

Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

VOLUME V

GURUPRIYA ANANDA GIRI
(Sri Gurupriya Devi)

Translated by Tara Kini



SHREE SHREE ANANDAMAYEE CHARITABLE SOCIETY
CALCUTTA
1990

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Translator's Acknowledgement

By Ma's grace, the fifth volume of Didi's diary has been translated into English. The work continues to be more than rewarding—Ma's life and activities being the most enjoyable *satsang* that one could ever desire.

I would like to thank Sri G. N. Roy Misra for his patient encouragement and advice. I am also very grateful to my husband for his regular and flawless typing of the manuscript.

Jai Ma.

U. Tara Kimi

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Chapter One

PILGRIMAGE TO KAILAS

Sunday, 16 June 1937

At eight a.m. we set out for Kailas with Ma. Others who were with us were to return from Almora. They all wept while leaving Ma. Nagendada who had come from Calcutta, Naren Choudhary and family from Delhi, Hari Ram and Manik from Dehradun all returned. Ma, Bholanath, Jyotish Dada, Swami Akhandananda, Tunu (Prankumar Babu's son), Dasudada and a servant (Keshav Singh) and I set out on the journey. The hill tribe girl Parvati was also with us. She was waiting in Almora to accompany Ma.

At eleven a.m. we reached a forest bungalow in a place called Barchina. The scenic beauty was exquisite. We had refreshments and rested till three p.m. The bungalow was situated at a distance of seven miles from Almora. Before evening we reached a place called Dhoulchira which was another five and a half miles away. We cooked, had dinner and spent the night on the verandah of a Dak bungalow. On Monday June 17, we started at five a.m. and reached Seraghat eleven miles further.

Enormous trees grew on the banks of the river at Seraghat. We cooked beneath one of the trees and finished with the ritual of eating. We then lay down beneath the trees for it was difficult to walk in the hot sun. Ten or twelve coolies were carrying our luggage and walking with us. Five dandis had been hired along with fifteen coolies. Parvati was accompanied by another lady, her small daughter and her brother. They had two coolies with them. The coolies reached the spot, cooked *rotis* for themselves and lay down to rest. Each coolie

carries a maximum load of fifteen seers. A horse was not available for Turu at Almora—a horse will be picked up on the way. As one *dandi* was spoilt, it was replaced by another one at Seraghat.

We could still spot a shop or two here and there, where we purchased rice, *dal*, *ghee*, salt and other essentials. We heard that no such shops would be available as we proceeded further. We had also carried some food items with us. We were told that nothing would be available beyond Garbiyan therefore we had dry fruit, sugar candy, pepper powder, tamarind pickles and other items packed with us. It is necessary to keep such items in stock to go across ice-laden tracks, as also warm clothing, goggles and water-proof material. We had heard that some travellers feel giddy and faint on the way to Garbiyan and so a lady at Almora had prepared a concoction of pepper, dried mango powder and other spices under the belief that it would keep our heads clear. We heard that it was difficult to cook beyond Garbiyan so that wheat flour, broken rice and other cereals have to be soaked in water and drunk—these items are also exorbitantly expensive. All were proceeding joyfully. But Ma, Jyotish Dada and I were not feeling too well. Today Bholanath went on foot for quite some distance; Ma and Akhandananda also walked for some time. Jyotish Dada and I remained seated in the *dandi*. What more shall I pen about the natural beauty of the Himalayan mountains? Many have written detailed descriptions. Probably it is this exquisite scenery that inspires people to venture into undertaking such hazardous journeys. Such surroundings and Ma amidst it all! When Ma walked on the mountain path, I watched her with the marvellous scenery in the background—it all appeared to be a reflection of Ma's beauty which seemed to be spreading its lustre. I am not exaggerating.

I write as my heart experienced the vision. Ma's entire form seemed to be seeped in a surge of great unrestrained *bhava*—her simple, sweet and lovely gaze was enthralling; perhaps that is the reason I was so overwhelmed. I do not understand if Ma's beauty is also getting enhanced.

Ramtaran Babu (advocate) of Calcutta had written, "I would watch Ma's form from a distance in the Birla temple—without any decoration, but what a marvellous beauty she spreads all around her! She is surrounded by well-dressed and ornamented women, but her beauty makes them all look plain. And her laughter—sometimes sweet, sometimes trilling—how enchanting was that laughter! Even today these memories make me forget everything else. Truly, Ma's gait is so lovely—this is not only what devotees observe—anyone who watches Ma even once will comment on this. I sometimes told Ma, "Ma, it seems you have grown taller than before." Ma would laugh and say, "And how do you say that? Do people ever grow taller after they grow old?" Ma's figure seems to be stouter, with considerable height—her countenance appears to glow. I had been saying, "Ma, you have gone down—do put on some weight." To which she had replied, "Alright, you wait and see, I shall surely grow fatter." When she had put on weight, she had declared, "See, I have become fatter!" After some days I had observed that she was not as agile in her movements as she had been before putting on weight, so I had said, "No Ma, don't grow any fatter. Now you must become slightly slimmer." Ma then told somebody, "Now I shall grow thinner for Khukuri had said, 'grow fatter—grow fatter' and therefore I had put on weight. But now she says it is better if I slim down. So now I shall have to become thinner." I knew that she would really become thinner—everything goes according to her will. This is only an example of that fact.

That aside, today we have to eat something more before three p.m. and set out to reach some shelter before nightfall. The sky was overcast with clouds. At three p.m. we set out for a place called Ganai which was seven miles away and reached before dusk. There again we spent the night in a dak bungalow. Ganai had a post office as well. Not everybody is allowed to stay in a dak bungalow, but we had brought along a letter of permission.

On the way our companion from Garbiyan, Parvati, narrated an incident. About five years ago when she was in her village, she dreamt that she was going somewhere with a group of people. She could not see the faces of the people clearly—but she saw Ma as a lady wearing a white sari who appeared to be a 'Mataji'. She also saw Bholanath's face clearly. She had gone to Almora for her education, some time after this dream. Now after five years, having completed her studies, she was returning to her village with us all. Last time when Parvati saw us at Almora, she had taken one look at Bholanath, recollected her dream and decided then and there that she would go with him to Kailas. Ma had also specially requested Parvati to accompany us to Kailas. She had been waiting for a month to travel with us. What a surprising coincidence of events! Last time she had not revealed the occurrence of the dream, but this time she narrated it all. Hearing this Ma smiled and said, "She came to Almora for her education in order to make the dream come true!" How exquisite this place is!

On our way here we met a brahmin householder who asked, "Where is Mataji?" On being shown Ma's dandi he offered flowers and fruits at her feet and did pranama. At night the same brahmin arrived with some milk and vegetables at the bungalow. He was asked, "How did you know that Mataji was

coming?" He replied, "I read in the newspapers that Ma Anandamayī was going on a pilgrimage to Kailas. From that day I have been awaiting her arrival. Today I am blessed to have had the darshan of Ma's feet."

Who knows how many more devotees have been affected in this way? That may be the reason why the Compassionate One has left Bengal and got drawn to this part of the country. Now I observe how these people feel that Ma is their very own, though they are so slightly acquainted with her and call her 'Devī Bhagavatī' and believe in her with simple, staunch faith.

Tuesday, June 18

At six a.m. we started from Ganai for a place called Beninag which is thirteen miles away. Water would be available there so we decided to eat and rest at Beninag. I forgot to write about an incident that occurred on the day before we left Almora. Naren Babu's wife dressed Ma in a silk sari with a red border, combed her hair, garlanded her and had a photograph taken. She then said, "Ma, I have never seen a cloth covering your head—today I shall cover your head." Ma replied, "No, let things go on as they are." Later the Compassionate Mother went to the Shiva temple, covered her head with a cloth and satisfied the desire of her devotee. Enchanted by her form draped thus, devotees fell at her feet and did pranama. Ma remarked, "Why, have you decked up a bride?" Naren Babu exclaimed, "How can Ma ever need to be decked up as a bride?" Ma, the unpredictable, pulled down the veil over her head as newly wedded brides do and the devotees burst into laughter. Naren Babu also took a photograph of Ma on the day of her departure for Kailas.

In the afternoon we reached a place called Rani after a ten mile trek where we stopped for a meal. At three p.m. we set

out for Beninag. The route was very steep and when we reached Beninag around dusk, we did not climb further to the dak bungalow but lay down on the verandah of a school building. That place, where we spent the night, was beautiful. One of our companions had a relative living here who had invited us all to this place. We found there a well equipped market, a good school and dispensary. Many people came for Ma's darshan.

Wednesday, June 19

By five a.m. we left for a place called Thala, situated ten or eleven miles away. The *dandi* bearers were now tiring out within a distance of one or two miles and stopping for rest. Jokingly, Jyotish Dada declared Swami Akhandananda the 'king' of the group and himself the 'heir-apparent'. When the *dandi* bearers resumed the trek and wanted to halt again, we discovered that Swami Akhandananda's *dandi* had hit against a rock and got broken, while a trunk had scraped Jyotish Dada's thigh which was now bleeding and his clothes had also got torn. This matter became the butt of jest. I said, "You had believed yourself to be the doer therefore the king and his heir-apparent are in such a state within the short distance covered!" Ma also laughed. Jyotish Dada joined in the laughter and said, "Don't forget to write about this in your note book!" Truly, when I think about it, there is something worthwhile in this matter.

On proceeding a little further Ma saw an old hill tribes-women walking with a bundle on her head. Ma called out to her saying, "Mataji, where are you going?" Without putting down her bundle the old woman replied, "I'm just going there," and continued on her way. The coolies were tired and they lowered our *dandis*. The old woman looked at Ma and

stopped short—slowly she came near Ma and sat down. Some children were with her and judging from the kind of clothes she wore, she seemed to be quite well off. She also seemed to be intelligent. She began speaking to Ma on various matters. When the coolies lifted the *dandis* and walked away, the old woman stood up saying, "Ma, your words were so charming that I could not go away and had to come and sit near you. We are poor what could I say to you by way of conversation—I sat only to listen to you speaking." Even after the *dandis* had travelled some distance we could spot the old woman gazing fixedly in our direction.

We reached Thala at ten a.m. and camped in the verandah of a school. This place also had a post office and other facilities. At Seraghat we had seen the Sarayu river and now the Ram Ganga was roaring past in Thala. This spot was also enchanting. The sight of the magnificent mountains inspired great thoughts and emotions in us. Whether or not this pilgrimage gives any other kind of merit, the natural beauty of the mountains rouses such lofty, free, steady and calm sentiments in our mind, that they cannot be compared with anything else. How very beautiful the scenery is! All those who have trodden this path will surely vouch for the truth of my statement. It is impossible to express in words, these feelings of the heart. However, we decided to spend the night in Thala.

Thursday, June 20

Early in the morning we left Thala. The day was already warm, though we had to wrap ourselves in blankets at night. The water is also getting cooler and for the last two days we have had very cold water. We proceeded ten miles further and reached Didihat in the afternoon where we halted for rest. On the way we met the Raja of Askola. He and his people had also

heard of Ma's trip to Kailas from the Raja of Dinalpur who was going to Kailas with Swami Jnanananda and others. They declared that they had been looking out for Ma all along the way. After paying obeisance at Ma's feet the Raja gave us a letter addressed to Askote, so that Ma would suffer no inconvenience after she reached there.

After eating our meal we set out for Askote which is seven miles away. We had heard that Askote had a good *dhar-masala* and we had decided to stay there. This morning we had got thoroughly drenched in the rain. The Raja of Askote is said to be related to the Raja of Tehri. These hill tribe kings are very rigid in observing rules. Though the Raja of Tehri had been abroad, he had to maintain Hindu disciplines strictly with regard to diet and other matters, when he was in his home land. The Raja of Askote is also very staunch in observing Hindu rules and regulations. Whenever he goes abroad he takes a brahmin cook from his place. He also reads the scriptures and performs the *puja* regularly. I have also observed this about the Raja of Solan, who eats only with purified apparel on. His expression also reveals an inner purity.

By evening we reached Askote and put up at the *dhar-masala*. On reading the Raja's letter all the people around began filing in, enquiring about our requirements. They had fixed a meal for us. In a short while the Raja's sister, brother, sister-in-law and other ladies arrived for Ma's darshan. We were all feeling braced by the mountain air; Swamiji's *dandi* had been taken for repairs. Another *dandi* could not be obtained on the route and the coolies were very tired. It was beginning to seem difficult to reach Garbiyan. These coolies cannot lift more than twenty five or thirty seers each and their wages are one rupee per day per head.

Friday, June 21

We decided to halt at Askote for our meal. I observed that many people have got news of Ma's journey and have been awaiting her arrival. I jokingly remarked, "Ma, when you have so many children here, why would you sit out in Bengal! May be this is the reason you have been pulled hither." The Raja's courtier's wife and many other ladies arrived with flowers and fruits for Ma's darshan. At ten a.m. the Rani sent men to escort Ma to the palace. There she offered a big variety of dishes to Ma as *bhoga*. I heard that the Raja's brother, who lived at Almora, had written to say that Ma should be welcomed with reverence.

On the request of the Raja and his brother, we had our meal at Askote. All the food came from the palace. After lunch we set out for Balvakot which is ten miles away. On the way the courtier took Ma to his house and welcomed her with great affection. The members of the household earnestly requested Ma to return via this place. The Rani and other citizens of this kingdom expressed great happiness at having been blessed with Ma's darshan. The Rani declared, "Ma, our home has been purified by your visit." The courtier's son who lives at Almora had written home to say, "Ma is leaving for Kailas, welcome her with due respect." These people told us that this was why they were all awaiting Ma's darshan.

It was raining and it was also very warm, especially since we had been walking in the sun which seemed to be very strong. After the river Ram Ganga, we could see the Gauri Ganga which flowed very swiftly. We walked for five miles and then encountered the river Kaili Ganga. The meeting point of the rivers Gauri Ganga and Kaili Ganga is said to be the entrance gate to Kailas. Many have a ceremonial dip here and offer charities. The pathways have been damaged by rain and

the coolies are also tired. For want of water and shopping facilities we have not been halting at dak bungalows. In Askote we saw shops selling cloth and other items. The Rani had given her own *dandi* for Ma's use and Ma was now being carried in it.

It was after dusk when we covered the ten miles to reach Balvakot. However, we took the wrong path and could not climb high enough to find a suitable halting place. We decided to spend the night inside the *dandi* under the trees. Parvati had brought along a tent for Ma, which was put up and some of our luggage was also kept inside it. The Raja had sent a letter to the chief of this village and it was sent to him at the top of the hill. He arrived and said, "You have taken the wrong route—we have a school in our village above, where you could have stayed." It was not possible to climb to the village in the dark. The village chief had some cow's milk purchased for us. Just as we settled down some what comfortably, a violent storm broke out and the rain lashed at the *dandis* making us all, including Ma, wet to some extent. The rain continued unabated through the night. With the break of dawn we continued our journey in the rain. We left all our luggage; it could follow us later, only our five *dandis* moved forward.

We were now finding it difficult to proceed because of the rain. We got some milk in a village on the way (at two seers for a rupee) and drank it. In between the path was very bad and we could not cross the fast flowing river on foot. With great difficulty we sat on the backs of the coolies and crossed the river, while almost seven coolies carried Ma's *dandi* across. We had another river to cross, but by then the rain had abated and the sun was peeping through the clouds. At eleven thirty we reached a dak bungalow in a place called Darchula. We put our wet clothes and blankets out in the sun.

As the coolies had not yet reached with our luggage we could not prepare any food. The hill tribeswoman, Parvati, was trying hard to help out.

The history of Darchula has it that when Vedavyasa descended from Kaiias, he had cooked food in a large vessel perched on these three mountain peaks. Since he had converted the three mountains into a fireplace the spot had acquired the name of Darchula (*chula* means fireplace). The village was fairly big and the roar of the Kali Ganga was loud—it sounded like the sea. We were travelling along the bank of the Kali Ganga. We halted at a small dak bungalow which was surrounded by many lofty mountain peaks. These mountains like unshakeable, immovable *rishis*, seemed to be engrossed for aeons in meditation of the Universal Father. Outward disturbances cannot touch them. Underfoot, the river, too, seems to sing the praises of the Lord as she flows along. A deep emotion surges within because of the atmosphere here.

After the luggage arrived we cooked and ate by three p.m. We had procured some greens and vegetables on the way and we all enjoyed it. As many items are not available here we had to carry a number of things with us. As the path was treacherous we had to be ready for many contingencies and had, therefore, come armed with such necessities. We had had to carry all this from Calcutta to Almora and I had been perplexed for I had not been in touch with packing trunks and cases for a long time. Also, I had not found the need for so many things and was not being able to cope when faced with them. The boys were exhausted, doing the shopping, for whoever remembered a particular item he thought would be needed, it was purchased immediately. Finally it was Ma who knew exactly what we required and instructed us about essential commodities. Later others told us that the same

items would be essential. When I could no longer manage the packing (the day before our departure) Ma sat near me and gave instructions which I followed. In a trice everything was well organized. My Ma is *purna* (complete) and therefore she accomplishes every job so beautifully. Nothing is either discarded or favoured by her. Every job is equally important to her—there is no differentiation between one and the other. Therefore she does perfectly whichever job is presented before her.

After the meal, before sunset, Ma took Jyotish Dada and went for a walk on the banks of the Ganga. On returning she told me, "Khukuni, Ganga took away the *kurta* you had made for me." I remarked, "Say you threw it in the Ganga. You did well." The *bhava* is not new to Ma, I have written many a time about how she has thrown *kurta*s and *dhotis* into the river. On being questioned she declares, "The water took it away," and flashes her sweet smile. Now she had again behaved similarly. She said, "This *kheyala* arose quite some time ago. It arose again now."

At night all the coolies were sent back for they were charging one rupee a day and on reaching Garbiyan where they would just sit around, they would still have to be paid ten annas a day. Their rates are rupee one for travelling and ten annas for waiting. A Rai Sahib here had received letters from Krishna Part of Nainital and the Askole Raja requesting that all arrangements be made perfectly ready for Ma. They were now going to fix new coolies. They said, "The route now is going to be very difficult and these coolies are sturdier." The coolies who had been with us till now were tired and had decided to return the next day.

Tomorrow we have to stay here because the new coolies have to be brought from a distance of seven miles; they will

again weigh our luggage and carry thirty five seers each. We heard that the route from here to Garbiyan is very bad and in comparison the route till now had been very easy. Everyone was enjoying every moment in Ma's company. At midnight we slept. Two incense sticks had been lit near Ma in the evening. An Ustadjif (who knew Ma) had arrived from Dehradun and was to accompany us to Kailas. He sang for some time and played the *bela*.

Almost everyone had gone to sleep and I was on the verge of falling asleep (next to Ma) when Ma called out from underneath the sheet which she had wrapped around herself. "Khukuni, have you fallen asleep?" I sat up instantly and asked, "Why did you call me Ma?" Ma replied, "Is there more incense? Light it and shut the window near me." I did accordingly but Ma remained just as she was, wrapped in a sheet. I lit the incense and asked, "Ma, has someone come?" Without moving, she replied, "Yes." No further conversation ensued, I wrapped myself in my sheet and lay down.

Sunday, 23 June

Ma rose very late and went to the Ganga. When she returned I washed her face and hands and made her drink some milk. We had been able to procure some cow's milk here. Ma again went to the banks of the Ganga with Jyotish Dada. I began cooking while Swarniji sat for his *sadhana*. Around eleven a.m. Ma was offered *bhoga* and then all sat to receive *prasada*. After lunch we all rested. I sat in the verandah. The natural scenery all around roused grave emotions in my heart for here Mother Nature seems to have assumed a very grave form. Though it did not rain, the sky was overcast with clouds.

As I have time today, I shall record an incident that occurred on June 14 in Almora. That night Baba Bholanath got extremely angry with Ma over a trivial matter concerning a cap. When Bholanath got very angry Ma clapped her hands and laughed aloud. Suddenly she went out. As she took Godavari with her she forbade anyone else from going out. Ma has sometimes been observed in such a state. I could not follow her and therefore stood in the doorway tortured by suspense wondering where Ma had gone. The next instant Ma walked in. Bholanath was still growing with anger. Ma stretched her hand in front of his face and began turning her fingers around and laughed loudly. A little later she moved away slightly and told Bholanath, "Quiet, quiet! This madness always!" The mood and form in which she behaved thus cannot be described in words. Tunu (Prankumar Babu's son) was pressing Bholanath's feet. Later he told us that on viewing Ma's fearful form that moment, he was shaking with terror. Dwaraka Prasad's wife (from Bareilly) and her sister-in-law (the wife of the D.P.M.G. of Nagpur) were sitting on a bedding nearby. They also happened to make eye contact with Ma at that moment. The D.P.M.G.'s wife said, "I had heard descriptions of the form of Kall Devit from my father when I was young," (ladies in this part of the country do not, usually, know much about Kall Devit). "I also saw Ma's similar form." Dwaraka Prasad's wife said, "Seeing her form today I realised that Ma is the Universal Mother." The others present did not reveal their individual visions. Each one witnessed a different form.

Once again Ma suddenly went outdoors, forbidding anyone from following her. At eleven p.m. almost everyone had left except Hari Ram. Bholanath had been sitting motionless, very quiet. When Ma went out he also strode on to the road—his anger had not quite abated. Dasu Babu ran out and

caught hold of Bholanath who shook himself free and continued to walk away. Nagen Babu and others followed Bholanath and stopped him. Meanwhile Ma had probably walked around the temple compound. When she saw Bholanath stalk out, she went past him like a streak of lightning, overtaking him. Though we ran after her we could not catch her. However, Bholanath was somehow made to return when all cajoled and pleaded with him. Hari Ram, Swamiji and I went in search of Ma and reached a tall temple building. Hari Ram climbed on to the verandah while I walked on the stairs. Hari Ram found Ma walking to and fro. Seeing him she said, "You people go away from here and tell Bholanath he can return to his place, else I shall set out for Kailas right away. He can follow with you all later on."

"Witnessing Ma's form and hearing her firm command, Hari Ram descended trembling with fear and went into the temple to inform Bholanath. Bholanath was well acquainted with every state and mood that Ma could assume. He had already entered his room, covered himself with his blanket and laid down. We sat quietly. As it was so late in the night and as Ma was still outside, Swamiji stood on the street, unable to leave, yet hesitating to stay—such was his condition because of Ma's orders.

Meanwhile, Ma descended from the temple she was in and came to the courtyard of our temple. She asked Swamiji why he was standing in the street. As we were also shuffling in and out she called me and said, "You know well enough, then why do you come outdoors? Go inside quickly and go to sleep. I shall return whenever I wish." We went in and sat quietly. Those who had seen this form of Ma began to feel numb. They, who had never seen her do anything against Bholanath's orders as far as possible, they, who had seen Ma

always move and behave according to his wishes, they, who had always seen this attitude in her even amidst so many people and situations, they saw this aspect of Ma today and were dumbfounded with fear and astonishment.

A little later Ma entered the room as if nothing had happened—she walked in smilingly and said, "Why are you all seated? Are you unable to sleep?" Again she asked, "What, has Bholanath fallen asleep?" Naren Babu's wife replied, "Yes Ma, Baba has fallen asleep." Ma remarked, "Not at all. Alright, go and see" and she began laughing. Naren Babu's wife is a personification of straightforwardness and so is Naren Babu. He has been like a child in Ma's presence. Ma asked Dwaraka Prasad's wife and her sister-in-law in Hindi, "Why are you also sitting quietly? Will you not sleep?" They replied, "Why will we not sleep Ma." Ma said, "Then go and sleep quickly." They commented, "Ma, you are the Universal Mother" and folding their palms, they did *pranama* at Ma's feet.

Ma seemed to manifest a kind of restlessness—she got up and went inside. I followed her. She went near the beddings of Manik and Tunu and said, "What are you doing?" They awoke and came to Ma. She spoke softly, "How did all this happen..." etc. Ma seemed to be controlling a particular mood and therefore such restlessness was visible externally—this was clearly evident. Tunu, Dwaraka Prasad's wife and her sister-in-law had happened to catch Ma's gaze at the moment that a particularly savage mood was emerging and perhaps that quenched the mood there and then, for she had then controlled herself and walked out—otherwise who knows what more could have occurred! The very next day Bholanath declared that he would not go to Kailas for sure. Hearing him Ma told us, "Wait, I shall pacify my Gopal." She then went to him and spoke in myriad ways to win him over and finally

made him agree to start on the trip. She then came in to drink milk. Mysterious Ma's *lila* is unfathomable.

I shall now continue the narrative of our trip. At three p.m. Ma got up. The river is wide here. The hill-tribes people tie a rope on either shore and hang on it like monkeys to cross the river—we find it frightening to even look at them. Practice makes anything possible—this is an example of the saying. We shall leave this place day after tomorrow. As new coolies join us here, all our luggage has to be reweighed. Each cooly will carry thirty five seers of luggage and they will be paid one rupee per day each. These have been the wages from the beginning.

Here, I would like to mention an incident. We were unpacking and rearranging our luggage sitting in front of Ma as she instructed us to empty out things into tins. As I have mentioned earlier, we were unable to do such things properly without Ma's help. Ma sat near us and made us arrange the things in a big trunk. When it was done, people lifted it and estimated that the trunk weighed more than a maund (forty seers) and therefore we would have to remove some things from it. As Ma left the room she smiled and said, "Alright, thirty five seers is what it has to be, isn't it? You say it is five seers in excess." Then laughing slightly she said, "It may even weigh less!" Hearing this I immediately suggested, "Just touch it, Ma—then it will become lighter." Ma laughed and rejoined, "Your suggestions are also unique! However, there is no need to touch it." Finally when Rai Sahab brought the coolies that evening and had the luggage weighed, that particular trunk was found to weigh exactly thirtyfour and a half seers!

In the evening Ma went to the bank of the Ganga for a walk. Rai Sahib had sent mountain bananas for Ma. He was doing his best to provide conveniences for Ma. Around midnight Ma first went to Jyotish Dada and then to each one of us by turn

and asked, "Did you have any dream last night?" Every one replied in the negative. Then Ma said, "All these days I met no one and then yesterday a man came." Nothing more was said about this.

From now on we were to have six coolies per *dandi* as the path would become more and more treacherous. Nine other coolies were to carry the luggage. A *dandi* was hired for Tunu's use. The people here commented that after the Raja of Mysore, no other person had gone to Kailias with such a big group of people. Rigorous preparations were afoot. All coolies have a chief who is called 'Mate'. Around midnight we went to sleep. Parvati was accompanying us all along—her simple and straightforward behaviour is worthy of mention. Sometimes, like a little girl she pressed Bholanath's hand—whenever she was afraid of something enroute she would hold Bholanath's hand. She must have been twenty five or thirty years old but she had no inhibitions or shyness. As if she was a close friend from years.

Monday, 24 June

At seven a.m. we set out for Khela, ten miles away. The terrain was very rough. Ma got down from her *dandi* and made us also walk with her for the fear of falling off from the *dandi* was too great. Walking beside Ma, I went a little ahead of the others. Ma sat on a rock and began singing. A song in Bengali which meant,

"Return, return to your own home."

Hearing this beautiful refrain from Ma's lips in those quiet surroundings made me feel enchanted. When the others caught up with us, we continued walking.

On the way we met Ruma Devi, who is a famous lady here and is the disciple of Sri Sri Sarada Ma. She felt very happy to

have Ma's darshan. She accompanied us till Khela. We reached Khela around one p.m. The Kail Ganga was roaring beside us, rushing to meet the sea; she danced with abandon and her laughter rippled merrily as she ran to meet the ocean, oblivious of any obstacle or barrier. I felt that as she went along she was teaching humans the manner in which they should run to meet God.

Ruma Devi came to Khela with us. She is a *sannyasinī*. Her nature is very calm. Her abode lies within these folds. She received *diksha* from Sri Sri Sarada Ma a year before the latter left her body. Ruma Devi has her *ashrām* in Khela and she extends much help to pilgrims. The ideal in her life is service. Narayan Swami of Mysore and she live in the same *ashrām*. Narayan Swami has many devotees; many ladies of the Almora Mission are his followers. The hill tribeswomen who went to Almora always made it a point to visit Narayan Swami or Ruma Devi on their way back.

Ruma Devi is about sixty years old. She sat near Ma for a long time and confided in her about events in her life. With the aim of attaining real peace of mind, she expressed the desire to live with Ma for a few days. She spent the night sitting near Ma in our tiny *dharmasala* and repeatedly expressed the joy she was experiencing from Ma's darshan. She said, "I feel the same kind of joy as I think I would feel in the company of my own mother. It seems I have never before experienced such happiness in my life."

Just before sunset two other hill tribeswomen arrived at Khela. They had seen Ma at Almora and had written to her sending her incense sticks. They had returned after passing their matriculation examination and now they were on their way for further training. When they saw Ma they came running to her as if they had known her for years. They fed Ma

with *pappi* which is made by mixing semolina or flour with sugar and spice and then roasting it in ghee. People here carry it along while travelling—we had also brought some with us.

In the evening an *asana* was spread on a rock and Ma sat on it, with all of us around her. Tonight again it was twelve by the time we slept. After praying for Ma's blessing Ruma Devi went to her own bedding.

Tuesday, 25 June

This morning there was a light drizzle. Ruma Devi and the other ladies went to Almora. They had advised, "Ma, if it rains too heavily, do not resume the journey, for the path ahead is very treacherous; the fear of an avalanche is great." We waited till seven a.m. and then set out. The route was very steep but the road was good. To enable the coolies to rest in between, Ma walked for some time and we accompanied her on foot. When the roads turned bad, the *dandis* used to knock against rocks and get damaged. Whenever we met workmen on the way we used to get the *dandis* repaired.

Now the river was no longer flowing near us and we could not hear its happy gurgle. For the past two days the weather was neither warm nor cool. Today we halted at a place called Pangu which was Parvati's husband's native place. We stayed in a school and arrangements were made for cooking in the courtyard. The rice, dal and other provisions were supplied by Parvati's home. We had travelled five miles to Pangu where we had lunch in the afternoon.

By three p.m. we set out again. The weather grew steadily cooler as we travelled further. At four p.m. Ma suddenly got off her *dandi* and began walking. Whenever she alighted we also got off behind her, but this time we did not see her getting down. Dasu Dada told us later that a hill tribesboy came to

Ma with two flowers and read out an invocation as he placed flowers at her feet. Ma commented to Dasu Dada, "Did you see how beautiful the children of this place are?"

Six miles ahead, was a place called Sirkha where we camped in a school for the night. The school was in the village and therefore we were able to procure foodstuffs. Dinner was cooked only for Dasu Dada and Tunu. Today we felt extremely cold. As soon as we reached Sirkha Ma lay down saying, "I shall not eat anything." We also lay down. It began raining and by two thirty a.m. the downpour was so heavy that our blankets got wet as we were lying on the school verandah. We opened our umbrellas and sat up. When the rain abated we lay down again.

Since the last two or three days we had been seeing snow on mountain peaks. The snow glistened in the sunlight; it was an extremely beautiful sight. In between we have been getting raw mangoes and I have been cooking them in dal, but for the past couple of days no raw mangoes have been available. In such cold weather mangoes could hardly be used anyway.

Wednesday, 26 June

In the morning we set out for Dipi which is situated ten or eleven miles away. At nine a.m. we halted at a spot to have some food. All along the way we saw dense forests. The scenery was marvellous and the silence was all pervading.

From Dharchula onwards we had not been able to travel more than ten or twelve miles a day because the route was so steep. Each *dandi* was being carried by six coolies, four lifted the *dandi* and two carried the foodstuffs. In between, the coolies were exchanged so that each one carried the passengers in turn. The path was wet because of the rain. Whenever

we came across any vegetables they were taken along as we would not be able to procure any more as we climbed further. Sugar now cost a rupee for one and a quarter seers.

Around one p.m. we reached Dipti. We found a room that looked like a cowshed, a part of which had been used to house a shop. This room turned out to be the *dharmashala* of this place. We spread a tarpaulin and made arrangements to spend the night there. By the time we cooked a meal it was nearing sundown. We heard that the route would become worse the next day.

Thursday, 27 June

This morning at six a.m. we set out for Malpa seven miles away. The journey turned out to be memorable. None of us mounted the *dandi* because the path was so bad it was difficult for any one to walk. With great difficulty, taking the help of the coolies we somehow reached Malpa by one thirty p.m.

Beautiful waterfalls decorated the path, but we were in no condition to admire them. Our legs were trembling and the sun was blazing overhead. Every moment we feared a fall. Amidst these troubles was a fresh obstacle—a group of sheep carrying loads tramped alongside! In these circumstances the up and down path seemed even more difficult. The path was broken down in places and no maintenance of any kind was visible. We heard that when the Raja of Mysore had travelled this path five years ago it had been repaired by the Government and since then it had not been touched.

Today, as we proceeded, Ma repeatedly told me, "Keep an eye on Baba's *dandi*." Walking ahead she again said, "Khukuni, come with Baba—he has got left behind." I could not understand why she was repeatedly cautioning me in this manner. Every day Baba's *dandi* got left behind anyway.

However a little later Ma's *dandi* collided with a projecting rock and was knocked down but Ma was unhurt. The *dandi* broke. Ma spoke at once, "I knew that one *dandi* would fall today—it was good it passed over me." Then Baba's *dandi* also got knocked down but he was saved.

There were no shops in Malpa and we could not procure any foodstuffs—we only managed to get some firewood. We had brought wheat flour and potatoes from Dipti and it was evening by the time we cooked and ate it. We had to cook outdoors and it was very difficult to get a fire started in the breeze; in addition, we were all exhausted.

The room we got to rest in was more dilapidated than the one in Dipti. To get some shelter from the rain, we had to manage in the room somehow or the other. The place was littered with goat droppings and garbage and the floor was made of mud. We spread the wax cloth and made ready to spend the night. Leeches were rampant in the hills and made it difficult for us to get any sleep. This room was infested with leeches, but we could do nothing for what alternative did we have?

The difficulties of the journey and the hard climb left us with hardly any energy to assist Ma. Jyotish Dada's condition was also very bad. Only Bholanath had arrived in fine fettle. He declared, "I did not find it difficult at all today!" It drizzled at night but we were spared from getting wet. It was midnight by the time we fell asleep. The menace of flies seemed to be increasing with height. Though the nights were cold the days were quite warm.

Friday, 28 June

We set out at nine a.m. and decided to halt at a place called 'Bodhi', seven miles away, for lunch. Today the path was

slightly better than yesterday's but it was undoubtedly terrifying. Our legs seemed to be giving way but we had to keep on. There was no question of halting anywhere.

At certain spots we had to hold on to coolies and walk. *Dandis* could not be used and it was a feat in itself for the coolies to carry our *dandis* along that treacherous route. How terrible the path was! One feared to even tread along it and these coolies casually lifted a *dandi* with a person in it and carried it along.

Around eleven a.m. we reached Bodhi. We took shelter in a school building. Having made a fire beside some rocks, we cooked a meal. This has been our routine for the past few days. After lunch we set out again at three p.m.

Garbiyan was only five miles away and we headed for it. As the path was very bad, we had to often get down from our *dandis*. The path had such large undulations that at times our legs were lifted high above our heads and our heads hung low while at other times our heads soared above as our legs dangled down. However, by Ma's grace we had been traversing the route without any mishaps. Sometimes a *dandi* fell, yet no one was hurt.

Bholanath was doing very well he was not the least bit fatigued. In spite of the difficult terrain that we had crossed, he would sometimes climb to a height, look back and descend to find out about our progress! The hill folk declared, "No one can outdo Baba when it comes to walking!" He was truly enjoying the journey and trekking without tiring. In the past couple of days he had hardly got into his *dandi*. He declared, "I feel inspired!" And so it appeared—I laughed and told him, "Our Lord of Kailas, Bholanath, is going to Kailas in great joy!"

As we neared Garbiyan, the scenic beauty became indescribably beautiful. We had no desire to leave the spot.

Chhayilek is a spot near Garbiyan. It is a plain dotted with little hills. It seemed as though the Infinite had been personified all around it. Flowers of various hues bloomed and some one commented, "This is floral garden designed by the Lord of Kailas." We came across snow which had collected here and there and the weather was now blindingly cold.

A coolie was suddenly bitten by a snake. Two days ago Ma had said, "I can see a black snake on the mountains." This snake was also black. Bholanath and the men with him attended on the coolie earnestly. Ma told the coolie to chew on a certain species of grass. His feet became swollen and he started foaming at the mouth. He was taken up the mountain along with Ma and Bholanath. Till now he has not got any worse.

At Garbiyan we put up at a school as the dak bungalow was full. To proceed from here a big group of people need to go together as the region is infested with dacoits.

As we reached Garbiyan the people who had received prior notice of Ma's arrival came to meet us. Parvati's house was only two and a half miles away and she was to go home. Some *sadhus* arrived to meet Ma. One or two of them were already acquainted with Ma.

The path has now to be covered on horse back or on yak back. We have heard that though the path is not so bad, the atmosphere is so rarefied that it becomes difficult to breathe. This is the reason why the *dandis* will not go any further.

Around one a.m. we slept. A pile of letters were awaiting us here. The post master had had them delivered to us. We have decided to halt here for a couple of days.

Saturday, 29 June

As we did not have to travel today we rose a little late. Some other travellers to Kailas had received news of Ma's

arrival and came to see her. A South Indian engineer was accompanying some *sadhus* from the Ramakrishna Mission to Kailas. He brought a big collection of fruits and offered them at Ma's feet. Swami Jnanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, who had already been to Kailas thrice, was now travelling with Kumar of Dinaipur. Kumar came to meet Ma. The morning was spent thus. A wealthy gentleman called Nandaram Babu, who came to know about Ma's arrival in a letter from his daughter Randra Devi, arrived from Almora. He worshipped Ma and offered flowers and fruits.

All the people conversed about arrangements for our trip to Kailas. The Dinaipur group, the group from South India and another group planned to leave together the day after tomorrow. But they would need fifty five horses which we heard could be procured from the neighbouring jungles. They had still not arrived. We have to take a guide along. Mules and yaks were to carry our luggage and we were to ride on horses. The hire charge per horse was nineteen and a half rupees. Our trip to Kailas and back would take about three weeks. In addition, the horse keeper of each horse was to be paid twelve annas per day. The man accompanying each mule would be paid eight annas a day and the guide would take twenty five rupees and the cost of a horse. We will have to carry all the food we need for we will not get anything on the way till Takalkot. As no shelter is to be found either, we also have to carry tents. The tents are to be hired; four people can sleep in a tent. We also have to arrange tents for the horse keepers. All the luggage will be carried by mules. The preparations to go to such an inaccessible spot are naturally tedious. Sugar and potatoes are very scarce here and are exorbitantly expensive. Kerosene is ten annas a bottle and rice is as costly as two seers a rupee.

In our anxiety over the preparations of the journey, we hardly had time to think about such minor matters as the cost of items. This was indeed a unique kind of journey. As Ma was having a cold we were to stay on for two more days. Yesterday and the day before had been extremely tedious going, except for Bholanath who was progressing merrily. It is said that on this journey even a father is unable to enquire about his son, but Bholanath was not the least bit fatigued. Instead, the manner in which he was ascending and then descending again to encourage the strugglers seemed to reveal the manifestation of some divine power in him—else it would not be possible for him to exert himself to this extent.

We hear that it is possible to go to Kailas and return in eighteen or nineteen days, but some delay is inevitable and therefore we have to prepare ourselves for a three weeks long span. Here wheat flour is sold at four seers for a rupee and ghee at ten chatank for a rupee. The local people are beautifully built. After lunch we all rested. I sat outdoors admiring the scenic beauty all around—Mother Nature seemed to have ornamented Herself. This beauty rouses a lofty emotion in the heart.

There is no shop here but commodities like rice, flour, dal and ghee were all available from the residences of the local people. There are absolutely no flies here, but the village is very dirty. We got woollen footwear here—with soles made of string and the upper part reaching up to the knees. Tibetans and Bhutaneses walk on ice with such footwear. We purchased a pair each of these footwear.

A *brahmachari* from Dehradun, who was known to us, had joined our group in the Indian Dharchula. On reaching here, he developed fever and chest pain because of the intense cold. We were hearing a variety of reports about the treach-

erous path ahead. Swami Jnanananda, who had been to Kailias three or four times, recounted the time he fell off his horse in a faint. We also heard many other terrifying stories. However, whatever Ma wills, will happen. We are with her and have no reason to fear. Ma has caught a cold. We all retired early to bed.

Sunday, 30 June

This morning, Kumar of Dinalpur came to offer *pranama* to Ma. He said, "I am about to traverse a difficult path. I have, therefore, come for your blessings. You are the Primordial Sakti—please give me the strength to complete this pilgrimage safely. I have heard many terrible tales and so I have come to seek your blessings. We shall leave today." Ma laughed and said, "God alone is to be trusted—He does everything. Whatever has to happen will happen. Repeat your *ishta mantra* and think of Him as you go on your journey." Kumar said, "Good, I shall do exactly as you say. I was unable to have your darshan even though I went to Dhaka. Now, I have your darshan in this out of the way place. This is my supreme good fortune. I hope that I shall have the darshan of your feet again." He bowed down before Ma and left. The other *sannyasins* who were with him and Jnanananda Swami came to Ma, did *pranama* and took her blessings.

Today they were all to set out—three or four groups together. Our day of departure was decided upon as Tuesday, the day after tomorrow. Ma's cold was worse. She said, "It will be better if you all keep healthy." We felt Ma's indisposition did not forbode good.

The local people gathered to discuss about arrangements for our journey. The beginningless and endless roar to the Ganga still echoed in our ears. Here the river was called Kaili

Ganga. There was talk of a *dandi* being taken along for Ma, or for anyone who may chance to fall ill. The cost of taking a *dandi* to and fro would be one hundred and eighty rupees. In addition, we would have to take a horse and a tent for the coolies who would carry the *dandi*—this was the tradition here.

After lunch, we rested for some time. I spent the afternoon sitting inside a *dandi* which was out in the open. We have travelled one hundred and thirty six miles from Almora. The coolies who came with us from Dharchula had accompanied us till here and then returned. On our return journey also, Rai Bahadur in Dharchula will send us coolies when we write to him. We will not have to keep the coolies waiting here and pay for them. Food is so expensive here, it is difficult for poor people to survive. It is a different story for the natives—they own fields, gardens, cattle, goats and sheep. It is too expensive for outsiders to come and live here and therefore they return ere long.

Tonight, Parvati's mother came to meet us. She brought rice, dal and wheat flour with her and also a pair of Tibetan snow shoes for Ma. She had taken a 'Tapovan' from the Raja of Askote to construct an *ashram*, which she now wished to give to Ma. (Purna Devi lives there). She had written to the Raja, making this request. Parvati and her mother entreated Ma so earnestly that she agreed to spend one night at their village (the capital of the Raja of Nepal) which was two and a half miles away, before proceeding to Kailias on Wednesday. It was midnight by the time we retired for the night.

Monday, 1 July

This morning the sun made an appearance—this place usually receives very little sunshine. Misty envelopes cause darkness most of the time. Ma went for a walk after washing

her face and hands. Seeing the sunshine, our spirits lifted. I had been feeling very cold ever since we reached this place. But in a little while clouds gathered again, darkness drew on and rain poured incessantly the whole day.

Today many hill folk arrived with *dal*, rice, *ghee* and other items that are necessary for our journey to Kailas. They also had Ma's *darshan*. They brought with them silver plated bowls and other offerings. They do not understand Hindi properly. They stayed for some time, did *pranama* to Ma and left. A local resident named Sandel Singh is to be our guide—the local people are making all the arrangements. The luggage to be loaded on mules had been weighed in the evening. It is a rule that each mule should not carry more than one and a half maunds. We heard that the charges are being gradually hiked—Swarni Jnanananda heard about this. However, all the arrangements have been made and we are to leave tomorrow morning for Parvati's house. In response to their earnest request, we are to spend one night there. On Wednesday morning we are to start for Kailas. Packing in yet another novel manner, it was again late before we retired for the night. We are carrying fuel to last us fifteen days because we shall not get anything on the way. Managing and organizing so much luggage is driving us crazy. What a terrific pilgrimage!

Tuesday, 2 July

We had some refreshments in the morning and set out at ten a.m. for Parvati's house. We had to cross a river. Field surrounded us on all sides. Above us we saw snow capped mountains all around us. The path went up and down. Ma was in a *dandi*, while we walked. By the time we reached Parvati's house we were tired and exhausted. A tent had been put up for us. Somehow, we managed to spread blankets in the

tent and lay down. Parvati's mother came and fed Ma with milk from their home-bred cow and other eatables; she also brought all the requirements for us to cook a meal. By evening we all finished eating. At night it began raining. Rain water began dripping into the tent. We somehow managed to spend the night.

Wednesday, 3 July

Today we are to set out from Parvati's place after meals. We cooked, ate quickly and got ready for the journey. Twenty one horses accompany us. One *dandi* is being taken for Ma. Sandel Singh is our guide. His fee is to be forty five rupees in all. By one thirty p.m. we reweighed all our luggage and set out. Today's path was truly terrible. We were astride horses and feared we would fall any moment. The horses stumbled against stones and rocks and progressed slowly. After some time the path seemed less difficult—it was slightly flat and quite high. The route was full of rocks and pebbles—there was really no well defined path or road. Ice and snow surrounded us and there was absolute silence. As far as we could see, there was not a sign of human life. The place seemed very lonely and calm. We followed, one behind the other on horse back, moving slowly. Ma's *dandi* was left some distance behind. The path was very bad and we had to dismount frequently. We had to cross the Kali Ganga. All around, torrents gushed out of the mountain sides and a swift stream flowed down. In between, we had to cross water falls, ice blocks, as huge as mountains, had formed on the edges of our path. Our bodies were chilled by the cold. When we crossed the Kali Ganga, we left behind the Nepal Raja's kingdom and proceeded further. We reached a place called Kalapani, seven or eight miles away, where four tents were pitched for our use during the

night. We had got wet on the way and it rained throughout the night. Most of us did not eat anything. Dasu and Turu ate some *krichdi* and the servant Keshav Singh also got a share. They finished their meal somehow and lay down. The guide said, "Tomorrow we must go atleast five miles ahead before we camp for a rest. The route is very bad and therefore we must eat before we start."

On all four sides there was nothing but a swiftly foaming river and enormous mountains for company. This was probably the first night we had spent thus. The ground was damp, so we spread the thick dotted rugs that we had brought with us. When we were astride our horses, wearing rain coats, caps and pyjamas like Punjabis, it was still and quiet all around. That was a unique journey! Our apparel was novel, the scenery was novel and our thoughts were novel too!

Thursday, 4 July

The morning was spent in cooking and eating. Though we had to cover only five miles, the route was so bad that we had to set out early. By eleven we were off, but it began to rain. However, what could be done—there was no other solution, so we wore suitable clothing, got on to our horses and proceeded in the rain. Ma was in the *dandi*. The route was bad enough to begin with, but with the rain it was even worse. We had to take the help of the grooms most of the time. In short, there was no longer any path to speak of. We heard that people would let loose goats which would lead them through these mountains. The situation did seem to be so! The hill folk were showing us the route to be taken; in between, we had to cross torrential water falls. In this lovely place, traders sit here and there with sheep and goats in tents. The downpour increased. The mountain residents were saying that they had

never seen such torrential rain before. We have observed that Ma is always accompanied by storms and rains during her travels. Whenever she starts on a journey, rains follow inevitably. In the bitter cold we were now swimming in water. Our bodies were numb and our feet were almost lifeless. Somehow, we managed to hold on to the rains and sit like blocks of wood. Such a state is difficult to describe; it can only be understood by those who have experienced it.

By one thirty p.m. we reached a place at the foothills of a mountain and discovered that to be the site of our camp for the night. All our luggage was drenched. Somehow, the guide managed to get his men to put up three or four tents for us. Parvat Devi, who had accompanied us, took the help of the grooms and lit a fire with the wood that we had with us in a small ramshacked goat pen which consisted of a rough pile of broken stones and rocks. Some of us went and sat around that fire and felt as if we had been granted a new lease of life. We did not even bother to see where we were sitting. After some time we realised that the pen was filled with the droppings of goats and sheep. The door through this pen was a small opening through which we had to squeeze in with bent head. In any other place, we would have found it impossible to enter such a room but in that freezing cold, for the sake of the warmth of the little fire, I sat there till evening. The rain did not let up. We took some fire into the tent and dried the clothes that Ma, Bholanath, Jyotish Dada and Swarniji were wearing. But no wood was available there and it was difficult to light a fire with the ice and water all around. Water was dripping into the fire that we had lit. We cooked some food, wrapped ourselves in blankets and lay down. Yet our bodies would not get warm. What an unusual journey! Since Jyotish Dada and father were suffering from upset

stomachs again. We boiled some beaten rice for them to eat. Thus we spent yet another night in the mountains. The name of the place is Dobral. So we started our journey on the next day. It was a very long and tiring journey. We reached Dobral on Friday, 5 July. We had to cross the Lipu Pass (that is, the Lipu Pass). Today we have to cross the Lipu Pass (that is, the Lipu Pass). We have been hearing right from the start that this is the most difficult part of this journey. We have to climb very high. We are already at a height of sixteen thousand feet and Lipu Pass is at a height of eighteen or nineteen thousand feet. The descent from there is also perilous. The fear of slipping on ice haunts every step. If the ice is not thick enough, it may give way in such a place. It is practically impossible to proceed in the rain. The ground becomes very slippery. We had to stop for some time in the morning. The sky was slightly clear and the grooms got the horses ready to start immediately. But when it started raining, we decided to halt for the day and set up camp where we were. The guide did not have the confidence to set out in wet weather. We were to have set out in the morning and reached Takalok by the evening. Therefore, some food had been cooked the previous evening so that we could eat on the way without halting. Now we ate the same food in the afternoon. Yonish Dada had loose motions. Some had some diarrhoea. Hards had feet numb with cold and it is difficult to write. My fingers refuse to straighten out. The downpour continues incessantly. The Indian Brahmins and from Dehradun has been travelling with us. He had nothing with him and it would have been impossible for him to travel along. It has been decided that we will start tomorrow morning if the weather clears up. We had to leave at the end of the day. Takalok is an important place. We have been told that we can procure many necessities there. The coolies in Dehradun

were drowsy but the coolies here wear trousers and coats. It is impossible to walk around without that. At three p.m. some rays of sunshine broke through the clouds. We put our wet clothing out to dry. In a short while, there was darkness again. But the bright spell of sunshine warmed our bodies. Hands and feet. We even strolled outside for a few minutes and then hastened to our tents. Unable to bear the cold, we were so. Tomorrow we have to cross the Lipu Pass. We hear that some people are prone to vomit and therefore we have to take necessary precautions. As it was likely to get colder, we wore warm trousers and coats and got ready. We are to leave early in the morning for. otherwise we will not make it to Takalok. Ma told everyone what to keep handy in case of giddiness or breathlessness. We were already experiencing some breathlessness. Though the place was flat like a field, we used to pant. By the time we walked even a little distance we were getting frozen by the cold but there was no way in which we could light a fire for we had no wood. The coolies were fetching damp sticks from a great distance to cook food. Ma had said, "If expense is not a problem then a hot bag and a camp cot should be taken along." Dry fruit has to be carried with us. If biscuits are to be eaten, they should also be kept handy. Some coolies will be sent with us. We were to start in the evening. On 5 July, we started our journey. It was a very long and tiring journey. We reached Dobral on Saturday, 6 July. We had to cross the Lipu Pass (that is, the Lipu Pass). Today we have to cross the Lipu Pass (that is, the Lipu Pass). We have been hearing right from the start that this is the most difficult part of this journey. We have to climb very high. We are already at a height of sixteen thousand feet and Lipu Pass is at a height of eighteen or nineteen thousand feet. The descent from there is also perilous. The fear of slipping on ice haunts every step. If the ice is not thick enough, it may give way in such a place. It is practically impossible to proceed in the rain. The ground becomes very slippery. We had to stop for some time in the morning. The sky was slightly clear and the grooms got the horses ready to start immediately. But when it started raining, we decided to halt for the day and set up camp where we were. The guide did not have the confidence to set out in wet weather. We were to have set out in the morning and reached Takalok by the evening. Therefore, some food had been cooked the previous evening so that we could eat on the way without halting. Now we ate the same food in the afternoon. Yonish Dada had loose motions. Some had some diarrhoea. Hards had feet numb with cold and it is difficult to write. My fingers refuse to straighten out. The downpour continues incessantly. The Indian Brahmins and from Dehradun has been travelling with us. He had nothing with him and it would have been impossible for him to travel along. It has been decided that we will start tomorrow morning if the weather clears up. We had to leave at the end of the day. Takalok is an important place. We have been told that we can procure many necessities there. The coolies in Dehradun

distance intended today, the rest of the journey would be nothing to worry about.

Takalkot is about ten miles away. The sight that met our eyes when we reached Lipu was unforgettable! At first we had to traverse a steep climb; even the very remembrance of the way the horses negotiated that route is frightening. Then we saw snow around us here and there. A little further, there seemed to be a sea of ice on either side with the black mountain in between. The mountain was also dotted with snow. It seemed as if we were atop a bridge over the sea. Then we started the descent. We all had to walk because the route was across ice and snow. We could walk only with the help of the coolies because our feet slipped with every step. At that time it felt as if we had stepped into a sea of ice. Each one of us slipped and fell, sometimes to great depths, but no one was hurt as we only fell on soft snow. It was very difficult to manage to keep the layers of clothing on amidst all this. Our hands were numb and our fingers were crooked. We were sucking lime pickle and preparation of black pepper. I put some of these into Ma's mouth. I was unaware of which hand I was using to feed Ma—such was my condition! But honestly, even though the journey was so perilous, we did not experience any serious trouble. The exquisite scenery all around us in our present condition gave rise to a feeling of deep bliss within. Dasu Babu was so overwhelmed with joy that he said, "Ma! Ma!" and burst into tears. Bholanath did not eat anything saying that he would eat only after we reached Takalkot. He was walking with obvious relish. Swarniji had been left slightly behind. Ma said, "You and Jyotish look after Swarniji." She then returned and fetched him, saying, "I think there is no need to worry about anyone. Having said 'Jai Ma Tanini' I am free of all anxiety. I have all the confidence in the world. 'In fact

when we had descended she patted me on the back joyfully and I could see tears in her eyes as she said, 'I understand that Tara Ma is looking after us all!' That joy had brought tears to her eyes.

By the grace of Ma and Bholanath we were travelling on this perilous path with such joy. After walking for about a mile, we rode our horses again, while Ma got into the *dandi*. We proceeded after eating some food. We crossed the mountainous path in different ways. Finally we had to cross flat ground. We saw the milk-hued mountains with all kinds of plants and trees and viewed the scenic beauty around us as we trudged along. The sights were marvellous. By evening we reached Takalkot. Our guide went ahead and pitched our tents. As we reached Takalkot, some of the residents came and stood with such looks on their faces that we felt afraid. Later we came to know that they often loot people and that we would have to be very careful from now on. On the way we had caught sight of many caves in the mountains and heard that earlier *sadhus* inhabited these caves. From quite a distance we had been able to spot the residence of the ruler of this province and the temples of the Lamas. There were also some houses and shops. Atop every house small pieces of cloth strung up with rope fluttered. Similar pieces of cloth decorated the top of the ruler's residence and the temples. We saw many fields irrigated by canals; rainfall here is irregular.

The dacoit menace starts here. Our guide had brought a gun with him. Two *sarmyas* from Peshwar came to meet Ma. They were disciples of the Lamas here. Before reaching Garbiyan we had met three south India *sadhus*. I cannot recollect their names. We slept after taking the necessary precautions. The guide said, "Tomorrow we must finish eating

early and set out for we have to go another half mile before we camp. No one here knows how to gauge a mile. The camp sites are located by rough estimation of the distance between them. At each site these people go and pitch tents as well as siting holes at night and reflecting over the day's journey. It all seems like a dream. The travels of the herds were forgotten in the beauty of the scenery. What a sight it was! It is not possible to describe it in words. Viewing the variety of trees in the mountains, Ma exclaimed, "Look! Look! The mountains seem to be clothed in tiger skins. How beautiful the steeds and goats are! Their hair stretches from their backs to their feet. Their large curved horns look so graceful!" The hair of these animals is used to make clothes, sacks, blankets and such other items. The local people brought these skins and we purchased some of them. As soon as we reached the camp site the horses were let loose and took some of the grass that was left over from the day's journey.

Sunday, 7 July We finished eating and set out for Rangjung at eleven a.m. We finished eating and set out for Rangjung which is nearly ten miles away. From the time we reached Takalkot to the time we left it was witnessing an interesting spectacle. The people of Takalkot were staring at Ma from all around. She was constantly surrounded by them. They could not understand a word of what she spoke. Yet they gathered around her in greater and greater numbers. At the time of our departure a big crowd of men and women stood surrounding Ma's dandi. Some started touching Ma's feet. Ma caught hold of their fingers. They smiled happily. These people deal in animal hair in Tibet. They brought many kinds of articles for us to see.

We reached Rangjung by six p.m. We saw many temples on the way. The stones that were used in their construction

had inscriptions carved on them which the horse grooms described as *Gmkeru* letters. Today's path was not a good one. The pilgrages of temples were decorated with sheep and goat skins, which were also carved. Today's path was not going to be long, but the fear of dacoits was great, so we walked close together. The path was completely deserted here and there, we could discern herds of yaks, sheep and goats. How many mountains we have crossed! Neither does this path seem to end, nor do the mountains. We had no idea of where and how we were being taken. There were no trees or shrubs on the path but we could see fields, roads and trees again. The mountain dwellers, however, knew this path. We eventually found ourselves walking through an enormous valley with no signs of any pathway anywhere. There were hardly any trees, not a plantation on the mountain sides. Yet it appeared as if someone had decorated the mountains with a variety of colours. The snow capped peaks enhanced the beauty of the mountains further. While treading this path one felt as if one was going on a limitless, endless journey. Perhaps one that would never come to a finish. The guide guessed the distance we had covered, and pitched the tents before dark. We then made arrangements to look after our belongings and settle down for a while. Then again we would break our ropes (tents) and set off. We had become just like nomads. As father was experiencing some breathing trouble today, Ma decided that he should ride the dandi tomorrow, while she would ride a horse. We finished eating as quick as we could and lay down to rest.

Monday, 8 July We finished our meals and set out. Ma rode a horse while father sat in the dandi. At one spot Ma's

horse went down to the ground; Ma slipped but was not hurt. By two p.m. we reached a spot called Gauri Pahad. It is the custom to camp wherever there is a good supply of grass and water. Today many of us developed breathing trouble, the cold was also excessive. We managed to spend the night somehow or the other. On the way we saw a star during the day time, but I could not find out whether Jyotish Dada spotted it or not. I have heard that those who do not see that star do live for long in this world.

Tuesday, 9 July

We drank hot tea and set out. We were accompanied by some people. Today after covering a distance of ten miles we are to reach Manasarovar. The guide had warned us about dacoits on this route. As Swarniji was having great difficulty in breathing, Ma rode a horse and made him sit in the *dandi* again. Last night I also found it difficult to breathe. By three a.m. it became very difficult to exhale. It grew worse and the cold was also unbearable in spite of wrapping on innumerable warm clothes. By eight thirty a.m. we set out. Even before this we had encountered dacoits on this route but by Ma's grace nothing untoward had happened. Our men were carrying guns and other arms. Today as we went ahead we met two armed men. They began walking by our side with their right sleeved rolled up—this is supposed to be a sign of their being ready to use their arms. A little further we saw two more men standing in the mountains. The men who were walking beside us signalled to them and they descended and sat by the path we were traversing. Our guide was heavily armed. He broke into a gallop and went right into their midst where he sat conversing with them. After all our horses and *dandi* had crossed the spot where the men were seated, our

guide galloped towards us, smiling, and joined us. Obviously he had managed to talk the dacoits into sparing us.

The *dandi* moved slowly; we waited every now and then for it to catch up with us. The guide was moving very cautiously. A little further, in that extremely desolated spot, two more men were standing and waiting. Not a plant or tree broke the contours of the vast expanse around us—only mountains could be seen as far as our vision stretched, nothing else. We went a little further and found a group of people in a tent. The guide again galloped ahead and went up to them. After we had gone past the group, he joined us again. We heard that the tent was the den of dacoits who lived there with herds of goats and sheep. Thus did we continue to tread this path with the constant fear of dacoits. But as we sighted the Manasarovar lake, we all totally forgot all our fears. What a marvellous sight—the enormous lake with a multi-coloured sky in the background! The lake looked like a duplicate of the sky spread on the ground.

Gazing at the Manasarovar we walked quite a distance. At some spots we encountered very steep ascents and descents. The rather unusual sight of Ma riding a horse was unbearable to us, but in view of Swarniji's condition Ma refused to travel in the *dandi*. The route was terrible and there seemed to be no end to our troubles. Ma travelled ahead smiling. We had come far ahead leaving the *dandi* way behind. Suddenly, in that desolate spot Ma descended from her horse. Bholanath, Jyotish Dada and I were near Ma. She told us, "You three proceed and halt wherever the tents are pitched. I shall wait here for the *dandi*." Tunu and Dasu Dada had also not reached.

We were loathe to leave Ma alone in such a deserted spot but she reiterated gravely, "Listen to what I say, you proceed." Bholanath protested a couple of times but finally

went ahead with Bhaji towards Manasarovar. Similarly, it also went forward for quite a distance till it finally reached the shore of Manasarovar where Parvati Devi and the guide were in the process of pitching their tents. Having reached around two p.m. we all sighted the tents. The other four groups had split into three parties. We sat down on the shores of Manasarovar awaiting the arrival of Ma and the others. The sun had set and the stars of every possible colour were shimmering in the waters of the Manasarovar. Finding some time on my hands, I moved away from the shore of the lake to the spot where our tents had been pitched and sat down to write. What a spot this is! It is just as beautiful as it is dangerous! All around it stand the magnificent mountain ranges decorated in different colours and at our feet is the vast lake. The wind blew gently. It was so cold that though the sun had emerged we hardly felt the warmth of sunshine. The guide was saying, "By Ma's grace we have reached here safe and sound. Sometimes the wind blows so strongly here that a person cannot even stand erect." Kailas is now five days away. The peak of the Kailas mountain is radiant with a temple-like structure of ice which glisters like silver. The people with us started calling out "Kailas! Puri Kailas!" on spotting the peak. Where have we reached! seeing these sights and musing over them we were filled with indescribable joy. It was about 10 p.m. when we started. After all other arrangements are made, the cooking will start. For a few days we have not been getting fire wood. But on this mountain are a few thorny bushes. The goats have gathered the dry dung of yaks with which a fire has been lit for cooking. Nothing else is available as fuel. These plants are not quite dry. Because of the breeze this is not possible to light a stove. All of us are finding it difficult to breathe and we have to make campfire to overcome the problem. On 22/09/2007,

As Ma and Ma had asked us to take a pair of woollen trousers each, and we had obeyed. Ma had also ordered woollen kurtas from Bareilly. Now I realize that if we had depended only on the stock of woollens that we had brought from Goulstan and not brought the extra woollens, we may have been in a very bad situation. We would have been able to survive if we could have also realize how important are all the other items, the campfire, which Ma had us bring with us. It was only after reaching this place that I came to know that what big campfire gases the problem of breathlessness. There is no doubt that Ma is absolutely perfect and all-powerful. What I don't try to forget about her greatness is her attention with these young mothers. Still, enjoying writing about them and I am doing so, I am sure you will get a lot of pleasure. The tails of the yaks that we have been seeing on the way are very beautiful. According to a superstition in this part of the world, if you ride a yak, you face some misfortune; on the other, therefore we came on horseback. All the horses and their riders remain in the forests and their owners fetch them whenever necessary. Sitting in that absolutely quiet spot I was overawed by the scenic setting of Mother Nature. A little later Ma and the others arrived. We all had a dip in the water and some of the Manasarovar Ma touched the water and sprinkled some of it on a few dogs that were near the camp. Ma and Ma saw that we were before, Bholanata bathed, the guide Ma and I spoke to her. Parvati took a kirta from Bholanath as a memento. The tent Ma was sitting on the banks of the lake, absorbed in some mood. Then Bhaji joined Ma. When Ma came back to the tent, Ma was busy cooking. The wind was strong and it was indescribably difficult to cook on a fire with raw sticks. With much trouble, some sort of a meal was consumed at night. By ten p.m. we had all retired for the night. Later I heard that in

the evening when Ma had gone and sat by the lake it was absolutely still—there was not a single ripple on the surface of the lake.

Near this lake, at the foot of the Kailas mountain, we could see yet another lake which the guide informed us was called 'Rakshas Tal'. It was named after the Rakshasa King Ravana who had performed penance there. I also heard that the King of this land does not award punishment to the dacoits because dacoity is their way of life. It is said that the King had told them, "Whether it is by force or by any other means, look after your needs." Therefore, even though these dacoits commit crimes on travellers they get away unpunished. The grooms also told us that they wear dark glasses so that the dacoits cannot notice the fear on their faces—if they do, the dacoits harass them even more. So they hide their eyes and pretend to walk past the dacoits nonchalantly. They also said, "These dacoits first ask for food; if the travellers don't oblige, the dacoits use their weapons."

We saw many charavak birds around the lake as well as other varieties of birds that we had never seen before. Today we travelled about ten miles.

Wednesday, July 10

There was talk of finishing our meal before starting. The wind was comparatively calm in the morning and that would make the trek easier. Yet the cold was intense and walking out would still be difficult. However, we finished cooking quickly, ate a little and set out by twelve noon. I have already mentioned that no one here has any accurate estimate of a mile and we travel between places by roughly gauging the distance and camping at some suitable spot on the way. Today again, around six thirty p.m. we pitched tents at a place called Jugumfa.

We must have walked about eight miles today. We walked a long distance along the bank of Manasarovar, crossed a mountain and entered a valley. We saw a cave with lamas in it and a temple. The cave was quite big and very clean. We saw a statue of Buddha and many other statues which had been installed there. Many scriptures were laid out and they were being preserved with great care. A lamp with ghee was burning. In front of the idols, many small bowls of water had been kept. A new priest is appointed every three years and all the items in the temple are handed over to the new priest. We also saw a number of musical instruments.

Some people perambulate around the Manasarovar, which is a distance of about sixty miles. This takes at least five or six days and we did not have the courage to attempt it. At a particular spot, not far from the lake, is a hot spring. Now we are only two days away from Kailas. One mountain merges into the next and the highest peak is Mount Kailas. It was evening by the time we pitched tents and unpacked our luggage.

It was bitterly cold. Neither could we procure any wood, nor could we light the stove because of the wind. The lanterns were all spoilt. We just ate some maize-barley flour and went to sleep. Everyone was in such a state of exhaustion that Ma and Bholanath were served wheat flour instead of the maize-barley flour, because no one had the strength to even see which was which. All of us were fagged out, especially Swarnji who was suffering from breathlessness. We all felt that Ma was being put to a lot of trouble riding on horseback but there was no other solution. We just had to put up with everything and anything—we were in such a state!

We reached the peak of the mountain and felt that gardens had been laid out on all sides. Other than the earlier

mentioned thorny bushes there were no other plants. But the bushes were laden with tiny, beautiful inflorescences. The bushes were so exquisitely ornamented that I started as if some gardener had pruned and maintained them. They were so neatly and nicely arranged. We were seeing sights and forms which are beyond my ability to describe. The path has undoubtedly been difficult and hazardous.

Thursday, 11 July

It was dazzling light from morning. Normally it hardly ever rains here. The rain made our progress even more difficult in addition to increasing the severity of the cold which rendered us all numb. The coolies drink alcohol and it is always also getting overpowered. With the cold and could not move fast, even when they were called. Because of this, cooking and eating became nearly impossible.

We were supposed to set out this morning but the cold seemed to have paralysed us all. It was decided that we should somehow manage a meal before we set out. By eleven thirty we ate and got ready. The wind was very chilly as we began our trek through an enormous field with almost difficulty. We could not see any division in the field. By six p.m. we had pitched tents at the foot of the Kalias mountain. The beauty of this mountain has to be seen to be known. It looked like a huge silver temple covered with snow. The surrounding mountains stood like the walls of the temple. We remarked, "See that, the mountain has looked around like the Kali Gauri, peema." The sight was marvellous. The name of the place was Boond and we spent the night there secure and on

Friday, 12 July

We are to trek the series today and cross Dhankena, which is quite a good place with some shops and other

facilities. We trekked east and set out. A little distance away from the flat ground, some people could be seen with their yaks and sheep. Our paramutation starts today. By twelve noon we had finished eating and set out. We stopped for tea at Dhankena on the way. The King of Shitan owns a residence here. This place may be a part of his kingdom.

Around four p.m. we pitched camp in a spot amid the mountains. We have trekked about six or seven miles. Today everyone is physically exhausted, mainly because of the difficulty in breathing. We felt we might die of cold. No one is in a state to even look at any one else. Even the slightest movement caused us to pant so much that we felt our breathing might stop suddenly. As we could not find firewood, we could not light a fire and it seemed impossible to keep out the cold with our clothes. My hand is so numb I can hardly write. It is hard to remember that we are now paramulating the Kalias mountain. Such is the state of the body. The cold is making all of us feebleless.

I must mention an incident. A black dog has been following us from Takakot. When Ma's horse set out, it started trotting alongside. Whenever we rested on the way, the dog sat near Ma. One day Ma stroked its head and fondled it. The dog ran behind Ma's horse. Whose dog was it? We never came to know, but it certainly did not appear to belong to this region. Today we encountered snowfall three or four times. It has been snowing every now and then. The mountain, sibil's live in tents with their yaks and sheep. They have huge, fierce dogs. Whenever we walked past the tents, the people emerged out and gazed at us in astonishment. Their costumes seemed to be a mixture of Nepali, Tibetan and Ghurani.

I have lost count of the number of mountains and rivers we have crossed. The beauty of the landscape is limitless. We

could not follow a word of the conversation between our helpers and the locals of this place. The manner of worship of these people is also unique. The beggars here raise a thumb to beg for alms. The higher we climb the more difficult the path becomes. Swamiji's breathing trouble has become acute. By Ma's grace we are still managing to advance somehow or the other. Jyotish Dada is extremely fatigued, riding on horseback, but what can be done? We are trekking on and on. Tomorrow again we have to advance further before halting. The day after, we are supposed to reach Gaurikunda which is at a height of twenty two thousand feet. A very steep climb of one or two miles has to be negotiated. I know not how we are going to reach our destination. Our faith rests in Ma alone.

Saturday, 13 July

The name of the place is Sarson. By twelve noon we set out. For the past few days we have been moving through enormous plains with some ups and downs. By four p.m. we camped at another spot. We could see the peaks of the Kailas mountain on three sides. At one place Sholanath indicated a rock which seemed like a pair of statues. He had halted while walking to show us the rock. He showed us whatever he saw in his visionary mood: he also showed us the foot print of Siva—but all this is a question of faith, a matter of one's bhava. At many places we saw piles of rocks embedded in the ground with some inscriptions carved on them which we were told were the Omkar and other great mystical sayings.

We could hear a waterfall some distance away from our camp. Here again we could not get firewood and we lit a fire with dried dung. We also managed to light a stove. In between it was snowing. A little further we came across a

cave. Legend has it that Parvati Devi had fetched some incense of Kailas and the ash of sacrificial fire from this cave. After leaving Garbiyan we had not been able to get any milk. Day before yesterday we had got some yak milk and butter. Tomorrow we should reach Gaurikunda.

This route is also supposed to be very bad. Tomorrow we may spend almost the whole day on horseback. The *dandi* cannot be carried any further and so Swamiji will have to travel on horseback. Seeing his condition people suggested that he and I should be left behind. But Bholanath coaxed everyone into agreeing to let us all proceed together. What ever has to happen will happen. Ma again distributed camphor and dried fruit to overcome breathlessness and also some other items to tide over the difficulties on the way. Tomorrow we may not be able to find any place suitable for cooking and so we cooked something for the next day as well. We felt as if we were preparing for a great war! The wind was strong. We wrapped ourselves in blankets and retired for the night.

Akhandananda Swamiji had a beautiful dream in the night. He saw a group of dark, naked ladies approaching him. He told one of them, "I am in poor health... now I shall not be able to complete the perambulation of the Kailas mountain." The dark lady pointed to a fair lady in front of the group and said, "Tell her." Swamiji saw a radiant, fair lady in front of him. He asked, "Ma, will I not be able to make it?" The fair lady said nothing.

Sunday, 14 July

We had to set out in the morning. It has been decided that Swamiji would accompany us. At that juncture he remembered his dream. As we were going for Gaurikunda darshan, no one ate anything, but we carried hot tea with us. We got

glimpses of sunshine in between bouts of snow. We set out by seven thirty a.m.

As per Ma's instructions, the horses were arranged in a single file. Last night hardly anyone slept because of the cold. We had put on every piece of warm clothing that we had, yet our bodies felt damp and cold. It has been bad enough here and today we shall climb even higher! As we set out for Gaurikunda which is situated at a height of twentytwo thousand feet, Ma showed us, "Look, all around there seems to be a circular line. This is called a *dharma*sabha. In my childhood, the mother of this body had told me that this is an auspicious sign." A few days ago the guide had halted his horse during midday to show us stars and the moon shining in the sky, saying, "It is an auspicious sign to be able to sight the sun, moon and stars simultaneously in the sky!"

We moved ahead—as there was not much wind the trek was not troublesome, yet the cold was so intense that we were freezing numb. Each of us was wearing two or three woollen trousers, sweaters, a coat and an overcoat—woollen socks, shoes, woollen caps, gloves—we lacked neither clothing nor equipment, yet we were shivering with cold; this route is truly terrible. The horses were stumbling at every step against rocks and stones.

Proceeding thus for about three miles we reached Gaurikunda. Whatever rituals have to be performed are done here, there is no temple or idol elsewhere. The religious ceremony at the culmination of this pilgrimage is the *parambulation* of the Kailas mountain. Today we complete this *pradakshina*. Gaurikunda is an icy pond surrounded by snow-capped peaks. The kunda thus seems to be surrounded by icy walls. We have been walking through snow, for though there was not much snow on the path, we were surrounded by

snow covered mountains. It is customary to offer a coloured cloth at a spot just above the kunda. All the items had been brought. We alighted at Gaunikunda with great difficulty. The water was frozen hard except for pools of water near the banks with ice floating in it. These pieces of ice had to be pushed aside while dipping in the waters of this kunda. Bholanath, Dasu Dada and the Indian *Brahmachari* in our group bathed in the water. The others only sprinkled the holy water on their heads. We spent sometime there. Ma also bathed her head, and drank some of the water. She then had dry fruits offered, incense lit and *arati* performed. A big lock of Bholanath's hair was cut and dropped into Gaurikunda.

A glimpse of sunshine appeared inspite of the continuous snowfall. So there was not much of a wind and this lessened our troubles. But Swamiji continued to suffer from breathlessness. He seemed to be in the condition of *kumbhaka* (the holding of breath during *pranayama*) all the time and he sat thus, behind Ma. Jyotish Dada was also in the same state. From morning he had been feeling uncomfortable in the chest. As he feared that his ailment would prevent everyone else from proceeding further, he kept quiet about it. He told us about this only on the way back. It is only because of Ma's grace and Bholanath's enthusiasm that we have all been able to reach Gaurikunda and perform all the religious rituals. Fruit, *halva* and dried fruit were distributed to everyone. There was no chance of getting any other foodstuff at the spot.

Around twelve thirty p.m. we departed on our return journey from Gaurikunda. Now the descent became as terrible as the ascent. Most of the time, we could hardly keep ourselves on horseback. The path by which we descended on horseback was terrifying even to look at. The descent lasted over a distance of about two miles. Ma was accompanied by

two people. Around two thirty p.m. we reached even ground and found ourselves near a spring. We rested for some time, drank some water and set out again.

We travelled on plain ground for four or five miles more and reached a waterfall by sunset and pitched camp. As we feared that the dandi would get left far behind the horses, Swarniji was also made to ride a horse.

During our perambulation of the mountain, we came across two men who were perambulating the mountain by prostrating full length on the ground. When they asked us for something, we gave them some money. We heard that such a perambulation, in which after each prostration the next prostration is begun where the head touch the ground last, takes fifteen days to complete. We were astonished to see such a feat being accomplished in such an inaccessible spot. The men had wrapped thick cloth around their knees and chest. We were stunned to see such devotion.

Meanwhile our guides came and told us that they had themselves declared that they were dacoit gang leaders to deceive the local people. We were again surprised to hear this! In the tent it was decided that Jyotish Dada would travel in the dandi in order to rest a bit. Ma puts herself to so much trouble on account of her devotees! At night after some food was cooked, we all ate and slept.

In the course of conversation Ma told us, "I can see five people clothed in saffron coloured robes (in their subtle forms) coming to me and saying, 'We were with you during the perambulation'. There are so many such beings. I did not say anything but another subtle-bodied being asked them, "Who are you all?" The sadhus replied, "We are disciples of Kanai, the nephew of Maheshchandra Bhattacharya. We are continuing our work in this manner". Ma continued, "From this

it appears that Kanai was in an exalted state in his previous birth." Referring to the matter of the subtle-bodied beings Ma explained, "Just as I can see you all, I can see them equally clearly. Just as you touch my feet, they sit next to you and do exactly the same."

Here again we could not procure any wood but Parvati Devi went to a cave and bought some. It was hardly wood—just small thorny twigs. We have been spending days and nights in the extraordinary costumes described earlier. Tomorrow we shall reach Booid where all our luggage has been deposited. We met a great number of beggars here—they were given handfuls of puffed rice which they were very happy to receive; such is their poverty.