family and individual of this panchayat is a part of it. All their children are here, does it not show their participation. Contribution is far off, they are so poor that they can hardly manage their own meals. They work as rickshaw pullers or laborers and earn fifty rupees daily, how can they contribute to the ashram. But they have a participation in the ashram. Mother asks the children to sweep the floor but the children say, "No, I am going to ashram". But after the age of twelve they are graduated so that they can go to the next higher level of enrichment.

I don't have the idea that I am doing some act of charity. I want that all of you must make yourselves clear that we are worshipping God in the form of Kanya. Do you not worship God in the form of stone? Is it not evident in Deoghar where forty lakhs of people undertake crazy vows of worship? God does manifest in stone also. All I am saying is to see God in a Kanya. And when you have accepted the stone in the form

of Sivalingam as God, you always venerate it similarly if you consider Kanya as Devi then you have to behave that way. Worship Kanya as the living Goddess and this is the simplest form of worship.

The followers of Shakta tradition believe that in order to receive divine grace worship of Kanyas should be done. The passions of kama, desire; krodha, anger; lobha, greed; moha, attachment etc. are very difficult to conquer. Do not even dare to try; you will receive a hard blow. If you confront and try to put down a robber, what will he do? He will give back a hard blow. Kama, krodha, lobha etc. are robbers inside you.

काम क्रोधश्च लोभश्च देहे तिष्ठन्ति तस्कराः । ज्ञानरत्नोपहाराय तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ।।
आदि शंकराचार्य

Shankaracharya says that desire, anger and greed are smugglers residing within you. And you want to suppress them. It is not possible without the grace of God. That is why I say that in order to receive the grace of God, the simplest way is to serve the Kanyas. These are village Kanyas, service to them will bring rewards to all. I say that desire, anger and greed are smugglers residing in your house and when you ask them to get out they will throw you out instead. Can you throw a ruffian out of your house? No way, even if he were your own son you cannot throw him out, he will take resort to force as well as law.

The worship of Kanyas has a great role to free one from the shackles of desire, anger and greed. Do not forget this. In your homes whatever worship you do, include the worship of Kanyas from time to time. In the worship of Kanyas do not see the caste. Do not say that I will worship only brahman Kanya. It can be shudra kanya, it can be the daughter of a washerman or a cobbler. The scriptures mention of brahmana kanya because at that time brahmanas lived as brahmanas.



Concept of Kanya

The concept of kanya is unparalleled in man's philosophy. The discovery that a young virgin was capable of symbolizing and representing the Cosmic Mother was made by a rishi.

Could you ever think of your little daughter as a the replica of the mother? No. The idea did not come to the people, only to those rishis, the great seers, who saw very clearly. Just as you see greed in money, passion in woman, fear in a ghost or tiger, why can't you similarly see the goddess in the kanyas? Why do you need to be convinced? Why should I convince you? It is your daily experience that where there is money, there is greed. The replica of greed is money. The replica of passion is a woman. The replica of fear is a tiger. The replicas of Devi are here. You don't have to prove it. It is as simple as that!

It is written in the Upanishads that a person who is innocent, who lives like a child, behaves like a fool among fools, like a scholar among scholars, like a young man among girls, is called avadhoota. These girls are very simple and innocent. Up to the age of puberty they don't know the jugglery of sensual life. There are many who even after puberty approaches, the whole system within the body, within the structure and psychology of the mind changes, and manifests in the emotional actions and reactions. Kanya worship is a most important part of Shakti Tantra.

Kanya means virgin. Man's soul is virgin. That virginity cannot be contaminated. Its pristine beauty and glory cannot be sullied. Even though it resides in you, you can't see that virgin soul. You don't know what it is or where can it be found. That purity of soul is the kanya, which is the next form of the Mother.





The kanyas of Rikhia are innocent and pure, and they represent your virgin soul, they represent your pure spirit, they represent your inner being, which you cannot and will not see.

In Devi Tantra, the tantric system of the Cosmic Mother, a girl up to the age of puberty is called a kanya and is considered to be the true replica of the Cosmic Mother. The scriptures say that, upon crossing twelve years of age, you cease to be a kanya and you become a gauri. Kanyas embody the aspects of purity, simplicity and innocence. Once puberty approaches, hormones begin to transform the body, mind and emotions, eventually losing the link with the spirit.

You're far away from that virgin soul, or reality. When you don't know an object, you have to form a concept. Herein, worship of kanyas is the concept. The purity of man's soul is embodied in the kanya. The innocence and purity latent in them represent your virgin soul, your pure spirit, your inner being which you cannot see.



So, remember, this is not social service that I am doing for the villagers, it is my worship of God. These kanyas are chosen as the medium of the formless Divine Mother. They have been chosen as the medium, just as you choose a copper wire as the medium for conducting electricity because it is a good conductor. In the same spirit, in the same way, we have chosen these kanyas as the medium, as they are good conductors of divine energy.

The kanya signifies the aspect of energy when it is raw and also pure, untouched and unaware of its own potential. Through worship, the kanyas become the medium for the descent of the refined and luminous energy of Devi, and through them, we receive her blessings and grace. Just as when you go to the temple to anoint the deities with sandalwood, in the same spirit, feed the kanyas, dress them and beautify them. This is worship. This is Kanya Puja.

Qualities of a Kanya

According to Vedic astrology, there are thirty-six qualities of a girl. The most important quality is the structure of their yoni, the reproductive system. The yoni is the place where generation and birth takes place. In English, the word yoni is called vagina, but in Sanskrit it is the place where generation takes place. There must be a yoni, a place of generation, for the whole universe also. The endless galaxies, millions and trillions of stars, the infinite skies, everything has a place of birth, a place where they emerge from the unmanifest. That is called yoni.

Not every unmarried girl is a kanya. Her yoni or reproductive system, may not match this quality. There are particular qualities in females that belong to a virgin. Even if she becomes a mother, the quality of the reproductive system is still called kanya.

There are females who are virgin by nature, and it is they who come for sannyasa. Not everybody thinks of sannyasa. This is a subject of Vedic astrology. In India, the matching of a boy and girl takes place before marriage amongst Hindus. While matching the qualities, they are very particular that the girl has a proper yoni, so that she can be used for reproduction.

If the yoni of the girl is that of a sannyasin, she will be useless for family life. Such a girl, whose yoni marks her to be a sannyasin will be indifferent to household duties. She will follow that life, but not with gusto, passion and heat. If somehow she gets out of it, she will be happier.

In England a priest had raised certain questions about the authenticity of the Virgin Mary, and the Christian church was unable to give proper reply. I was reading the report where he asked how Mary could be a virgin and I said, "These priests relate everything to sexual life. How can virginity be related only to that?" Virginity is a natural quality that belongs to

one's genetic structure. I am a celibate because that is my nature. Even if I have had an interaction with a woman, it does not change my nature, my DNA structure, which is my



genetic personality. This also applies to many others. This is the meaning of virginity, and one should study that part of Vedic astrology.

Therefore, every nine-year old girl in the street cannot be taken for worship as a Kanya Kumari. A young girl may be a virgin in the sense that she has not menstruated or had sexual interaction, but that alone is not virginity.

Virginity is a basic and special quality in relation to her reproductive system. This basic quality of a yoni will have to be explained. The basic quality of a yoni is its inherent quality and that remains even if the girl is married and gives birth to a child. Then, even after becoming a mother, she feels like adopting sannyasa and living in solitude. This thought does



come to the minds of some women. So, this is actually called Kanya Kumari, the real virgin.

A virgin can always bless a sannyasin and give the touch of divinity, whether she be Virgin Mary or any other virgin. In reality, she is a virgin who has the basic quality of a virgin, who has the divine grace of a virgin, and she can always give blessings.





Sat Chandi Mahayajna, Kanya Pujan 2002



Sat Chandi Mahayajna, Kanya Pujan 2007



Sat Chandi Mahayajna, Kanya Pujan 2021

The Medium of Devi

On the final day of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna, the kanyas of Rikhia are worshipped in the Kanya puja as the true representatives of the Divine Mother. We worship them just as we worship the Goddess, by feeding them, giving sumptuous gifts and receiving their blessings.

During the yajna the kanyas represent the highest power or creation and on the final day we witness the grandeur and glory of the Cosmic Mother in them. This is a very sacred Tantric ceremony in which the kanyas are worshipped as the living, breathing manifestation of Devi. They are not Devi, they are the medium of Devi, through whom She will manifest and bless us all.

The kanyas, who epitomize the beauty of Rikhia and the beauty of this yajna, are chosen as medium of the formless, Divine Mother. They have been chosen as the medium, as they are good conductors of the divine energy which we are invoking in this Sat Chandi Mahayajna.

The tradition of yajna began from that unforgettable day when man's consciousness took an evolutionary leap and he realized how to use fire and the grain, the two eternal principles. Therefore, we offer those grains to the Devi through her most beautiful form, the kanya.

We have selected the girls for this puja from Rikhia itself. We try to help and promote the women, and I am already famous or infamous for that. However, I don't mind what people say, because if saints and sages do not fulfill their duty towards woman, then who will?

Most people are afraid to be outspoken, but what have I to fear? Don't we have a duty and an obligation towards the woman whose womb we have occupied for nine months? We have been closest to a woman because we have lived in her

womb for nine months. We emerged into this world out of her body, so why should we feel different from her?

Significance of 108 Kanyas

One hundred and eight girls are worshipped in the Kumari puja on the final day of Sat Chandi Mahayajna. One hundred and eight represents the separation of Purusha and Prakriti.

People often ask why the number 108 is auspicious. Actually, it is not 108; it is one-cipher-eight. One represents Purusha, eight represents Prakriti, the eight fold nature, and cipher represents blank, void or shoonya. When Purusha and Prakriti come together, there is creation. Eight plus one is nine. Now, if you take all the multiples of nine: $9 \times 2 = 18$, $9 \times 3 = 27$, $9 \times 4 = 36$, $9 \times 5 = 45$, each total is nine! All the multiplications of nine are nine and it never changes. Whether duality or destruction is there, the universe, the creation, continues. But remember there is no beginning and no end to this creation. There will not be a day when there is no creation. It was, it is and it will be. So it is exactly 108.

One represents Purusha and eight Prakriti, but to separate Prakriti from Purusha, you bring in the situation of vacuum, shoonya, non-existence, no mind. That is yoga. The number 108 represents the process of yoga, separation of Purusha from Prakriti by creating a state of vacuum, which is called



samadhi. The cipher means zero, and zero means there is nothing. When the mind becomes quiet, there are no ripples. The state of shoonya arises when the mind is totally devoid of every experience: conscious, subconscious and unconscious. So, shoonya separates Purusha from Prakriti, samadhi separates Purusha from Prakriti, and that is the significance of one-zero-eight.

Duty of Society

Since 1995, this puja has been going on here. Many of the kanyas have now gone out of Rikhia. In the course of time, these children will also go out. They are intrinsically related to the ashram. The only thing is that they go back to their cottages, their kutiya, their dwelling, at night. The whole day they are in the school, which is next to the ashram. It is a Middle School, a government school. After that they are in the ashram. They only go home in the evening, at six or seven o'clock, and then in the morning they get out. They are always with the ashram and in the ashram. So we will say they are ashram kanyas. And ashram feels it, understands it and responds to it.

We have already constructed Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen to feed all the kanyas and batuks. Next year the children will not require to ask their mother for food; the ashram will provide it. The ashram will provide because it is the duty of society to look after its children. It is the duty of society; it is not the duty of government, it is not the duty of NGOs. It is the duty of the entire society. And I am society.

It is the duty of society to look after children up to the age of twelve, dwadash varshe bhavet Gauri. After twelve, the parents should look after them; after eighteen the husband should look after them; after fifty or sixty, their children should look after them. But up to twelve it is the duty of society to look after their education, their health, to look after everything.



Before the Kanya Pujan the venue is purified and sanctified.



The Kanyas arrive wearing the new clothes and jewellery they received



As the Kanyas enter, they are worshipped with traditional washing of feet.



The Kanyas are worshipped as an embodiment of Devi with sacred mantras.



The Kanyas are offered an elaborate feast of delicious dishes.



The Kanyas are offered generous gifts for their entire families.

The Living Goddess

Worship of the living Goddess in the form of a Kanyas can be traced throughout history and found within the ancient text, however one place where the tradition has been upheld and it still continues to be practiced as part of the culture today is in Nepal.

In Nepal, the tradition of worshipping the female Goddess is very widespread. It is as old as Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Buddhism. The female principle is widely and explicitly recognized. Vedic seers have also attached high place to the female power in creation and so a woman is held in high respect in Vedic religion. In the Sankhya philosophy which evolved Shaktism (female as the source of dynamic energy) the symbiosis of the female principle (Prakriti) in union with the male counterpart (Purusha) is recognized as the fundamental law of creation. In Nepal and in some parts of India, Shaktism is popular and its main feature is the worship of Shakti or Devi who is regarded as the personification of the Mother Goddess.

Although, female Goddesses are worshipped in various forms, the most prominent is the worship of the living Virgin Goddess, Kumari. The cult of Kumari is unique in Nepal where a living vestal virgin is ritually installed as Kumari and is worshipped. The prestigious position of the Kumari, her antecedents, and the strict rules of ritual and purity that she must follow, as well as the vitality of the tradition of the living Goddess, still exists up to this date.

While there are several living Kumari's selected throughout Nepal, the best known is the Royal Kumari of Kathmandu, and she lives in the Kumari Ghar, a palace in the centre of the city. The selection process for her is particularly rigorous and she is revered as a manifestation of the Goddess Durga. Great faith is placed in the power of the living Kumari and she is worshipped as a symbol of power and even a glimpse of her is believed to bring good fortune. Any type of diseases can be cured simply by her darshan (glimpse). Many people have been blessed by the Kumari for long life and prosperity. From the Kumari's blessings, it is widely understood that the nation is peaceful and prosperous.



Swami Satyananda accompanied by Swami Satsangi, in Nepal, the place of the living Goddess in the form of a Kanya

Kumari Darshan

During his parivrajaka whilst in Nepal, Swami Satyananda, accompanied by Swami Satsangi, was blessed by the darshan of the Kumari at her palace. For darshan, people gathered below the Kumari's window in the Kumari Chowk, and the Kumari gave darshan through her latticed windows on the third floor. They were blessed by darshan and it is said that any prayers made in front of the Kumari will be fulfilled.

Swami Satyananda felt great connection with the various forms of worship of the female Goddess which are prevalent and practiced in Nepal and also with the powerful tradition of the living Kumari.

This is evident as during the large scale Kanya Pujan conducted at Rikhiapeeth in 2007, the Kanyas of Rikhia were dressed in traditional clothes and ornate jewellery as is worn by the living Kumari of Nepal. The elaborate traditional dresses and jewellery were all hand made in Nepal and offered to the Kanyas of Rikhia for large scale puja conducted on the last day of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna 2007.







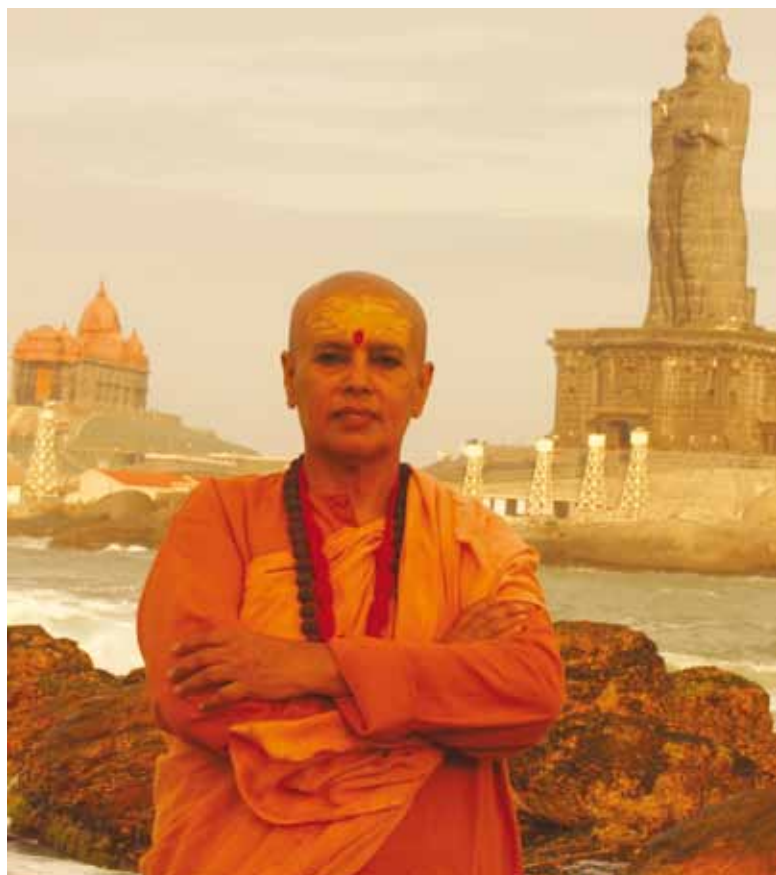
Before coming to Rikhia, Swami Satyananda performed kanya puja at Kamakhya in Assam, which is the foremost Shaktipeeth in India. Swami Satyasangananda and Swami Niranjanananda also have worshipped Kanyas at Kamakhya, Assam

Kanya Kumari Temple

In South India, there is a famous temple of Kanya Kumari dedicated to the virgin goddess. She is also addressed as Devi Kumari. The temple is called Bhagavati Kumari Amman Temple and it is a famous place of pilgrimage. The Kanya Kumari temple is an ancient one, and is said to have been built around 3000 years ago. In the Bhagavata Purana it says that when Balrama went on a pilgrimage he visited Kanya who is a form of Durga Devi, who had her shrine south of Malaya.

In the early Christian era, Greek sailors and others reported that a cult of the virgin damsel or Kanya Kumari was flourishing, in a place at the southern tip of India which is also known as Kanya Kumari. It is also considered one of the sacred Shakti Peethas. It is believed that the right shoulder and (back) spine area of Sati's corpse fell here creating the presence of Kundalini Shakti in the region.

The shrine of Kanya Kumari is at the southernmost tip of India, at the edge of the water. Three seas meet there: the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. You can see the waters of all the three seas merging. The maximum depth of the Arabian Sea is about forty to fifty meters, so a lot of mud flows in the water and its colour is muddy. The water of the Bay of Bengal is green, as it comes through forests, collecting algae, leaves and grass on its journey. The India Ocean is clear blue. You see these three different colours in the water, and by this captivating sight the shrine of Kanya Kumari is situated.



Swami Satyasangananda at Kanya Kumari

Kanya Kumari is popular because it is the only place on earth where you can see the sunrise and sunset from the ocean. It is the only place in India where you can enjoy the unique spectacle of sunset and moonrise on full moon days.

Legend has it that one day Siva said to his consort, Parvati, "We have had a heavenly marriage, but we have not had an earthly marriage, with all the pomp and splendor" Shakti agreed. Siva said, "You go first; I am coming." Thus Shakti came down, in the form of a beautiful enchanting sixteen-

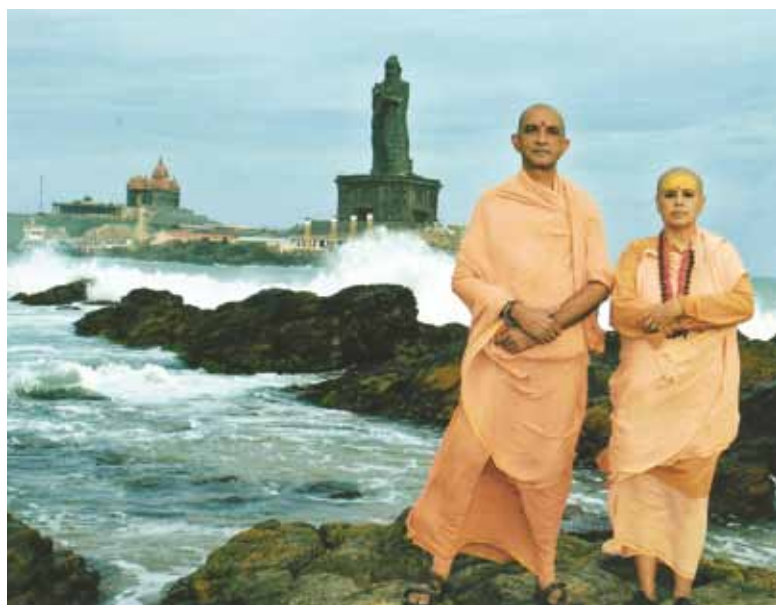
year-old Devi. At the last minute, however, Siva was called away and since that time, Shakti is waiting for Siva, in the form of Kanya Kumari.

Kanya Kumari is one of the names of Durga, and there is a statue of her in the temple. The black stone image of Kanya Kumari in the sanctum, this image of Bhagavati, is that of a sixteen-year-old virgin girl and is reputed to be absolutely enticing, enchanting and beautiful.

Of particular significance is the glittering nose ring that is visible from a distance. The Devi has two diamonds on her: one on the nose and the other on the lower lip. It is said that before the walls were built around the shrine, she used to look out into the open ocean, and the sun's rays striking the diamond would act like a lighthouse. The glow of the diamond could be seen by sailors from far away and they could be guided into the harbor. Thus, she is also the patron deity of sailors and seafarers.

Kanya Kumari is also the impression, the image of Katyayani. Katyayani is the sixth form of Devi. The name indicates that in this form, she has the power to remove the rigidity, arrogance and the hard shell of the spirit. The rigidity of life is eliminated by Katyayani. Arrogance, the negative and destructive ego, is destroyed by Katyayani and purity enters with the invocation of Katyayani. That is the meaning of the word Katyayani 'one who is able to remove rigidity and destructive, negative ego.'

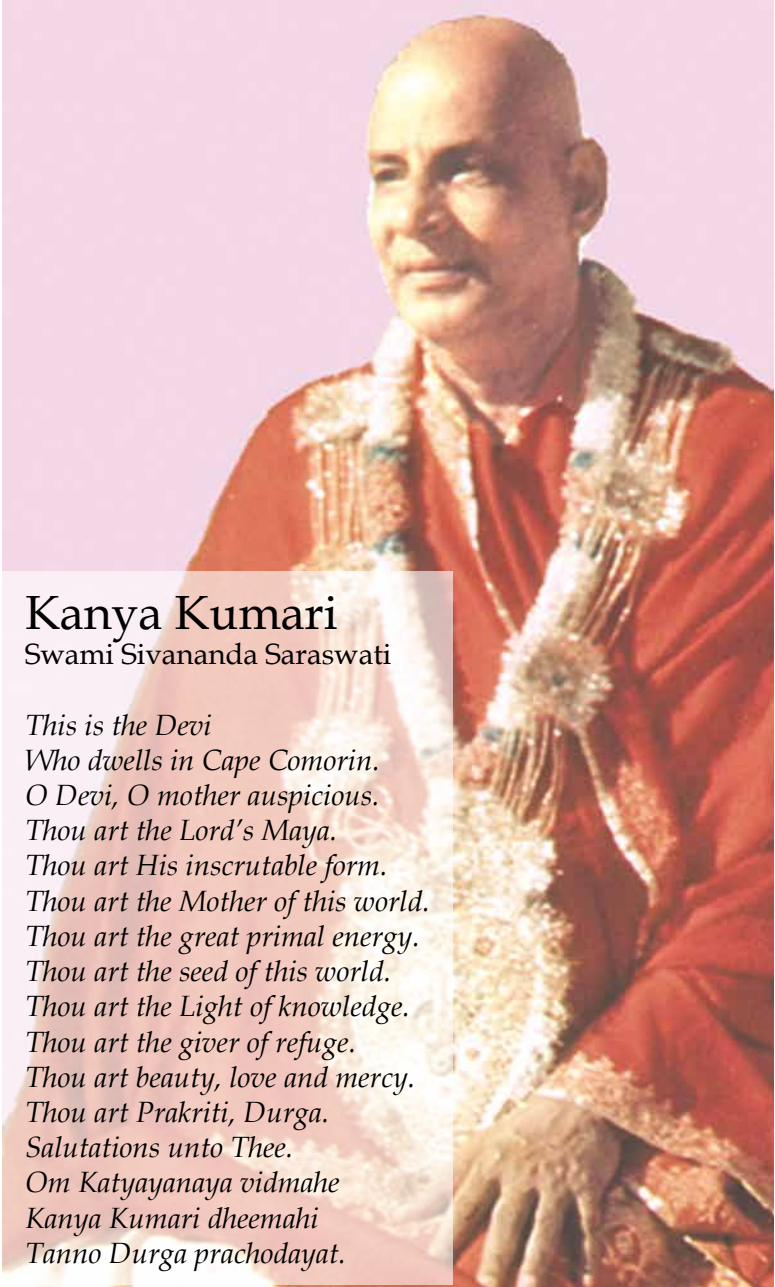
Cape Comorin, or Kanya Kumari, is one of the most beautiful places of pilgrimage in India. It has picturesque scenery. It is a lovely place where continent and oceans meet. There is sea on the three sides. The sacred temple is dedicated to Goddess Parvati. The India Ocean with its two arms, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal wash and worship the holy feet of Mother Parvati.



Darshan at Kanya Kumari

In August 2012, Swami Satyasangananda and Swami Niranjanananda travelled to the southernmost point in India to visit the temple of Kanya Kumari, and pay their respects to the Virgin Goddess.





Kanya Kumari

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

*This is the Devi
Who dwells in Cape Comorin.
O Devi, O mother auspicious.
Thou art the Lord's Maya.
Thou art His inscrutable form.
Thou art the Mother of this world.
Thou art the great primal energy.
Thou art the seed of this world.
Thou art the Light of knowledge.
Thou art the giver of refuge.
Thou art beauty, love and mercy.
Thou art Prakriti, Durga.
Salutations unto Thee.
Om Katyayanaya vidmahe
Kanya Kumari dheemahi
Tanno Durga prachodayat.*

PART III

Kanyas of Rikhia

Welcoming Devi to Rikhia

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

When I arrived with Swami Satyananda at Rikhia, an obscure village in Jharkhand, I felt as if I was slipping back into the 16th century. You could not get more backward than that; there was simply no trace of 21st century, no roads, no electricity, no phones, no news papers, no cars, no busy streets, no hospitals. There was a few dilapidated schools looking desolate with only a few ragged unkempt children, wearing torn and tattered clothing.

That was the Rikhia we entered on 23rd September 1989. Swami Satyananda had chosen this place for his life of seclusion according to a mandate he has received while performing austerities at the jyotirlingam of Siva at Trayambakeshwar near Mumbai. Soon after he arrived, Sri Swamiji plunged into sadhana and undertook the sankalpa of performing many arduous practices such as panchagni and mantra anushthan.

It was during this time that our neighbours began knocking on our door for help. They were hungry, they needed medicines, shelter and clothing. The very basics that we take very much for granted were unavailable for them. We started helping them in whatever way we could and help started pouring in.

Our work began in full swing when, in 1995, Swami Satyananda, accepting that as the will of God, gave us the

green signal to start this work in earnest in an organized and systematic manner, with the attitude of an aradhana, or worship of God in living form.

Today, when you see the same place and the people, especially the children, you may not believe the condition they were in hardly ten years ago. They would qualify perfectly for a before and after advertisement if you know what I mean!

How did it all happen? The very same children, who at that time did not have the confidence to look you in the eye and answer a simple question like what is your name, today are at the helm of the Rikhia ashram, speaking wonderful English, designing the ashram calendars, conducting all its multifarious programs, singing soul stirring kirtans, conducting yajnas with perfect intonation of Sanskrit mantras which would make even a pandit sit up and listen.

When I look back to the time where a young village girl knocked on our door and shyly asked to learn English and we hesitantly started to teach her 'abc', I am amazed to see how the small seed sown on that day has flourished into this giant tree of over 1,500 children that are ever on the increase.

Mind you, these children come from impoverished homes. They are the unfortunate, neglected of the society who have been condemned to a life worse than the animals that affluent members of society rear as pets in their homes. They do not have even the basic amenities that a child needs for personal hygiene like a toothbrush or toothpaste, soap, comb and towel or even a bathroom where they can bath in privacy. This is the main achievement of Rikhia because these children have literally risen out of the doldrums.

Rikhia was an experiment, based on the philosophy of Swami Satyananda, that education is a process of unfoldment from

within, not something you borrow from outside, which becomes possible when the child is exposed to a positive responsibility and love, as in gurukul system of education. Sri Swamiji always said that when you contribute to the growth of an otherwise useless person and make him capable, that is a big achievement and accomplishment. Anyone can get things done by trained professionals, but then what is your contribution in that? Instead, if you make a person who is otherwise a total reject into someone useful, that is a big service you have done for him.

With this words in mind we took up the challenge at Rikhia. We started with the girls because they were the most neglected in the community. The parents did not even consider it necessary to send them to school or educate them. These little girls were doomed to a life of doing odd jobs at homes which perhaps no one else cared to do. In other words, they were considered good for nothing or a burden on the family.

With his wonderful ways, Swami Satyananda changed all that. He gave them the name 'kanya', which immediately exalted their position in the minds of everyone as kanya worship is an integral part of Indian society, so much so that every Indian, rich or poor, educated or illiterate has utmost faith in the ritual of kanya puja. To my mind that worked wonders for them, as from that moment some deep-rooted change began to occur just by this recognition given to them.

The method we used was first of all to allow them their own free space without making any demands on them to come regularly. In other words, they should want to come out of their own sweet will. Then arouse the question of what we should teach them.

Yoga was the natural option as we were all trained yoga teachers and we all knew how beneficial yoga would be for

their expansion of mind. But then we decided to ask them what they wanted to learn instead of imposing our choices on them. Imagine our surprise when they said English! Those ragged, snotty-nosed kids, who could not even speak their own mother tongue properly, wanted to learn the most sophisticated language of our age.

So the English lessons started. Sometimes they came, sometimes they didn't. But we did not react to that. One fine morning when the kids had not turned up, some of us sannyasins were chanting the morning prayers in Sanskrit, followed by kirtan, when a few of them turned up and asked to join in. They liked it so much that they began to come regularly and soon learned all the chants and kirtans effortlessly.

Gradually, we noticed a marked change in their confidence levels. They respond better, they looked brighter, they move with ease, grace and poise. They became more and more enthusiastic about all their activities and thus learnt quicker. The chanting of mantras had worked wonders for expanding



the frontiers of their mind, making them more receptive to the unfoldment of knowledge.

After all, expansion of mind is that phenomenon which opens all the unseen locks of the mind that prevent the removal of ignorance. This was taking place in these children through the constant chanting of Sanskrit mantras. Sanskrit is a phonetic language based purely on sound frequency. In that respect, it differs from other languages which have developed for the purpose of communication.

Through the medium of sound, Sanskrit activates energy centres located in the mouth, throat, nasal tract, epiglottis and tongue, which are directly linked to higher centres in the brain. To achieve this, the only requirement is that the pronunciation should be perfect and the chanting should be regular. They fulfilled both these conditions and we can see the results.

The chanting of mantras and kirtan are integral part of nada yoga which utilizes dhvani, or sound, to awaken inner potential. Along with nada yoga, we introduced them to the



ritual of yajna, which is fire ceremony performed with the chanting of mantas. These simple methods have worked wonders for them.

Today the attendance of girls in the nearby school is one hundred percent and they carry away all prizes for distinction in all subjects. With this marked improvement in the kanyas, we then decided to include the little boys as well or else the girls from Rikhia would soon begin to overshadow them. Swami Satyananda named them 'batuks', as this has created a wonderful competitive spirit between them.

Today their minds have opened up to a whole new world out there. They can hope, aspire, dream and even become what they dream to be. Previously, they were like the proverbial frog in the well that could not even imagine a world beyond the walls of the well where he was born, lived and died. All this was possible only because a very special person, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, happened to step into their lives one fine afternoon in 1989 and revived the ancient concept and tradition of Kanya.





Offering of prasad to 64 Kanyas on Naumi, October 2021

Kanyas of Rikhia

When Sri Swamiji called the young girls in the surrounding villages 'kanyas' he elevated their status and planted a seed that was to transform their lives. They started to think, 'Yes, I can do this. Yes, I can learn this. Yes, I can become anything in life.' Their self - confidence came with just that one name that Gurudev gave them. They thought, 'I am Divine!'

These kanyas are regarded as Devi because if that Divine energy in all its purity has to descend it can't just descend in anyone. Then what form will it choose? Obviously a pure medium. These little children are not yet in the realm of duality. We live in duality - love and hate, heat and cold, like and dislike, pain and pleasure, happiness and unhappiness - but they do not. The purity of that force needs a pure substance through which to descend and so these children, pure and innocent, are regarded as kanyas. They are worshipped and fed, clothed and looked after with that feeling.



A lot of people look after children, it's true. Everywhere, throughout the world it happens. But the feeling with which these children are cared for, the manner in which they are fed and clothed and given whatever they need, is that they are kanyas, they are Devi, and so by worshipping them you are worshipping Devi.

God in Human Form

This traditional worship is usually done on a small scale of 1, 9 or 11 kanyas. But in the true spirit of Swami Satyananda, he expanded and exalted this to include thousands of little girls in Rikhia and beyond.

Through the kanyas the prasad was distributed into every household and family of Rikhia. Suddenly the forgotten and undervalued girls became the hands of Lakshmi bringing generous prasad of grain, utensils, blankets, clothes and other such items into the homes. It was through the kanyas



that prasad reached into each and every home of the local community, and this alone changed the status and value of the girl child in an instant.

Love without Expectation

These kanyas feel that their luck changed the day Swami Satyananda came here because what he did for them he did it without any motive, he did not want anything in return, he did not expect anything in return. When you do in that manner, then it is from the heart. We have been successful in changing the destiny of these young girls only because we did it with purity of heart. Sri Swamiji said, "If you do it selflessly, then you will have good results".

The ongoing seva activities are not considered as charity rather as worship of God in human form, and are conducted as part of the vision and sadhana of Sri Swamiji.

The Carriers of our Culture

Kanyas carry the seeds of the future; they are the carriers of our culture. The quality of life and experience of girls will be directly seen in the results of the next generation. Swami Satyananda spoke of our responsibility to provide girls with equal opportunities as for boys. He said, "Girls and boys are equal parts of society. So long as women do not stand on equal platform with men, their country cannot stand upright."

Swami Satyananda always supported the kanyas. He wanted them to have the opportunities that all children should have, such as quality education and wholistic development. This included exposure to activities such as dance, drama, arts, sports, yoga, chanting, puja and also to computers. For many years selected kanyas have been exposed to English and computer classes which have opened many doors for them and which continues to develop and adapt to the changing times.



The Kanyas are learning computers and are competent at navigating educational online applications and software - they especially love learning through videos and multimedia platforms



Practical Philosophy

So you see how this philosophy has entered the practical life. It is not merely a philosophy. If I am divine, then you are also divine and everyone is divine. Then everyone has to be respected, everyone has to be loved. We should feel connected with each other because we are all divine. That is the philosophy, and look how it has percolated down into the practical life – by caring for the children, by looking upon them as the Devi.

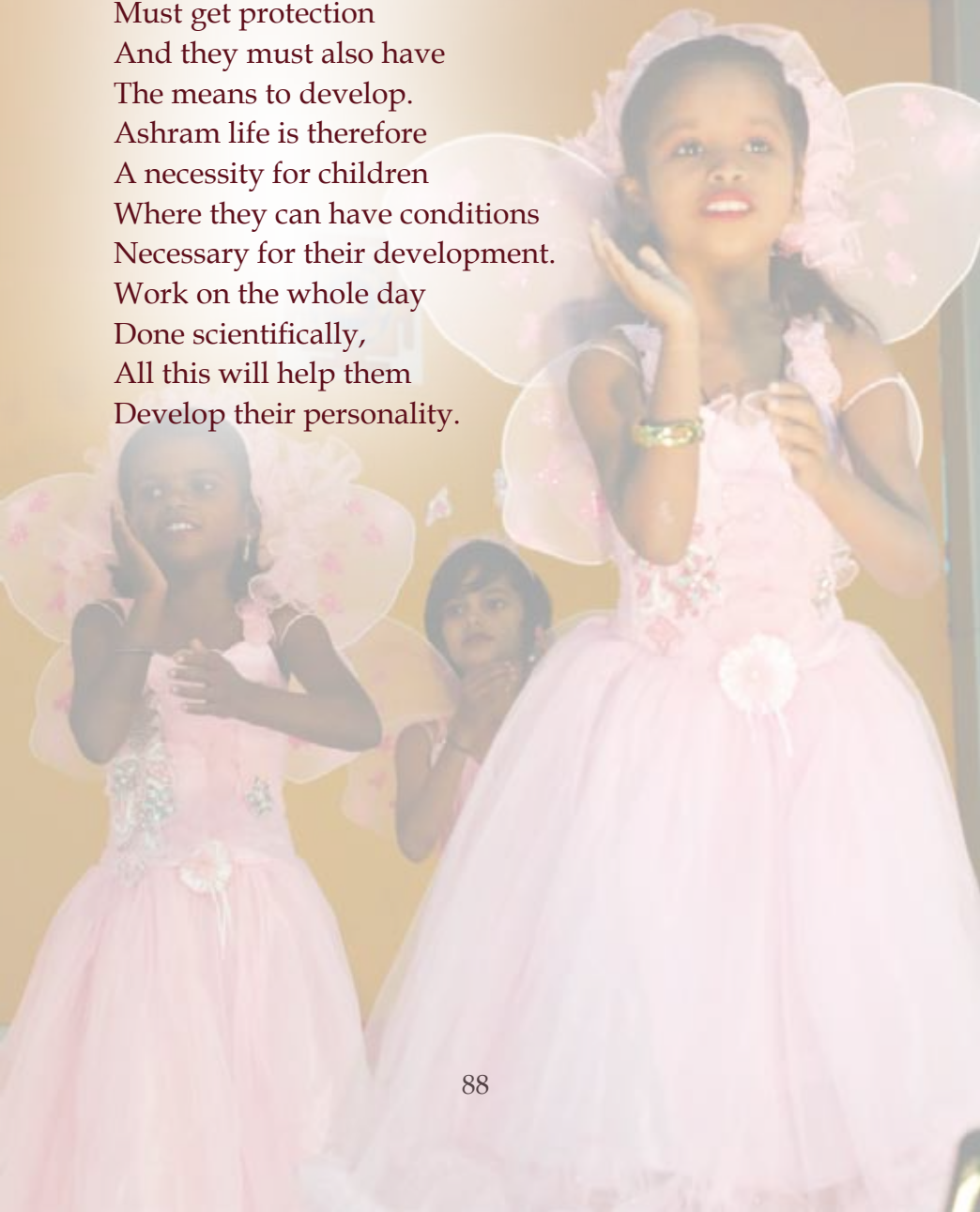
This is not just an abstract philosophy, it also serves the needs of the time. Shouldn't we feel more unity with each other? Shouldn't we love each other more? Shouldn't we adapt, adjust and accommodate with each other more and more and more? Or should we just be individualistic and serve our own needs?

As long as we don't feel divine, that is how we will go on living the life - remaining shut in our own compartments. But if we begin to feel that we are divine, which is our birthright, we begin to feel freedom in the true sense of the word. That freedom comes to you, because that is its nature.

Little Children

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Little children and young roots
Must get protection
And they must also have
The means to develop.
Ashram life is therefore
A necessity for children
Where they can have conditions
Necessary for their development.
Work on the whole day
Done scientifically,
All this will help them
Develop their personality.



The Kanyas of Rikhia

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Rikhia means a place of rishis, a place of sages and seers. Rikhia is pure, serene and radiates peace. The children here are poor, simple and innocent. They were born after I came to live here. They never see me because I live in seclusion.

The kanyas do not belong to the upper crust of society, nor do they not belong to the middle class or even the lower middle class. They belong to the strata of society which many in the West and even in India do not know about. It is called 'no class'. They have no status in society. They collect cow dung every morning and carry the load of paddy and wheat from the field to the granary. They take the cattle for grazing. They rise before sunrise and defecate in the open. They bathe in the pond and then walk long distances to collect dried leaves so their mother can light a fire to cook food. They have a very different way of life which you cannot imagine, but they are simple, innocent and meek.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" says the Bible. Blessed are the meek, the poor and the humble, because they will inherit the earth. The poor people have no profile in society. It is the wealthy, affluent and powerful who have a high profile in our society. The meek belong to the 'no profile' category. They simply exist without any profile.

The Bible proclaims that these are the people who will inherit this earth, for they will continue to exist for millions and



millions of years. It is because of simplicity and meekness that they can survive in any condition without raising their voice.

The affluent who live in comfort cannot survive during calamities. It is the meek and humble who will outlive all calamities and start afresh. If they don't survive, your earth will become barren because you cannot inherit the earth. This is what I have read in the Bible, the Koran, and the Upanishads. Rikhia is pure both from the spiritual and material points of view. The kanyas epitomise the beauty of Rikhia.

They have survived the ravages of nature. They have survived without a roof over their head. They have survived the pangs of hunger. They have survived the dangers of living with snakes, scorpions and mosquitoes. You would not survive even one day on the water they drink or the food they eat. This is why they will inherit the earth.

The kanyas in Rikhia have imbibed very good samskaras. The next generation and the generations after that will be very good. Many of them will be ambassadors. They will go to other homes, become mothers and teach their children the Ishavasya Upanishad, kirtans and bhajans.

We will organise programs for them. We will teach them how to perform small yajnas so they can do it in their homes. We will teach them how to do abhishek of the Sivalingam, chant the Rudri Path and perform arati so that good samskaras gradually permeate their homes. When these children grow up they will be able to do puja themselves, chant the Vedas, perform abhishek and do havan from time to time. There can be nothing better than this to improve the environment at home and in society.



When I first arrived in Rikhia, neither the children nor their parents showed any interest in their studies. I was surprised because my feeling was that if the sannyasins in the ashram are so highly educated, then householders and their children should also be knowledgeable. Classes start from Makar Sankranti, mid-January, every year, and continue till Navaratri in October. People from India and all around the world stay in the ashram and teach these young children, who have developed a great interest in their education.

Originally, when the girls saw Swami Satsangi speaking English so fluently, they were surprised. They were even more astonished when they saw her driving vehicles. So they followed suit and the process of education among the girls began. Some of the older girls now go to Deoghar for higher education.

All the students read English and practice speaking it too. When I come across them during my morning stroll, they say, "Good morning, Swamiji," and also enquire, "How are you?" When I ask how they are, they say, "I am fine, thankyou."



Children are the up and coming generation. I chose the kanyas to manage every aspect of the yajna, and they handle it all with versatility, charm and innocence. Children should learn early in life how to share their pleasure with their fellow beings. Giving good samskaras in the formative years will bring about changes in their attitude to life and affect the future generations.

A Silent Revolution

A change has taken place. There is no family in this panchayat which goes without food. There is no child in this panchayat who does not get a proper dress every one or two months. On every festival, whether it is Holi, Diwali, Dussehra, Navaratri or Guru Purnima, we give them beautiful dresses. We always have supplies ready for them.

When the kanyas of this panchayat get five or six sets of dresses every year, what will you call them? Destitute? Lower middle class? Upper middle class? In which category do we place them? They are happy and their prosperity is percolating. Prosperity should always percolate, because that keeps a man in check. If riches come like tsunami, they completely sweep you away and you cannot control yourself.

These children have full attendance in the nearby schools now, so keen they are to learn and study. When we came here, all the schools were empty with practically no attendance. Now they are overflowing with children, and the local administration has also made a few nice classrooms for them. Study has become their interest and passion, and the proof is that a private school has opened in our panchayat where parents pay thirty rupees to have their children educated. This shows how keen they are to have their children educated. The local administration does not have to tell them to do that because they understand the value of education.

I am Society

The kanyas of Rikhia are children of the ashram. The ashram nurtures a dream for them which is gradually coming to fulfilment. Parents should be able to feed, take proper care and look after the health of their children. These poor villagers are not able to do that at present. However, their destiny is entwined with mine.

We are sannyasins, nothing belongs to us. We do not own property, have relationships, family, bank balance, wife or children. We do not have attachments. When a flower blossoms, its fragrance wafts into space, and engulfs everybody. Wherever a sannyasin lives, he has to disseminate the fragrance of knowledge. That was our intention with this place, and we can see it flower.



Descent of Cosmic Shakti

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

During Sat Chandi Mahayajna we witness the kanyas, receive their prasad, sing kirtans, dance, serve – they are everywhere in this ashram: guiding people, managing situations, keeping everybody engaged. These little children have become the medium for the descent of the higher force as per the sankalpa of Sri Swamiji.

In the year 2000 some children came to meet Swami Satsangiji and during the discussion they expressed their desire to learn English and computers. So Swami Satsangi made the arrangements for them and gradually, the number of children increased and increased and increased and increased.

The few sparks which used to be lit here, suddenly became a big bonfire, and hundreds and thousands of these kanyas flocked to the ashram. For them, the ashram is their second home - they care more for this ashram than they even care for their home.

You know, in the last satsang, in the year 2009, Sri Swamiji's address was to the children. And he asked them a question: "Who looks after you – your father or me?" And all the children yelled in one voice, "You!" "Who gives you food, your father or me?" And all the children yelled in one voice, "You!" "Who gives you clothes, your father or me?" And all the children screamed in one voice, "You!"

In everything, it was Swamiji who provided for them and who gave them opportunities in their bleak future. There are hundreds and thousands and millions of children all over the country, and the globe; but what kind of opportunities are they getting to cultivate their skills and their strengths? Education does not provide a solution. Opportunities bring forth the innate and natural creativity.

We all can see the kanyas dance. Believe me, I have seen many, many people dance; professionals dance, all over the world and this country – but the way these kanyas dance here is incomparable to any dance you can see anywhere else in the world. The way they sing kirtans – when they sing their first line, the heart begins to jump. By the second line, the hands begin to clap, and by the third line you want to get up, and by the fourth line you have forgotten yourself. That is the spirit which they are conveying. This spirit is not their own, let me tell you this very clearly, and emphatically.



Yes, they have been given the opportunity and they have utilized that opportunity to improve themselves – that is their goodness, that is their good nature. But the catalyst has been the shaktipat, the sankalpa of Sri Swamiji in their life.

Swamiji did invoke higher shakti to descend in the lives of the kanyas. And in all the children who come to the ashram you can see the spark of that higher power. They speak English, better than any American or Englishman or Australian. Yes. Americans don't speak English, they speak American. Australians don't speak English, they speak 'Strine'. Englishmen don't speak English, they speak cockney. Here, the kanyas speak English which is English and is English.

From where does this inspiration come into their life? From where does this spark, this receptivity, this sensitivity, come into their life? After all, there are so many children all over the world – why can't they be like them? Think about it. And even if you try to make your children in their image, you can't. Even if you try to make your own child into the image of children of Rikhia, you will not be able to make them. I can give that to you in writing. And this is the blessings of a saint in action, that we are witness to in this place.



PART IV

Kanya Bhoj



Kanya Bhoj

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

Kanya bhoj is worship. It is not just feeding children or feeding the poor. It is not charity. It is something different. It is like a pure vibration. The best way you can think of it is that it is an experience of purity. We can say that kanya bhoj is an aradhana of the Supreme Energy in its pristine purity.

It is with this bhavana that Swami Satyananda started it at the culmination of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. That is when all the kanyas, the children from the neighbouring villages, are given beautiful garments and adornments, worshipped with mantras and fed sumptuously.

To worship God in the temple is good, but that alone is not enough if you want to please him or connect with him. Ultimately, in order to receive his attention, grace and love you have to see God in human form. The kanyas are fed and given the items that they need with the feeling that they are divine, they are Devi. In return Devi blesses us.

This is a sadhana that Swami Satyananda initiated in Rikhia, and it brings the most auspicious and divine blessings of Devi into our lives.



Pradosh Bhoj - A Sankalpa

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

I have lived among the poor all my life, and my habits are like any poor man in India. You may not have seen the poor, or know much about them, but I have lived with them. Even now I live among them. Everywhere, in every corner of the world, there are hungry souls whose children sleep without a morsel of food. Hunger and starvation exist throughout the world, not only in India. There are people who need food for survival in Africa, Asia, South America, and even Europe and North America. Therefore, I say, "Feed man and God will be fed". If man dies hungry, God will also die because the existence of God depends on man.

When we think about others, a spiritual awakening unfolds within us. God takes care of those who care for others. Last night, at midnight, while everyone was celebrating New Year with fireworks, I prayed for all of mankind. This was my prayer:

*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah,
Sarve santu niramaya,
Sarve bhadrani pashyantu,
Maa kashchit dukha bhagbhavet.*

May God make them prosperous,
May God make them free from disease,
May God remove all the sickness and ills of their family,
And let them enjoy bliss, peace, happiness and health.

Only the force of God can help those who are helpless and neglected. It is for this reason that I perform the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. Until the villagers receive the blessings and grace of the Divine Mother, their sorrows will not be removed. I thought that the Sat Chandi yajna has been performed for so many years and light has been kindled in so many people. Now, the children in this neighborhood should be given pradosh bhoj, an evening meal, every day of the year. I am not talking about a midday meal because the need to provide a midday meal is accepted by the entire world, and is being taken care of, by the schools.

I am talking about pradosh, which means sandhya, dusk. If an evening meal is given to these kanyas, I think it will be the greatest worship of Devi. Five days of the year, during the Sat Chandi yajna, Devi is offered food, but for the rest of the year she starves! When you offer food to Devi, she eats it. That is why it is offered. So on the other 360 days of the year Devi should also be given prasad.

Then I thought where will 2,000 children sit in the rainy season? It certainly can't be under a canopy. What size cooking pots do we need? What food will we give them? These thoughts came. The biggest problem will be water. We are practical. If 2,000 children wash their plates the well will dry up, maybe not during the rainy season, but in June, at the height of the summer it will. Even though the ashram has eight wells we face water shortages. Like this, one thought after the other followed. I stayed awake until about 3.00 am thinking about every aspect of the bhoj.

Every evening, 2,000 children should have good food here. The evening meal will be nutritious, balanced, yet interesting. We have experimented with food a lot because we have a big ashram where lots of people eat each day. Idli and dosa are meant to be the best of all foods. Steamed food suits

everyone's digestion. Along with idli and chutney, we have experimented with other healthy foods for the children including sambhar, and different dals and vegetables to provide protein and all the minerals.

Now I have taken this thought of pradosh bhoj as a sankalpa, a resolve. A sankalpa to provide one square meal to the children and the elders of our panchayat. This is the sankalpa of a Paramahansa, the sankalpa of Rikhiapeth.

But even though it is a New Year sankalpa, it doesn't mean that it will happen this year. It means that this year I have sown the seed within myself and one day it will germinate. When it does, food for 2,000 children will be cooked and distributed every day, not just on special occasions.





Swami Satyananda surveying the disused factory that was to be converted into Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen



Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen in full swing during Shravan Kanya Bhoj, 2023

Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen

"Feed man and God will be Fed"

- Swami Satyananda Saraswati -

An essential aspect of the vision that Paramahansa Satyananda held for the kanyas of Rikhia was to provide them with one daily nutritious and balanced meal. This sankalpa has become a reality and the grand venture to construct the Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen was complete and was inaugurated in November 2010 during the Lakshmi Puja conducted on Diwali, festival of lights.

Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen has been developed in a disused factory; this huge structure has been completely transformed into a modern and spacious all weather dining area to facilitate the daily feeding of over 2000 persons in rain, hail and shine.

The Annapurna complex consists of an enormous dining area with multiple tiled dining areas, adequate store rooms and offices, an open air langar and facilities to store wood and coal. It features a modern gas kitchen which has all the latest facilities of pizza and roti makers along with an electric oven.



Annapurna Kshetram - Aradhana of Body, Mind and Spirit

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Swami Satyananda, who lived and propagated the teachings of his Guru, Swami Sivananda, often told us that if you see a person hungry, know that God inside that person is also hungry. If you see a person suffering, know that God inside that person is also suffering. If you see someone crying, know that God inside that person is also crying, because God is nothing but a reflection of one's own consciousness. In a state of agitation, God is agitated. In a state of bliss and peace, the experience of God is blissful and peaceful.

Swami Sivananda saw the presence of Lord Narayana in everyone, especially those in need, the sick, hungry, homeless, destitute and suffering. For him helping people in need was his aradhana, his worship. Swami Sivananda told his disciples that if you serve your fellow human beings, you are actually serving and worshipping God, because God is present in all forms of life.

The luminaries of our tradition gave practical understanding to the ideas of Vedanta which emphasise realisation of the divine essence in life. Swami Satyananda taught us to cultivate atmbhava, the ability to see the reflection of one's own self in others. He said that when you begin to feel for everyone in the same way that you feel for yourself and

the people closest to you, the efforts you make to bring happiness, prosperity and fulfilment in their lives becomes the real aradhana.

Worship is an act that people perform for divine intervention in order to bring peace, plenty and prosperity in life. But the personal endeavour has to include the perception of the divine in every being and all forms of life in the world. This is practical aradhana. It develops one's awareness and experience of the divine in the earthly dimension. It brings happiness, peace, hope, conviction and strength to all.

The anna kshetram therefore, is not charity. It is not an anna kshetram where people are only fed. It is an aradhana. It is worship. It is the worship that is spoken of in the Vedas, it is 'atmabhava'. It is to fulfil the needs of every being.

Sri Swamiji's aradhana was one of fullness; first to eradicate the hunger of the body, then to eradicate the hunger of the mind, and then to eradicate the hunger of the spirit.

Annapurna - The Mother of Giving

Annapurna is that aspect of shakti which nurtures life. 'Anna' means grain and 'purna' means fulfiller. She is the one who fulfils the need of grain which is associated with nourishment. Annapurna is the controller of Prakriti, or nature, which gives food in abundance for survival. You can survive without clothes, comfort and luxury but you cannot survive without food.

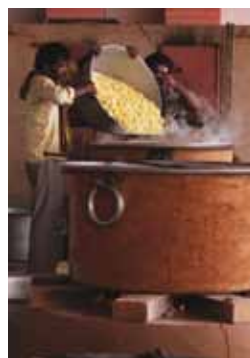
Her benevolence is not limited to the physical body, she also provides for the health of the mind and spirit. Adi Shankaracharya's prayer to Annapurna says, "Jnana vairagya siddhyartham bhiksham dehi cha parvati" – give me the boon of jnana and vairagya.







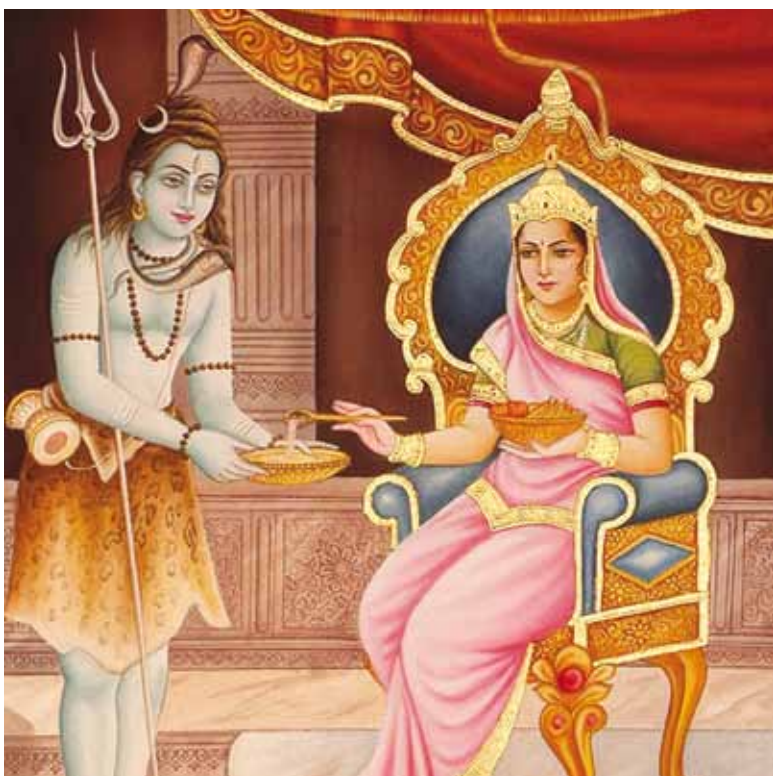
Prasad for the Kanya Bhoj is prepared in Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen



Prasad for the Kanya Bhoj is prepared in Annapoorna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen

Annapurna is the unconditional giver of the universe. The story goes that she gave bhiksha or alms to Lord Shiva - the highest of all divine beings! Once, Lord Shiva went around the world saying, "I am hungry. Please give me something to eat." Everybody laughed at him. They said, "How can you be hungry? You are our God. You are the one who provides for us, and you say you are hungry! How can we satisfy your hunger?" Thus, nobody gave Shiva any food. Finally, he went to Annapurna and said, "Mother, feed me. I am hungry." Annapurna fed Shiva and his hunger was sated.

The shakti that is strong enough to satisfy Shiva is powerful enough to bring satisfaction to the life of every sentient being, and welfare to all insentient matter.



अन्नपूर्णा-स्तोत्रम्

नित्यानन्दकरी वराभयकरी सौन्दर्यरत्नाकरी
निर्धूताखिलदोषपावनकरी प्रत्यक्षमाहेश्वरी ।
प्रालेयाचलवंशपावनकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥1॥

नानारत्नविचित्रभूषणकरी हेमाम्बराडम्बरी
मुक्ताहारविलम्बमानविलसद्वक्षोजकुम्भान्तरी ।
काश्मीरागरुवासितारुचिकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥2॥

योगानन्दकरी रिपुक्षयकरी धर्मेकनिष्ठाकरी
चन्द्रार्कानलभासमानलहरी त्रैलाक्यरक्षाकरी ।
सर्वेश्वर्यसमस्तवाञ्छितकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥3॥

कैलासाचलकन्दरालयकरी गौरी उमा शंकरी
कौमारी निगमार्थगोचरकरी ओंकारबीजाक्षरी ।
मोक्षद्वारकपाटपाटनकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥4॥

दृश्यादृश्यप्रभूतपावनकरी ब्रह्माण्डभाण्डोदरी
लीलानाटकसूत्रभेदनकरी विज्ञानदीपाङ्कुरी ।
श्रीविश्वेशमनःप्रसादनकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥5॥

उर्वीसर्वजनेश्वरी भगवती मातान्नपूर्णेश्वरी
वेणीनीलसमानकुन्तलहरी नित्यान्नदानेश्वरी ।
सर्वानन्दकरी दशाशुभकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥6॥

आदिक्षान्तसमस्तवर्णनकरी शम्भोस्त्रिभावाकरी
काश्मीरा त्रिजनेश्वरी त्रिलहरी नित्यांकुरा शर्वरी ।
कामाकांक्षकरी जनोदयकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥7॥

दर्वी स्वर्णविचित्ररत्नखचिता दक्षे करे संस्थिता
वामे स्वादुपयोधरी सहचरी सौभाग्यमाहेश्वरी ।
भक्ताभीष्टकरी दृशा शुभकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥8॥

चन्द्रार्कानलकोटिकोटिसदृशी चन्द्रांशुबिम्बाधरी
चन्द्रार्काग्निसमानकुण्डलधरी चन्द्रार्कवर्णेश्वरी ।
मालापुस्तकपाशांकुशधरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥9॥

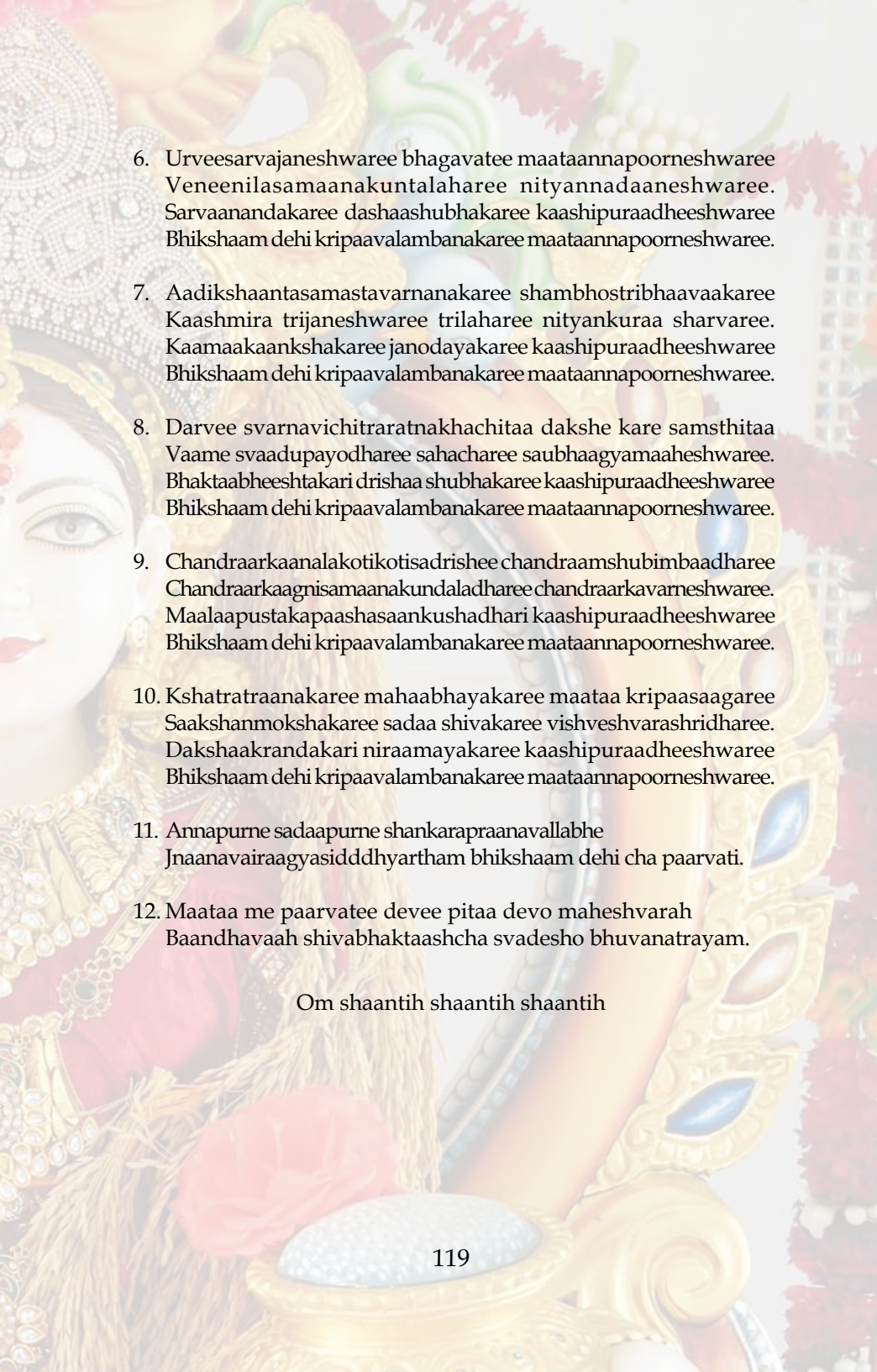
क्षत्रत्राणकरी महाऽभयकरी माता कृपासागरी
साक्षान्मोक्षकरी सदा शिवकरी विश्वेश्वरश्रीधरी ।
दक्षाक्रन्दकरी निरामयकरी काशीपुराधीश्वरी
भिक्षां देहि कृपावलम्बनकरी माताऽन्नपूर्णेश्वरी ॥10॥

अन्नपूर्णे सदापूर्णे शंकरप्राणवल्लभे ।
ज्ञानवैराग्यसिद्ध्यर्थं भिक्षा देहि च पार्वती ॥11॥

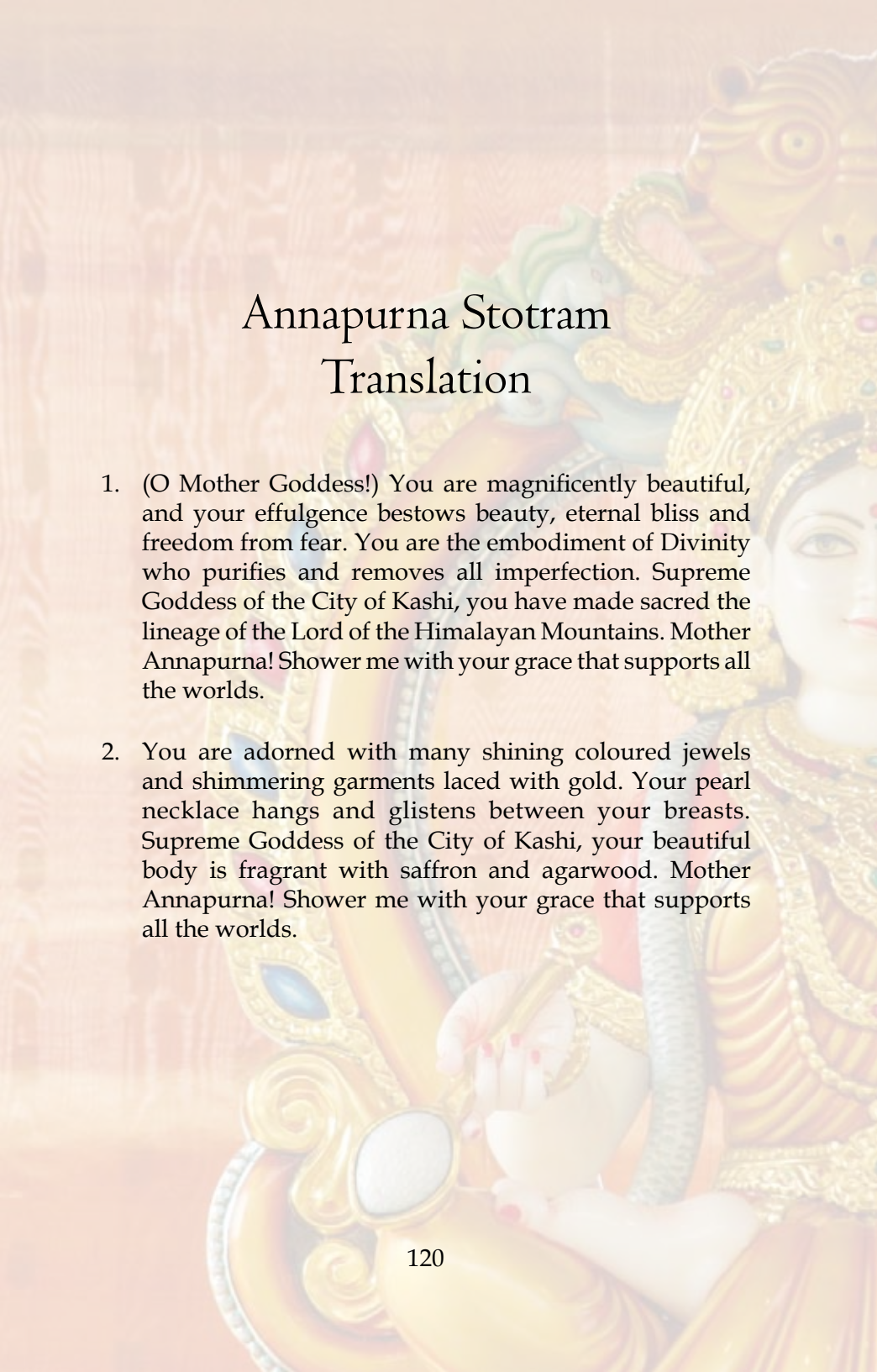
माता मे पार्वती देवी पिता देवो महेश्वरः ।
बान्धवाः शिवभक्ताश्च स्वदेशो भुवनत्रयम् ॥12॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Annapurna Stotram

1. Nityaanandakaree varaabhayakari saundaryaratnaakaree
Nirdhootaakhiladoshapaavanakaree pratyakshamaaheshwaree.
Praaleyaachalavamsapaavanakaree kaashipuraadhishwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
2. Naanaaratnavichitrabhooshanakaree hemaambaraadambaree
Muktaahaaravilambamaanavilasadvakshojakumbhaantaree.
Kaashmeeraagaruvaasitaaruchikaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
3. Yoganandakaree ripukshayakaree dharmaikanishtaakaree
Chandraarkanalabhaasamaanalaharee trailokyarakshaakaree.
Sarvaishwaryasamastavaanchhitakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
4. Kailaashaachalakandaraalayakaree gauri umaa shankaree
Kaumaaree nigamaarthagocharakaree omkaarabeejaaksharee.
Mokshadvarakapaatapaaatanakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
5. Drishyaadrishyaprabhootapaavanakaree brahmaandabhaandodaree
Lilaanaatakasutrabhedanakaree vijnanadeepaankuree.
Shrivishveshamaanahprasaadanakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.

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6. Urveesarvajaneshwaree bhagavatee maataannapoorneshwaree
Veneenilasamaanakuntalaharee nityannadaaneshwaree.
Sarvaanandakaree dasaashubhakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
 7. Aadikshaantasamastavarnanakaree shambhostribhaavaakaree
Kaashmira trijaneshwaree trilaharee nityankuraa sharvaree.
Kaamaakaankshakaree janodayakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
 8. Darvee svarnavichitraratnakhachitaa dakshe kare samsthitaa
Vaame svaadupayodharee sahacharee saubhaagyamaaheshwaree.
Bhaktaabheeshtakari drishaa shubhakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
 9. Chandraarkaanalakotikotisadrishee chandraamshubimbaadharee
Chandraarkaagnisamaanakundaladharee chandraarkavarneshwaree.
Maalaapustakapaashasaankushadhari kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
 10. Kshatratraanakaree mahaabhayakaree maataa kripaasaagaree
Saakshanmokshakaree sadaa shivakaree vishveshvarashridharee.
Dakshaakrandakari niraamayakaree kaashipuraadheeshwaree
Bhikshaam dehi kripaavalambanakaree maataannapoorneshwaree.
 11. Annapurne sadaapurne shankarapraanavallabhe
Jnaanavairaagyasiddhyartham bhikshaam dehi cha paarvati.
 12. Maataa me paarvatee devree pitaa devo maheshvarah
Baandhavaah shivabhaktaashcha svadesho bhuvanatrayam.

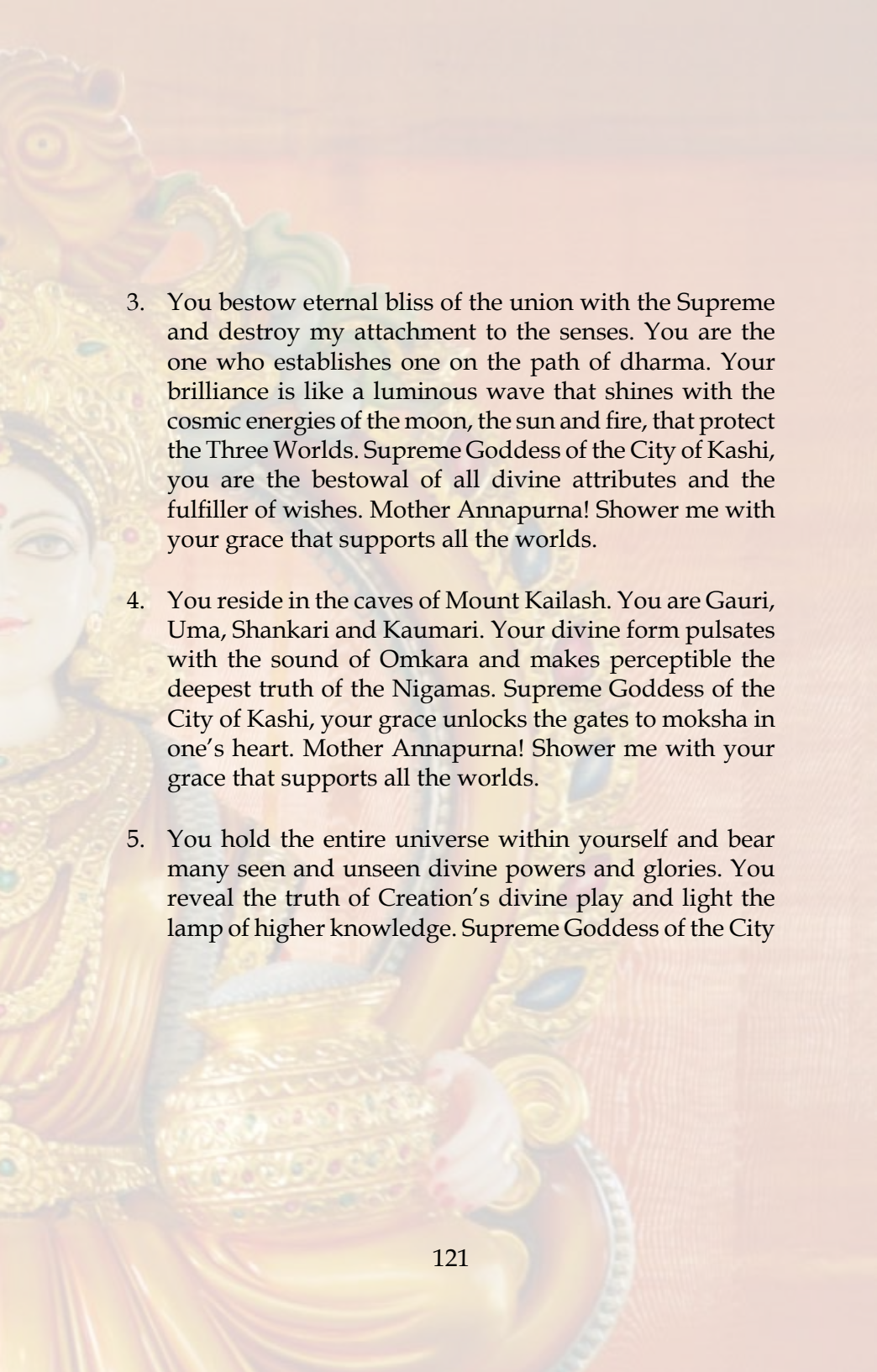
Om shaantih shaantih shaantih

The background of the page features a traditional Indian religious illustration. On the right, Goddess Annapurna is depicted with a serene expression, wearing a tall, ornate golden crown and multiple layers of gold jewelry. She is adorned with a red and gold sari. In the center, Lord Shiva is shown with his characteristic white complexion and matted hair, wearing a crescent moon and a snake. To the left, Lord Hanuman is visible with his blue face and white body. The entire scene is set against a warm, golden-brown background with intricate patterns.

Annapurna Stotram

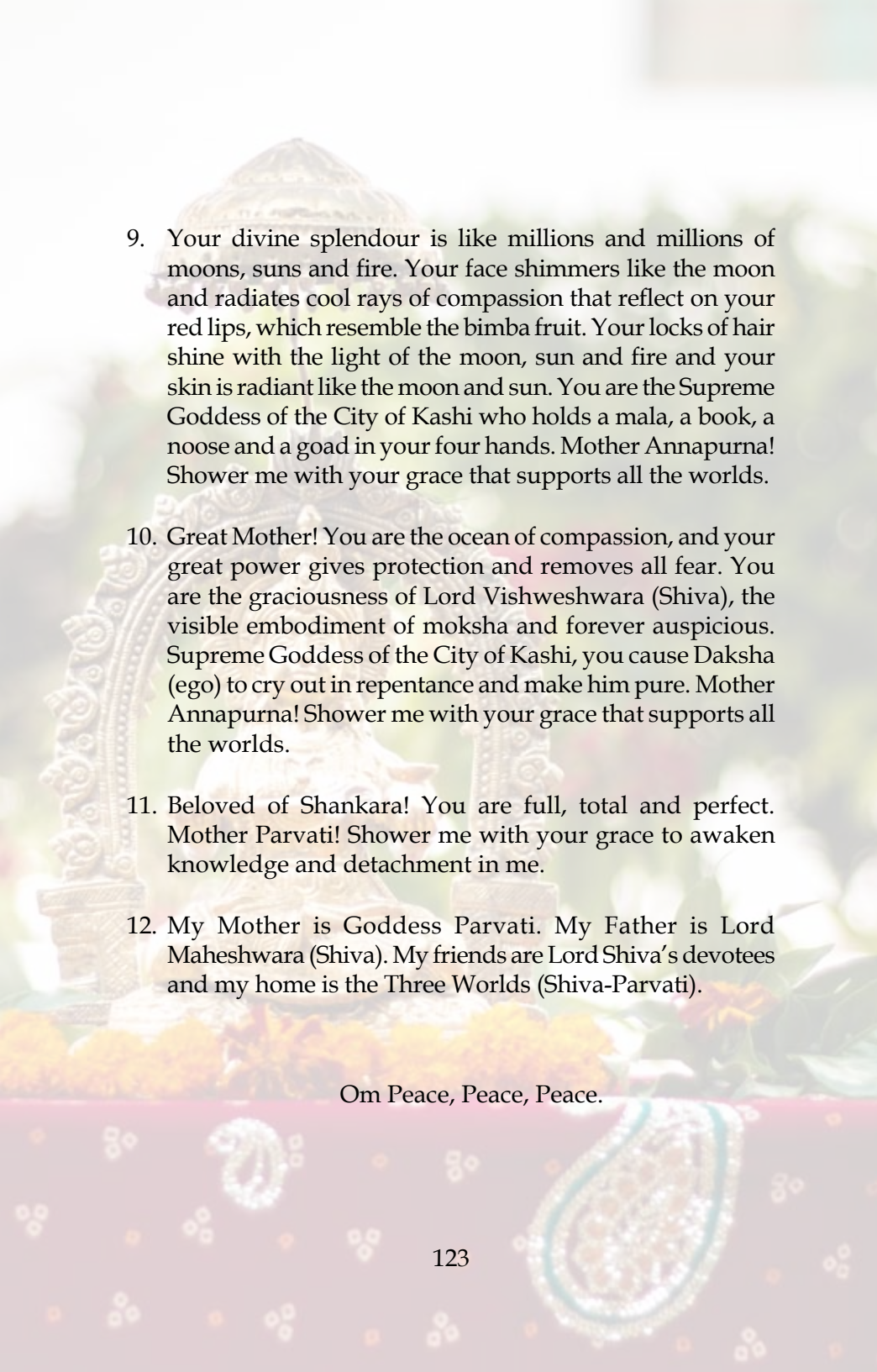
Translation

1. (O Mother Goddess!) You are magnificently beautiful, and your effulgence bestows beauty, eternal bliss and freedom from fear. You are the embodiment of Divinity who purifies and removes all imperfection. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, you have made sacred the lineage of the Lord of the Himalayan Mountains. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
2. You are adorned with many shining coloured jewels and shimmering garments laced with gold. Your pearl necklace hangs and glistens between your breasts. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, your beautiful body is fragrant with saffron and agarwood. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.

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3. You bestow eternal bliss of the union with the Supreme and destroy my attachment to the senses. You are the one who establishes one on the path of dharma. Your brilliance is like a luminous wave that shines with the cosmic energies of the moon, the sun and fire, that protect the Three Worlds. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, you are the bestowal of all divine attributes and the fulfiller of wishes. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
 4. You reside in the caves of Mount Kailash. You are Gauri, Uma, Shankari and Kaumari. Your divine form pulsates with the sound of Omkara and makes perceptible the deepest truth of the Nigamas. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, your grace unlocks the gates to moksha in one's heart. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
 5. You hold the entire universe within yourself and bear many seen and unseen divine powers and glories. You reveal the truth of Creation's divine play and light the lamp of higher knowledge. Supreme Goddess of the City

of Kashi, you cause the mind of the Lord of the Universe (Vishweshwara) to flow its benevolence to the world. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.

6. Supreme Goddess Mother Annapurneshwari! You are Mother Earth herself and Goddess of each and everything. Your dark braids fall like waves of your grace and you eternally give food to all your children. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, you bestow unending bliss and auspiciousness. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
7. You are the source of Shambhu's three natures (sattwa, rajas, tamas) and all the syllables emanate from your being, beginning with A and ending with Ksha. You are the colour of saffron and the Goddess of the three waters that flow as three waves, and you perpetually bring forth Creation by your female power. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, you fulfil all desires and transform the lives of everyone. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
8. Beautiful daughter of King Daksha! You are entirely covered with beautiful sparkling jewels. You are the Great Goddess who holds a bowl of sweet milk on your left side and lovingly feed all your children. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, you bring good fortune and auspiciousness to everyone. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.

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9. Your divine splendour is like millions and millions of moons, suns and fire. Your face shimmers like the moon and radiates cool rays of compassion that reflect on your red lips, which resemble the bimba fruit. Your locks of hair shine with the light of the moon, sun and fire and your skin is radiant like the moon and sun. You are the Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi who holds a mala, a book, a noose and a goad in your four hands. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
 10. Great Mother! You are the ocean of compassion, and your great power gives protection and removes all fear. You are the graciousness of Lord Vishweshwara (Shiva), the visible embodiment of moksha and forever auspicious. Supreme Goddess of the City of Kashi, you cause Daksha (ego) to cry out in repentance and make him pure. Mother Annapurna! Shower me with your grace that supports all the worlds.
 11. Beloved of Shankara! You are full, total and perfect. Mother Parvati! Shower me with your grace to awaken knowledge and detachment in me.
 12. My Mother is Goddess Parvati. My Father is Lord Maheshwara (Shiva). My friends are Lord Shiva's devotees and my home is the Three Worlds (Shiva-Parvati).

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.



Kanya Bhoj Blossoms at Rikhiapeeth

The first kanya bhoj in Rikhia was performed in 1995 at the first Sat Chandi Mahayajna. One of the most important parts of a yajna is kanya worship, the ancient method of worship of the Cosmic Energy in the form of a young girl. The girls are dressed beautifully and their feet are washed. Then they are offered food with the chanting of mantras. At the first Sat Chandi Mahayajna just nine kanyas, a young mother and child, and a batuk were worshipped.

A yajna is not complete without anna daan, offering food. As an extension of the first Sat Chandi Mahayajna, the following January, villagers from the surrounding area were invited to the Akhara for bhoj every day. Thereafter, bhoj was held on various festivals throughout the year and the villagers were provided with nourishing food. This was given, not only as a social service to the poor, but as a mode of worship of the embodied Self. It was the expression of Sri Swamiji's realisation and experience of the oneness of spirit that is atmabhava.

- 2001 When formal enrolment starts for the kanyas, education and learning started to move to the forefront. Initially just 11 kanyas were enrolled.
- 2002 During Shravan, the auspicious month of Shiva, a worship of chausath yoginis was performed by giving bhoj to 64 kanyas. Every day for a month they were worshipped and fed. This was the small beginning of the annual grand Shravan Bhoj.
- Gradually the kanyas were given bhoj on more occasions in the year including Chaitra Navaratri, Guru Purnima, Radha-Krishna Jhulan and Ashwin Navaratri. By the end of the year there were 108 kanyas, who were all fed during kanya worship at the Sat Chandi Mahayajna.
- 2004 Once the position of the kanyas was established the young boys, called batuks, were able to be integrated into the ashram classes and activities. As with the girls, the process of integration began slowly with 11 batuks. By the end of the year the number of kanyas and batuks was 400.
- 2007 On New Year's Day, 2007 Sri Swamiji publicly announced his sankalpa to provide one wholesome meal every day of the year for all the children and elderly people in the panchayat. At this time there were 1,008 kanyas and batuks.
- The same year, a massive derelict steel factory on the outskirts of Rikhia Hatia market was acquired by the ashram. A large-scale renovation project started to convert it into the sprawling facility of Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen for large scale bhoj.

- 2009 At midnight on 5th December, Sri Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi. As part of the Shodashi every day for 16 days the kanyas and batuks, and the villagers were invited for a grand bhoj. Thousands of people came. On the last day everyone who came to the Akhara was fed.
- 2010 The Kanya Kitchen was complete, transformed into a vast kitchen and feeding place for over 2,000 children. It was named Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen in honour of the Goddess who provides nourishment for the body, mind and spirit.
- On Diwali, the festival of lights, Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen was inaugurated by feeding all the kanyas and batuks under one roof. Their number exceeded 1,600.
- 2012 - Shravan Bhoj is held annually for all the kanyas and batuks and all local school children. Foods from different regions of India and the world were offered to the children at pradosh, sunset, every day for a month.
- 2016 - The pradosh bhoj is offered on more days of the year. All the children are fed every evening from Basant Panchami to Sivaratri, Chaitra Navaratri to Akshay Tritiya, Guru Purnima to Radha-Krishna Jhulan (Shravan), Sivananda Janmotsav to Diwali, Sat Chandi Mahayajna, Yoga Purnima, and all the sacred days and special celebrations in the year.
- 2020

2020 -
2023

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, Peethadhishwari Swami Satyasangananda guided the activities of Rikhiapeeth by applying the mandate entrusted to her by her Guru Swami Satyananda, of Serve, Love and Give. She has initiated and masterminded the Karuna Relief Seva which has supported the most vulnerable within our community during these unprecedented times.

The Karuna Relief Seva assesses the needs of the community and strives to alleviate the hardships being faced by thousands of rural families as well migrant workers, unemployed, youth, young students, farmers, widows and the elderly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic.

The regular distribution of grains, rations and household items to the kanyas has ensured that the offering of prasad continues in an adapted format suitable for current times to ensure the health and safety of all.



PART V

Meet Some Kanyas
of Rikhia

My Life as a Kanya of Rikhia

Kumari Alpana, Sinu



I would like to share with you my experiences as a Kanya of Rikhiapeeth. As you all know that all the kanyas have been born after the arrival of Sri Swamiji into Rikhiapeeth in 1989. In Rikhia, all the children at the age of nearly four or five years start not only going to the schools but also coming to this ashram. I started coming to the ashram in January 1998 when I was six years old. Since then I remained 'a kanya of Rikhia' until January 2008.



Initially I came to the ashram for English classes. Besides English, the kanyas were also taught some “mantras” and “stotras”. Once we got the opportunity to chant “Saraswati Vandana” before Sri Swamiji. And by successfully reciting it before him we felt extremely delighted. For the first time we, the group of kanyas who sang kirtans, sang the kirtan “Saraswati Maha Saraswati” on the occasion of Basant Panchami. Gradually we started singing during other ashram events and the daily evening programs.

I am happy and very thankful to Sri Swamiji that he gave us the chance to conduct these programs. We felt very satisfied to see the audiences spellbound during our recitations. Sometimes it also happened when we sang kirtans, so many people, including Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi, could not stop themselves from dancing.

As a kanya of Rikhia, each year in the ashram I had the same opportunity and experience to chant the complete “Ramcharitmanas” twice, “Sundarkand” twelve times and

“Bhagavad Gita” twenty four times and various other stotras several times.

I met many new people of different castes, religions and nationalities here, who came from all corners of the world. I talked to them and learnt many things about their cultures and societies. I made many new friends from different parts of India and the world who came to visit the ashram. I really enjoyed playing and talking to them.

I learnt computers for the first time at the ashram. I also received a laptop computer in Sita Kalyanam in 2008. And it is well known how essential is the knowledge and use of computers these days.

All the kanyas and batuks are fed in the ashram during every festival and event. I have eaten so many types of dishes here for the first time. They also receive at least ten sets of



beautiful dresses, some traditional and some modern every year, which are donated by different people from India and abroad. Like all other children, I too, felt happy to receive them, and delighted whenever I wore them.

By coming here and being involved in various activities, I have learnt so many things and my personality has developed very much. I am pursuing higher studies and am now completing my final graduation year of BA English honors. When I go to my college and institute in Deoghar, my friends do not easily believe that I have done my schooling in a Hindi medium government school.

Sri Swamiji has always encouraged us kanyas to study first, then make your career and then to think about marriage or anything else. Fortunately my parents are of similar thoughts. They encourage me in everything. Now I go to my college and tuitions in Deoghar riding on a nice Scooty given to me by the ashram. I also give tuitions to small kanyas and batuks in English in my spare time. I conclude by saying that I am really blessed that Sri Swamiji came into my life. Please, Sri Swamiji, always shower your grace upon us!



Life of a Graduate Kanya

I graduated as a kanya of Rikhiapeeth in January 2008. After graduating from being a kanya, my association continued with the ashram as a graduate kanya until 2011 and of course is continuing to this day. Now I will share with you about my life after 2011.

I completed my university graduation from SK University, Deoghar College in the year 2012. The same year I got my first job at Bank of India. Luckily, I could still come to ashram occasionally as my posting was not very far from Rikhia. In December 2017 I got married to a Pune based software engineer from Patna, Mr Avinash Sinha.

My life has changed a lot in each of its phases. As I child I was a kanya of Rikhia, next I was as a graduate kanya and then I became an independent girl, working and having a job. Then it was marriage and shifting to Pune in 2018. I continued with my job here in Pune with the same bank. It was very different and new experience for me. New place, new home, new family members and although working in the same bank the job profile was also different with many new responsibilities. However, it did not take much time to settle into the new routine.

In Pune on weekends along with my husband I used to explore Pune and nearby areas. We did a lot of exploring as my husband and I both love travelling and outings as these are so refreshing.

As we all know how 2020 hit the whole world with Covid – 19. In March 2020 like everyone else my family and I too had to go through the lock down. Continuing working and managing without house help made life very hectic for several months. But you know, when you have seen closely and been part of ashram life all of it was somehow manageable. People from all over the world have suffered during this tough time of

Corona. This Corona pandemic goes away and am looking forward to a better world ahead.

It is not that in all these years my life has been a bed of roses, but when you are confident enough that you will come out of tough situations, it certainly makes things easier. I have also gone through many challenges in both my professional and personal life. But it is my faith in Gurudev and God that has saved me from each and every difficulty.

Now the latest phase of my life has started with the birth of my son Shreshta in November 2021. His birth is a blessings to us. We have bought our house flat in Pune and are completely settled here. I am currently enjoying my maternity leave with my family. A new chapter will start when I will join at the office again. So, keeping faith in Guru and God I am moving on, and am sure that every new chapter of life will be more blissful.

Namo Narayan!



My Name is Sita



My name is Sita. I am a graduate kanya of Rikhiapeeth and I have my Guru's grace with me always. I am proud to be one of the Rikhiapeeth kanyas. When I first came to the ashram I was 4 days old. I repeat, 4 days old. I feel blessed that I got my name Sita from Sri Swamiji, right here, at the ashram during Rajsuya Yajna.

Sri Swamiji used to give satsang every Sunday. I never missed even a single one. In the presence of Sri Swamiji, I have conducted many programs, chanted from the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayan, Bhagavad Gita and sung many lively kirtans.

I also did many announcements in English. Sri Swamiji was very happy with this and he would always encourage me. We are very lucky. You know why? Because during every program, Swami Satsangi, and Swami Niranjan dance with us. This would make Sri Swamiji very happy and he would praise us. This always made me very happy.

Swami Satsangi has taught me everything. You can clearly see the result right in front of you. Swami Satsangi does not teach us in a classroom. But she always guides us. We practice the chants only once with her, and just like that, we perform in the program the next day. No one can match our speed and accuracy, and I can challenge you! You know why? Any guesses? It is by the grace of Sri Swamiji and it is because Swami Satsangi has taught us. I used to sit in every satsang. Sometimes not understanding, and at other times perhaps not even listening. It didn't matter.

Sri Swamiji would always ask me to sit beside him. Although at times I did not understand much of the satsang. I now realize why he always called me. It was so that I could get the positive samskaras, and grace.

When I was little, Sri Swamiji asked me to do Shanti Path and announcements. He liked my Shanti Path and announcements very much, and I loved doing it! During Shanti Path, when everyone's eyes were closed, I used to open one eye to sneak a look at Sri Swamiji and we would smile at each other. His expression was priceless like a fathers smiles at his daughter.

Whenever we chant, we don't always understand the meaning of the Vedas, Upanishads or whatever we have been asked to chant. We have never learnt Sanskrit as a language. I don't really know how it's even possible, for us to chant like we do. Many times, we have been called on the day of a program to chant. Sometimes we would never even have heard it before.

I will give you an example. Once during the Navaratri program we had to lead the entire Durga Saptashati, but for some reason my other friends were not able to come. Swami Satsangi called me and said "You have to lead Durga Saptashati". I was so afraid. I said, 'Swamiji, I can't do it'. But Swami Satsangi said "You can do it". I had never chanted it before alone. But on that day I chanted it perfectly and naturally. What do you call this? A miracle or Guru's grace!

I know it's Guru's grace. We are the luckiest children in the world. Believe it or not, it's true. I used to read about Guru's grace in books like the Ramayan and the Mahabharat, but in Rikhia we can all see and feel it so clearly. Swamiji has given endless opportunities to us.

Many of the kanyas have never seen Sri Swamiji. I feel so blessed to have been able to be in his presence, and everything I do, I always offer to him. Sri Swamiji is everything to me. He loves me like a mother, cares for me as a father and guides me in every way. The list is endless.

Swamiji, I have no words to even describe my feelings for you. I love you from the bottom of my heart. Sri Swamiji had said, "A pot cannot hold a river, but a river can hold a pot". Sri Swamiji's heart is like a river, and I am a tiny pot. And I know that I live in Sri Swamiji's heart.

All I can say is thank you, and I love you very much Swamiji.

Thank you Swamiji

Soni Kumari



First of all I want to I thank God for sending me to Rikhiapeeth as a kanya. Sri Swamiji always wanted us to learn some new and good things and for this we have many classes in the ashram like English, Computer, Drama and Yoga. Sri Swamiji always told our parents that you have to give support to uplift kanyas. Sri Swamiji came into my life like a light that removes darkness forever.

Whenever I go out of Rikhiapeeth people ask me where are you from and when I tell them I am from Rikhia, then they speak about Rikhiapeeth and Sri Swamiji. They say that Rikhiapeeth is a very peaceful place.

Sri Swamiji is such a great yogi, and yet he was always ready to do good for others. We are very lucky children that we got a chance to live with Sri Swamiji. I have attended many satsangs of Sri Swamiji and he always spoke about kanyas and batuks. It is his grace that we became kanyas and a medium of Devi Ma. We have been given so much love. Now as I am growing up, I have started to see how great his vision for us is. In every birth I want to become a kanya. I don't have to think of heaven, because now I am living in heaven. If Sri Swamiji did not come to Rikhia, how would we have lived in a world without him? I can't imagine.

Do you know that Sri Swamiji has given us two beautiful gifts? - Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi. When I look at them I can see Sri Swamiji's face in their faces and feel his blessings through them. Thank you Swamiji. I am very lucky that you came in my life and changed it. I love you Swamiji. and I know you also love me very much.



I am a graduate Kanya of Rikhiapeeth and I am proud to be one. I lived in the ashram for 5 years and spent the whole day in the ashram, only in the night I used to go home for sleeping. I have attended almost all satsangs of Sri Swamiji and before the satsang would begin he would give us a chance to sing kirtan. I have seen Sri Swamiji many times while doing karma yoga in the ashram. Being a chanting Kanya I have had the opportunity to chant all the mantras and sing the many kirtans which I had been taught. When I sang kirtans, all the people including Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi could not stop themselves from dancing.

I have learnt so many things here, such as English, computer, chanting mantras, Ramayan, Bhagvad Gita, Vedas and Upanishads. Swami Satsangi has taught us everything. She always looks after us and takes care of us.

I sang kirtans, chanted mantras and spoke English with great confidence in front of thousands of people. Sri Swamiji always said I am his daughter and he dwells in my heart. Because I love him very very much, from the bottom of my heart. All this has become possible only by the grace and blessings of Sri Swamiji.

Nitu Kumari, Rudrapur



My duty in the ashram is managing the prasad distribution during all of the big programs. I love being a part of Sri Swamiji's sankalpa for peace, plenty and prosperity for Rikhia. I have managed the distribution of prasad during Sat Chandi Mahayajna and really enjoy seeing the happy faces of people when they receive their prasad. Every program many, many people receive prasad. I am the lucky one to give it to them. When they smile, I smile too, and Sri Swamiji smiles with us.

Puja Kumari, Amarwa

Bhoj at the Annapurna Kshetram Kanya Kitchen is always very exciting for us! The food that the ashram serves us is from all corners of the world. Now all of us kanyas and batuks have a taste for pizza, pasta, calzone, momo's, fried rice and our favorite chow mein. We now hope that we will learn how to cook them too!

Dolly Kumari, Agiya

During my time as a kanya my duty was chanting. Together with my friends we conducted many programs. I like Rikhiapeeth very much as we learn a lot here.

When Sri Swamiji came to Rikhia I wasn't even born, but I know that Rikhia was different. No one knew about Rikhia. But today everybody knows about Rikhia! I have never travelled outside. But I feel I know about all the countries of the world and their people, because I meet them all here at Rikhiapeeth! The whole world comes to Rikhia. Thank you Sri Swamiji for everything you have given us.

Puja Kumari, Lorhia

When I was small, I felt there was a pure place near my home. That place was Rikhia ashram. I am very happy to be born in Rikhia, and to be called a Kanya of Rikhiapeeth. Swamiji gives everything to us and no one is unhappy here. Everybody feels happy and joyful.

Swami Satyananda could never stand to see another human being suffering. That is why he started to help all of the villagers from Rikhia. He loves everybody and we love him.

Anita Kumari, Rikhia



In the ashram we have had many workshops. I am so happy that I get to learn many new skill here. I have always loved to sew, and now I am also very good at it. Thank you Swamiji for sharing with us this usueful skill which I can use to help my family.

Ruby Kumari, Rudrapur



I love so many things about Rikhiapeeth. One of the things I love, is computer class. I have learnt word, excel, powerpoint and I can do so many things now! Thank you Swamiji!

Rinku Kumari, Nawadhi



“The children are the future of the earth. If they are groomed properly in a free atmosphere, with free expression and good environment, they will create a new earth, a new society, and Rikhiya is an example. You call it religion. I accept it. You call it spirituality, all right. You call it mysticism, occultism, okay. And if you call it joy and recreation, perfect! Everything is here.”

– Swami Satyananda Saraswati



100 YEARS OF SPREADING PEACE, PLENTY AND PROSPERITY
1923 - 2023