

# A Spiritual Sojourn Unveiled: Precious Moments with Acharya Saumyendra Nath Brahmachary

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## Abstract

This article is a trans-creation of a long and intimate interview of Gurudev Shrimat Saumyendra Nath Brahmachary (1946-2012), former Acharya, DevSangha, Deoghar. An attempt has been made to understand life and experiences of a monk and to understand views on spirituality, religion and modern generation from a spiritual leader. Further, efforts have been made to understand the functioning of the spiritual organization.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Religion, Monkhood, Sanyasi

## Introduction

Unlike most of the conventional spiritual leaders, Gurudev Shrimat Saumyendra Nath Brahmachary (1946-2012), former Acharya, DevSangha, Deoghar was once a brilliant technocrat and a highly successful corporate manager. He was B C Roy Gold Medalist from IIT Kharagpur for being the best all-rounder of his batch (1968) and also the topper of his class of Mechanical Engineering. He rose to a senior position in a multinational company at a very young age and left his career to plunge into spiritual Sadhana at the age of 31 as directed by his Guru Shrimat Narendranath Brahmachary, the Founder of Dev Sangha Ashram, Deoghar.

Later after the mortal departure of his Gurudev he was christened the Acharya of Dev Sangha in 1988 and emerged as an exceptionally inspiring spiritual leader with a marked difference. An eloquent speaker of outstanding calibre, he had lectured in many academic institutions like IITs and IIMs on topics ranging across Leadership, Motivation, Decision Making, Conflict Resolution,

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Communication, Self-Development, Stress Management and Values among others. He had the unique ability of presenting the wisdom of classical India from Upanishads, Gita, Yoogasutra and Shri Shri Chandi as relevant and applicable to modern times in a lucid language that appealed to the hearts and inspired the audience.

This article is a trans-creation of a long and intimate interview of Gurudev Shrimat Saumyendra Nath Brahmachary (1946-2012), former Acharya, Dev Sangha, Deoghar. An attempt has been made to understand life and experiences of a monk and to understand views on spirituality, religion and modern generation from a spiritual leader. Further, efforts have been made to understand the functioning of the spiritual organization.

The interview was taken at the office of Dev Sangha Seva Pratisthan on the ground floor of a residential building in Kankurgachi, Kolkata. One had to take off footwear, push the door and walk in. The first thing that draws attention were the photographs of two saints with a pristine serene look. They were staring at the photograph of Trailanga Swamy, the original Master of the spiritual lineage of this organization hanging on the opposite wall. Saumyendra Nath Brahmacharyji came forward wearing cream coloured Punjabi and a dhoti (traditional Indian dress). He looked strong and well-built and has his hair crew cut. He at that time was Acharya (Spiritual head) of Dev Sangha. He was a Sanyasi or monk but without any external indicator like garland or 'tika' (mark on forehead). Forget about any saffron attire, he was in fact wearing the dhoti tucked at the back. First he escorted the interviewer to show a permanent wall exhibition depicting the activities of their organization. Then he explained the concept and story behind Uma Haimavati, their presiding deity in Deoghar. His exposition was brief but profound. Then the interview began.

## Interview

### *Your life before monkhood*

My name is Saumendra Chandra Mukhopadhyay. I was born in Behrampore in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. I spent my childhood there. But my education was in a Kolkata school. I passed the Higher Secondary examination from Mitra Institution. After that I went directly to Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur. Those days there was this five year 'Integrated Course'. I passed B. Tech. (Hons.) from this Institute. In 1968, by the grace of God, I became First class First in my department. Apart from that I was adjudged the best all-rounder student considering both academics and sports. The prestigious B. C. Roy Gold Medal was conferred on me and my name was included in the Institute Honour Roll. I used to play

football and take part in Athletics. After passing out, I came back home. Shrimat Narendranath Brahmachary of Dev Sangha Ashram is my Spiritual Master ('Guruji' or Gurudev). He had told me – “Do not be in professional service for more than ten years otherwise your spiritual life will not attain fulfillment. After completing my graduation I went into working life at the age of twenty two, but with a very clear idea that I am not going to work for more than ten years. Gurudev had also told me that one cannot engage in spiritual pursuit while begging. If one keeps on begging while travelling across places of pilgrimage, then the mind becomes constricted and narrow. Hence he wanted me to be economically self-reliant in ten years so that by living a simple life I may save some money. This will help me to fulfill some of my wishes – travelling, pilgrimage or offering help to the needy – and for that I won't have to ask for money from others. It is not that suddenly at 32 I had the desire of renunciation ('vairagya'). My working life began at the age of twenty two. I had worked with Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). By the grace of God, I could rise to a senior position at a young age and if I had continued to work I could have reached a very high position. But following the wishes of my Gurudev, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1978, I left my job at the age of thirty two and devoted myself to spiritual pursuit. My Master had prescribed a kind of 'Five Year Plan' for my spiritual life. In the first two years I moved around to visit various places of pilgrimage. My Master had instructed that I should not be travelling alone. I found a companion in a brother disciple who was a spiritual aspirant at a pretty high level of spiritual evolution. I had asked Gurudev – Why, a companion? There are two types of pilgrims, he had said. One type of pilgrims embody divinity and greatness in human form while the others are nothing less than rogues and scoundrels. God has given you two eyes so that you may take a good look at both and distinguish between the two. He had also told me – “You are incapable of discerning the genuine from the fake ones. Keep your eyes and ears open when you are on

pilgrimage, then gradually you will gain the ability to know the human beings as they are.” “What will I do after two years?” I had asked. “You will come to Deoghar Ashram and immerse yourself in meditation and yogic practices.” Said he. So I would engage myself in 'Sadhana' (spiritual practice) sixteen hours a day. I was not observing this silence out of any imposition. In that serene ambience it came from within. I have seen in life that by virtue of the blessings of my Master whatever I had needed I got without much effort. “What will happen after those five years?” I had asked. “Let us see,” was his cryptic answer. It was 1983. He had already chosen me as his successor in the Ashram before his demise in 1976. But some of the brother disciples raised objection because I had come from the corporate world. It resulted in a lot of arguments and finally the matter went to the court. I did not like it at all and felt very bad. “Why should there be court cases in the religious world?” I had asked my companion in pilgrimage. “You are not yet ready”, he answered. “That is why Gurudev had given you five more years as the court case will not be resolved so soon.” Finally in 1988, as per the wishes of my Master I was installed as the 'Acharya' (Spiritual Head) of the Ashram. I am only trying to maintain his traditional ideals of spiritual practice ('Sadhana'). As per the wishes of my Master Dev Sangha Seva Pratisthan has been founded for service to humanity. I am also trying to work in that area especially in education.

#### *Your organizations and their activities and future plans*

We have two organizations. Of these two, Dev Sangha Ashram was founded by my Gurudev in 1950 at Bompas Town, Deoghar. Deoghar is presently a District town in the newly formed state of Jharkhand. In accordance with the wishes of the Master I was accepted as the leader of the organization in 1988 as the next Acharya after him. Following the instructions of our Gurudev we founded the Dev Sangha Seva Pratisthan. The main

office is on the opposite side of the road adjacent to the ashram. Education is our primary domain of activity. It has been five and a half to six years that a Co-educational Higher Secondary (C.B.S.E) English medium School has been created. It also has hostel facility for boys. At present the School has about 450 students. About 50 -60 boys stay in the hostel. We have also started a B. Ed College this year. Though we have received approval for Co-educational College, we have decided to admit only girls for the first four years. We believe that if the women in society are properly educated then there will be more rapid spread of high quality education in society.

Once the educational activities gain a firm ground we have the desire to begin Vocational Training to alleviate the acute suffering of a hungry stomach. Unless you impart some practical training and education, the society cannot develop in a proper and wholesome way. This is of crucial importance as there are many tribal communities in Jharkhand. In the Sakher Bajar area of Behala in Kolkata we run a school for mentally challenged children. This small school has been named 'Divine Smile'. About 25 to 30 children are taken in this school. They are imparted special Life Skills so that they grow up learning to adjust with all others. However their parents want them to be settled in life but we have not been able to achieve that for lack of funding and manpower. This will only be possible by setting up of a full-fledged Ashram which will be self-sufficient through various productive activities.

There are about four to five Brahmacharys in our Dev Sangha Ashram. According to my Gurudev, a Brahmachary is one who always resides in Brahman. We have no system of grooming Brahmacharys through initiation (*Diksha*) and training in our Ashram. In some other Ashrams in order to become a Sanyasi you have to perform '*Shradh*' (last rites) of your parents and even of yourself. We do not follow anything like that. We do not belong to the '*Dashnami Sampraday*' (The ten

Sanyasi sects created by AdiShankaracharya).

What do we understand by '*Sanyasi*' in our Ashram? He is someone who has completed his '*Nyas*'. Now '*Nyas*' means '*Tyag*' or renunciation. A Sanyasi is one who has renounced his ego, '*ahamkara*', and all petty desires and cravings, and selfishness arising out of that. Why? Once one is able to renounce one's 'unripe ego' ('*Knacha Ami*' as made popular by Shri Ramakrishna) then slowly his or her transformation towards the ripe or Higher Self ('*Paka Ami*', in Shri Ramakrishna's words) has already begun. We believe that even in the pettiness and meanness of the unripe lower self, there is the latent potential of divinity. The more that potential finds expression through enrichment, the unripe lower self is gradually transformed into the Higher Self like the blooming of a flower from its bud. This is a process, a journey of consciousness – from human to Divine.

We do not have any special training or organized programme for attaining *Sanyas*. We engage our members in '*Tapasya*' (spiritual practice) for 15 days in our Ashram during Shivaratri. During this entire period there is regular reading from scriptures like Gita, Upanishads along with intense practice of '*Dhyan*' (meditation) and '*Japa*' (silent chanting). Many householders take part in this process wearing saffron clothes during that period. '*Havan*' (Offerings and prayers to the sacrificial fire) is performed every day. Apart from this we also observe Durga Puja, Saraswati Puja and Guru Purnima in our Ashram. There is also regular chanting from Shri Shri Chandi. From the day of the '*Amavasya*' (moonless night) preceding both Durga Puja and Annapurna Puja '*Navratri Vrat*' is observed in the place of worship. During this period the disciples and devotees take part in chanting of mantras and perform '*Havan*' every morning to prepare themselves for the main Puja. All these Pujas are performed in a collective manner.

For us '*Brahmacharya*' is a lifelong '*Vrat*' (observance). But that does not mean that if anyone enters into a married life he becomes fallen in our eyes. He remains associated with the Ashram as a householder. In our view there is no formidable wall separating and differentiating the *Sanyasis* (monks) from the householders. We whole-heartedly believe that in the spiritual world it is pointless to discriminate people on the basis of their station of life and life practices. I firmly believe that the sacrifice of a householder (especially the womenfolk) in bringing up their off-springs is no less compared to the renunciation of a '*Sanyasi*' or monk.

We hear that in most of the religious institutions there is a shortage of manpower. Because only a few are willing to consecrate their entire life and become a Brahmachary. But we are primarily interested in householders. The original spiritual culture of India was that of the '*Rishi*'-s (sages and seers). The '*Rishi*'-s who had composed the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita were all householders having their own wives and family. They performed twofold duty in society. One was to impart residential education that was financed by the King (or Government). The other was to offer their advice in times of acute crisis of the country. For this they would leave their Ashram and '*Tapovan*' for the capital and return after discharging their duty. We derive our inspiration from this ideal. The subject of sex is intimately connected with life. Sex is never looked down upon as impure in the Vedantic worldview. According to Vedanta, conjugality has been called '*Prajapati Vrat*'. If we consider sex as impure for religious reasons or for preservation of *Brahmacharya*, then how can one deny that the *Sanyasis* or monks who are performing this '*Vrat*' are also products of this sexual act or conjugal union. If we take a negative view of sex, we shall end up in despising our physical body and treating our birth as merely the by-product of our unrestrained desires. We do not subscribe to such a view. I am indeed happy that my parents had met to



bring me unto this earth so that I can take part in this grand celebration of 'Ananda' (Bliss) that is Life. If we do not have this worldview, even if to some extent, we shall never be able to awaken and enliven the 'Rishi dharma'. The 'Rishi'-s have amply demonstrated this, corroborated by the poets of the Upanishads and the even the composer of the Bhagavad Gita, that there is no inherent conflict between one's own observance of Dharma and station of life (Ashram) with one's pursuit of desires (including sexual desire). However with a *Brahmachary* tag along with my name I cannot indulge in frivolous relationships or carnal pleasures with women. By the same logic, it will also be unjust if I live and behave like a *Brahmachary* with my wife. In all our programmes and celebrations we invite householders with their family and friends to attend. If they like our association they are encouraged to come closer to our organization and its activities. Though we have hardly two hundred initiated members, we have countless friends and well-wishers who support us.

*Your objective behind choosing a life of a 'Sanyasi'*  
I am not a 'Sanyasi' in the conventional sense. I don't think that I have made any personal sacrifice. But I must also admit that even from my childhood days I had never felt the urge to get married and bring up a family. I had told my Gurudev – when one changes one's station of life there is some specific purpose or goal behind it. What will I gain by getting married?

In our Sangha (organization) we do not emphasize on engaging in 'Tapasya' by undergoing hardships. If hardships are imposed by force then there always remains the hidden desire or craving within oneself for the objects of sacrifice. If one leads a normal and natural life, these disturbances do not come in the way.

Why did I choose this path? We have been under the spiritual umbrage of Gurudev for three generations. From the age of ten I would come to

the Ashram with my mother, a widow, along with my brother and sister to spend the holidays. We were blessed with his love in abundance. As I was growing up I was also becoming aware of his exceptional qualities. With growing reverence for him my days of fun and play with him came to an end. I was enchanted with his love and wisdom. In my working life I had only partly followed every word of his advice - not all the time. I would wonder – How could a saint like him know about workplace politics? But now I have come to realize that if I had followed his words in full it would have only come to my benefit. Thus when he revealed before me a blueprint of my future life I thought that the path unveiled by him would be the best for me. I also felt relieved of my own sense of responsibility. If my life ends up in failure and fruitlessness I can blame my Gurudev in the end – “You have ruined my life.” If I attain success and experience fulfilment then also I will say – “It is all because of your grace.” Whatever may happen, good or bad, I have tried to follow your words.

My goal in life is very clear. I do not want to see God, nor to attain the knowledge of Brahman, not even to earn fame by becoming a world renowned saint (though sometimes I think it would have been good if I could get some inner peace). What I really want is this: at the end of the day Gurudev will come and say: “My son, with all your effort you have done well.” I mean, whatever I do or want to do it is only to please my Gurudev, all for that great man and nothing else. This is the purpose of my life, my life goal. Some have remarked – isn't this madness? Perhaps. But I have seen many girls belonging to affluent family have left home holding the hand of her beloved. Then why can't I do this for my Gurudev? My Gurudev never told me to leave anything. He shaped me in his ideals and asked me to face life on a strong foundation. I must make an attempt to make it a reality. Isn't it?

*What importance do you attach to 'Dhyan' (meditation) and 'Prarthana' (prayer)? When and*

*how do you offer your prayers?*

There are eight stages in Maharshi (the great sage) Patanjali's '*Ashtanga Yoga*'. Of these he had accorded the seventh stage or '*Anga*' to '*Dhyan*' followed by '*Samadhi*' and finally '*Yog*'. Our Paramguru (Guru of my Gurudev) Brahmarsi Satyadev had said: "One cannot attain '*Dhyan*' – '*Dhyan*' happens." It means that when the consciousness evolves to reach a certain level, it culminates in '*Dhyan*'. What we can try for is to attain the immediate previous stage that is '*Dharana*'. '*Dharana*' is the ability to contain our mind within a limited zone that may be manifest or otherwise. It is this practice of '*Dharana*' that naturally leads to '*Dhyan*'. Those who approach through '*Jnanyog*' (Path of Knowledge) must practice this '*Dhyan*' for quite some time up to a certain level of perfection. Then, he says, one gains deep insight into any subject or situation. Once you reach that stage, there may not be need for any meditative process ('*Dharana*' or '*Dhyan*') in our regular religious chores. But one has to keep in touch with the practice from time to time. This is necessary for two reasons - to set an example to others and help them in learning; and secondly, to keep alive our own creative forces (like the flight of a bird) but not to draw public attention. But in the initial preparatory stage one must practice meditation quietly all alone for a long period.

'*Prarthana*' means reflecting deeply on the '*Artha*' or meaning. '*Prarthana*' - to whom? We believe that we are the children of '*Isvara*' (Divinity) who is verily our parents (both mother and father). If we address the Divine Spirit as '*Ma*' or Mother, there is one advantage. If we address the Divinity as '*Baba*' or Father, then the Father can disown his children, but the Mother will never do so. To quote Shankaracharya: "You may find a wayward son, but never an evil mother." If we believe this then we have a strong anchor in our mother. There is another advantage in a mother-child relationship. If she is indeed my Mother and I am her offspring then

the divine potential within us is bound to flourish over time. The Divinity created the human being in his own mold. The lion gives birth to a lion only while a donkey begets a donkey. Therefore the divine potential is latent in human beings and that is bound to manifest. Having faith in this is the first stage of '*Sadhana*' or spiritual pursuit. When my daily pressure of work mounts, I perform my religious practices as if like 'abiding the law'. There is also the belief (though entirely my personal one) that the Divine Mother longs for me much more than I pine for her. It means that when I come to visit the Mother I feel happy no doubt but the Mother is happy much more on seeing me. When I visit the temple on some urgency, I go there and tell her that you have dragged me here because you wanted to see me – "You are old and cannot walk any more. So you have brought me here right in front of you. Now please take a good look at me to your heart's content". I do not intend to have your '*darshan*' (sight) but I have come to give you my '*darshan*'. The Divine could be the Mother Goddess, or Jesus Christ or anyone else. Now '*Prarthana*' is the act of seeking something from her. But in this kind of a situation or relationship is it right to seek? To pray? Mother understands far better than I can. Personally I feel a little ashamed when it comes to seeking something from the Mother. If I seek anything at all from her, I do not need to express it for her understanding. The best approach would be – I know that you will give me that which you are giving me all the time without my asking. But please empower me so that I can fulfil those aspirations that you have kept alive within me.

*What is your view of these religions - Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain? What do you like about them? And what all you don't like?*

I must admit that I have not read much about these religions and hence I do not know. However when I was studying in IIT Kharagpur I had friends from all religious faiths. When I travel in India or abroad, I mix along with them, stay in their homes, but even

then I follow my own food habits and life practices. I am a vegetarian and I remain firm on that. I also believe that there is an inner core of every religion that is called spirituality where there is no difference between religions. Our Gurudev had met Muslim religious heads and Christian priests, did his 'Sadhana' (spiritual practice) in churches and mosques and realized that all religions are true. But they are not the same in external customs, practices and behaviour.

'Joto Mot Toto Poth' or as many faiths so many paths – what does it mean? If I need to climb to the top of a tower, say the monument in Kolkata Maidan, then wherever we may be staying we have to come and assemble at the bottom of the monument and then there is only one way up to the top. If you are residing in Lake Market or Shyambazar you will have to take different routes to reach the bottom of the monument. According to our Gurudev, after reaching there all have to go up by climbing the same stairs. This is the realm of spirituality where all religions and paths become one.

Man is inherently selfish; selfishness is the natural 'dharma' or propensity of all human beings. At present our selfishness, that is, our I-consciousness and identity is limited within our body, our family, members of our organization, our race and community groups. By spirituality I understand the gradual flowering of our I-consciousness beyond the limited notions of our self, and expanding the sense or feeling of 'My' into all things and beings – towards realization of the world or universe as 'my own'. Renunciation or disowning of selfishness or self-sacrifice should not be called spirituality. The essence of spirituality is this 'expanding selfishness', ever growing 'self-ishness' and then seeing one's own reflection in all others. The ripe mango is latent within the unripe green mango – one has to just give it an expression, a revelation. Those who have reached this stage will find all religions like Christianity, Islam or Jainism are

only the external forms. The customs and practices of a religion are determined by the space-time context and socio-cultural backdrop in which the particular religion has evolved. But when that religion is taken to a different environment leading to a change in space, time and cultural context, then if that religion does not alter its religious customs and practices to adapt to the changed circumstances, then it results in some discomfort and dissonance within that religion. But I also believe that in our bid to become more liberal there is the fear of gradually losing one's own originality. It is indeed a formidable challenge for those who mix with people in the religious world to strike this balance – remaining firm in one's inner self and poise while simultaneously adjusting oneself with the outside world.

*In the present societal context what will be your advice to the Bengali youth – men and women?*

Personally I do not think that I have reached a stage that I can offer advice. I will only talk about such advice as have helped and benefitted me. In the last stage of his life Rabindranath Tagore had said – “Do not lose faith in man. To lose faith in man is a sin.” Swami Vivekananda had proclaimed – “A man who does not believe in his own self is an atheist.” One who does not believe in God is not an atheist. 'Aastik' (loosely translated as theist) is one who has faith in own self. If you lose faith in yourself, then your life is of no value. Then they may ask, how to anchor this faith? There is one way in which you can do it. When we become overwhelmed with sorrow and despair in life, think that our life is cursed and doomed, then there is a saying: Look down below, and you will see that there are so many people living in suffering and misery much worse compared to yours, but still they are living with hope. If you come closer to them, even if you do not want to serve them, you will finally realize that God had given you so many opportunities. Now you can build your life on that positive foundation. But don't look down below only, you must also look up – you

have a long way to go before you can rest. If we can expand our view of life a little up, down and sideways, then it is possible to kindle hope even amidst despair.

I think that the most acute problem in Bengal is the health of Bengalis. It is difficult to talk about spirituality to one who is not physically fit. The present day youth have spoiled their health by way of bad habits and a willfully uncontrolled and wayward lifestyle. I do not want to advise them like a know-it-all religious preceptor. I just want to ask them – is smoking good for health? Even if casual smoking? If you think so then please go ahead and live life as you consider best. Go to sleep late night – is there any credit in that? Don't you think that regular exercise in life is good for you? Why don't you give it a try for some days? Will physical exercise for 20 minutes or half an hour be able to give you happiness in life? Our body is the very base and medium through which we perform all our activities. If you ruin your health by taking oily fried food, drink tea and coffee at random while smoking in abundance, consume some alcohol time to time and lose your *Brahmacharya* by an unrestrained wayward lifestyle during student life, then you are inviting your own misery yourself. Don't blame the society and the environment. Finally the urge to develop good habits and its inspiration must come from within. You find out what is good for yourself – this is my advice.

*Have you travelled abroad? Where? Please tell us something about that experience*

I had been abroad – twice in United States, and a month in UK during the return journey of my second visit. My younger brother lives in California and his friends and relatives are scattered around. Some NRIs had organized my visit, arranged for some meetings and gatherings and invited me there to deliver lectures. They had also invited some of their American and European friends who had vacation during that period. I went

there during summer holidays. I did not have much opportunity to visit other places. I have seen that when it comes to relationships of love among human beings, there is no barrier created by religion, ideology and economic status. My experience may be biased but wherever I had gone I have received abundant love and affection. Even then (especially after interacting with affluent American families and society) I had experienced a feeling. While watching the gorgeously lit cities from the aircraft, I felt as if I could hear the suppressed heart wrenching cries rising from those cities - "Can you give me a little love?" I have heard that during the 1942 famine, one could hear a cry at night: "Can you give me a little starch?" That was the cry from a hungry stomach. But when I fly from one illuminated American city to another, I felt time and again that I could hear: "Can you give me a little love?" One cannot make it out during the day - they are so busy then. In this regard when I travelled across Indian villages, amidst illiterate and poor folks – I had felt again and again that India is primarily a country of love and affection. Even though our present education has become somewhat materialistic and career-oriented, one finds that the Indian people essentially believe that – 'Love of brothers and mothers, how may you find elsewhere/ O Mother, thy feet duo, I hold on to my heart/ This is where I was born, and this is where I wish to die.' (Translated from the last stanza of D L R o y ' s f a m o u s B e n g a l i s o n g , 'Dhanadhanyepushpebhora') This love that one finds in every Indian home is not the treasure of India only. If this spiritual heritage of India and her quality of the heart spreads worldwide like the fragrance of a flower, I think it will lead to well-being and development of one and all. If India beckons the humanity at large with this offering of love, it will create an ambience of love and affection the world over.

*In this city life of Kolkata what are those issues that make you deeply worried and most concerned?*



I have been told that Kolkata is perhaps one of the most polluted cities of the world. But such a level of pollution (that has got nothing to do with poverty) could not have been possible unless there is pollution within. Now the question arises, if the external environment is made free from pollution, will it also automatically cleanse the inner pollution? There is a deep organic connect between the inner and the outer worlds. Another issue is of concern to me. The way Kolkata or West Bengal is governed today, I mean the purpose behind this rule, is not just driven by political ideology only but by political sectarianism. This political sectarianism worries me the most – “Whatever my party men may be doing I must support them and any opposition must be treated as enemy.” This may inevitably precipitate an alarming crisis - political sectarianism leading to religious sectarianism. This is indeed a serious problem facing West Bengal as well as India today. And it is extremely difficult to come out of this crisis as poverty and lack of education are issues controlled by political interests. I hope that when globalization will become a reality, and the borders between nations will cease to exist, then there will be dominance of economic forces that will be followed later by unleashing of spiritual energy. In his famous poem '*Bharattirtha*' Rabindranath Tagore wrote: “Now the west has opened its door, and bringing gifts all through it they pour/ To give to take, their mixing make, their way they will not retrace/ Where India's greatness reigns before the ocean space.” (Translated from Bengali) If this be true, then this grand union will take place in India on a seashore - in Mumbai or Chennai or Kolkata but not in Delhi. The foundation of the celebration of this union has already been laid, from where will emerge a splendid, unified and rhythmic culture. Some great saints had said that this grand celebration will take place in West Bengal. With my limited intelligence I have my doubts. One must overcome this doubt as nothing is more contagious than doubt. I would like to believe that India will again become great and rise to her highest position

in the world congregation. This will not be just for the good of India but also for the well-being of the world. Whatever is good is good for all. And what is good for all is also good for me. I think that is the highest spiritual fruition or outcome.

*Do you feel proud as a Bengali? Why?*

Born in Bengal I spent the whole of my life in Bengal. I studied in Kharagpur. But there even if one spoke in Bengali, there was a pan-Indian and partly westernized culture because many foreigners lived and studied there. Hence while I have no special allegiance to Bengali culture, I have also no disregard for other cultures. However being a Bengali, unknowingly, I have my love for Bengal. And that is why I feel shaken when I see in Bengalis their failure, non-performance, shirking tendency, aversion to hard work, lack of sincerity and whole hearted commitment to action – all this irritates me, makes me sad. I cannot tolerate falsehood. When Swami Vivekananda was presenting India abroad, he suppressed all the weaknesses of our country and extolled its glory. However when he was lecturing from Kanyakumari to Almora, he highlighted India's weaknesses to their very depths. This was because he loved India. If you truly love someone then you can also scold that person. Therefore while I feel proud of being a Bengali, I also have a feeling of despair at times when I see the present situation and the lack of future possibilities. I don't seem to find a way out.

*At present the most acute problem is poverty. What measures would you suggest for its eradication?*

Great men had said that magnanimity depends a lot on the stomach. To quote Swami Vivekananda, “Religion is not for the empty stomach.” In the Eastern part of India, in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and Assam poverty is becoming a major problem. I have observed that in a society where the magnitude of poverty is high, the population and illiteracy are also high. Thereby the problem of

poverty becomes deeper and more acute. But I believe that our inner poverty or scarcity mentality finds expression first, which then culminates in economic deprivation. In order to remove this poverty, Swami Vivekananda had said, mere financial assistance is not enough - education is the only way out, the only prescription to this malady. If there is human development through education and culture building, then only it will deliver the desired result. That is why we chose education as the focus of our Seva Pratisthan. Education and health are essentially proactive and reactive. In our country the problem of health is not solved by 'preventive medication'. When someone falls ill, we reach there with medicines to render service to the patient. But the education has to be future-oriented so that there is no poverty in spiritual, mental and material levels. And until we introduce integral and holistic education, poverty will continue to remain a problem here. Because the government can dole out only a temporary assistance that will help in winning the election and remaining in power. But that will not help to develop a healthy society.

*As an individual, how do you want to live in the minds of the others?*

It may sound awkward, (people may think that I have lost my mental balance), I do not want to live in the minds of people as an individual with my unique identity, my special traits and behavioural characteristics. Just like a rose offers its fragrance and drops off, but that fragrance is never lost and only dissolves in the air. Even though no one

remembers its presence but still the fragrance remains forever. So also I want to lose myself by completely permeating within the others. It's like that Tagore song – “*Se din amaynaibamonerakhle*” (May you not remember me on that day!) So whether people remember me or not is not important to me. I want to remain forever within one and all. “Men may come and men may go but I go on forever”. “*Chiro diner jaoaasaykorbe khelae iamiei ami*” (Tagore). This eternal 'I' will ever be at play in this movement of life as I come and go for all time to come.

#### Notes:

1. This interview of Shrimat Saumyendra Nath Brahmachary (1946-2012), former Acharya (Spiritual Head of Dev Sangha, Deoghar, Jharkhand, India) was conducted in Bengali in 2007 by Shri Dipankar Basu, former Teacher, St. Xavier's School, Kolkata and published in the Bengali magazine 'Mohana'.
2. The photographs of the two saintly figures in the Dev Sangha Kolkata office (mentioned in the beginning before the interview) were of Shrimat Narendranth Brahmachary and Brahmarsi Satyadev – the Gurudev and the Paramguru (the Guru of Gurudev) of the Acharya respectively.
3. Uma Haimavati is the presiding deity of the main temple of Dev Sangha Ashram in Deoghar. There is reference of Mother Haimavati in the *Kena Upanishad*.