

*Memoirs
Of
A Global Hindu*

Jagdish Chandra Sharda Shastri

Compiled and Edited by
Ratan Sharda

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Dedication

*The book is dedicated to all those tyagi, viragi and
tapasvi heroic noble souls
who work untiringly to unite, organize and serve the
Hindu samaj
at the cost of their own comfort, family life
and personal ambitions,
where ever they are.*

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Glossary of some Indian words used in this book

Tyagi:	a person of sacrificing nature, one who renounces
Viragi:	withdrawn from worldly comforts
Tapasvi:	one doing ceaseless meditation, prayer for a hallowed cause
Shlok:	Sanskrit verses
Shri:	addressing somebody with respect, like Mister, abbr. of Shriman
Sarvashri:	addressing a group of people collectively
Chacha:	paternal uncle
Shastri:	academic qualification in Sanskrit for a Sanskrit scholar, equivalent to a Bachelor's degree with Honours
Guru:	mentor, guide, spiritual head
Pandit:	scholar, term also used colloquely for priests, abbr. in book Pt.
Mananeeya:	a person worthy of respect, higher mode of salutation, abbr. in this book Man.
Poojaniya:	worthy of worship
Param Poojaniya:	highly revered
Ji:	suffixed after a name to show respect
Samaj:	society, community
Sangh:	organization
Sarsanghchalak:	highest authority in RSS, guide and philosopher of the organization
Sarkaryavah:	General Secretary of RSS, highest elected post, elected by the Central Governing Body.
Sahsarkaryavah:	Joint General Secretary of RSS
Pracharak:	a dedicated full time organizer of RSS, BSS, HSS working without any remuneration
Vishwa:	Universe, world
Vibhag:	section, division, part
Sanyojak:	co-ordinator
Swayamsevak:	volunteer of RSS, BSS, HSS
Karyakarta:	active volunteer working with more responsibility with within organization volunteer holding some official posts in the organization
Sewa karya:	social service
Prarthana:	prayer
Varg:	workshop, classes
Shakha:	lowest unit of operation, like a branch. In HSS or BSS, smallest operative unit in a geographical area
Mukhya shikshak:	chief instructor of a shakha
Karyavah:	secretary
Gat Nayak:	coordinating leader in a shakha, of a group of swayamsevaks with similar interests or living in same locality

Sanghasthan:	place where shakha activities take place
Karyalay:	office
Utsav:	festival
Mandir:	temple
Swami:	spiritual head, monk
Parivar:	family
Tirth yatra:	pilgrimage
Kanya:	girl
Vidyalay:	school
Sevika:	woman volunteer
Samiti:	organization of women volunteers, viz. Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Hindu Sevika Samiti
Pramukh	
Sanchalika:	Head of Rashtra Sevika Samiti.
Makar Sankranti:	Transition of the Sun from Sagittarius to Capricorn during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere, celebrated to mark the commencement of six month northern journey of the Sun when duration of days are longer in the Northern hemisphere.
Kumbh Mela:	A mass Hindu pilgrimage event that occurs four times every twelve years and rotates among four locations on based on particular zodiacal positions of the Sun, the Moon, and Jupiter
Vijayadashmi:	Popular Hindu festival commemorating victory of Lord Ram over Ravana that concludes a nine-nights' worship of Goddess Durga (Navaratri), also known as Dussehra, being the 10th day of the bright half of Hindu month Ashvin.

Saluting the Unsung Heroes

“*Jagdish Chacha ji*”, as we in family know him since childhood, and “*Shastri ji*” as almost all the acquaintances, friends and students of Shri Jagdish Chandra Sharda Shastri know him; has been a source of inspiration for me whenever self doubts have dampened my spirits. It has been a gradual journey of discovery about him for me - from an affectionate Chacha ji who led us lovingly to the local shakha of RSS on his visits to Mumbai, Bharat and cut countless jokes on breakfast table with a hearty laugh; to seeing him as a highly respected and loved person, while I was exposed to his work in Kenya and other countries after emergency when FISCI conference took place in Mumbai, followed by other Vishwa Sangh shibirs in Bharat. During these camps, as a part of the organizing teams I met many other senior workers of HSS and BSS and heard of the work he had nurtured in Africa, UK and Canada. I too glowed under the halo that surrounded him and the love people showered on him during these events.

It was the fascination with his energetic, optimistic and positive and happy view of life and his self effacing view about his contribution to the society that forced me to persuade him to write his memoirs. The first manuscript he sent me began as a third person account of a swayamsevak. He was so averse to talk about himself, that it was a big exercise to persuade him to write about his life and times in first person! Once we were able to convince him why such a narrative of the work done by him and his colleagues needed to be felt in flesh and blood, he reluctantly agreed.

For him, it was a laborious exercise to first rummage through his diaries and other sources of records, talk into a voice recorder, get it converted to typewritten documents and then get them mailed to me for editing. I marveled at his memory and energy to do this exercise over months. While I wondered how tough it would have been for him to plan all this with his assistants, based on the time he could dedicate within his busy schedule, I was not really surprised at his loving praise all this while for the relatively simple job that I was doing - helping him

get his memoirs edited! Such is the stuff our Chacha ji is made of. He always has nice things to say about everybody. I call great souls like Shastri ji, our pracharaks like Shri Chamanlal ji, Bhide ji and many others – vintage models! God doesn't make people like this any more. Their hard work, sweet nature and extreme humility makes one so humble that one is almost embarrassed to brag about one's work or complain about one's problems. When we meet people like these, we really understand the essence of Vedic saying – “*idam na mama*” (this is not mine). They are rarest of rare species within humankind today, when promoting oneself aggressively by any means, fair or foul, and trampling over others to rise in life is supposed to be the key to success.

It is not easy to live a life of an ascetic, but it is much more difficult to work for the society as a family man, devoting all the time and energy to social work and giving up the possibility of better comforts for oneself and one's family. It needs great spiritual energy and motivation to do this, not just once in a while but over a life time, in a sustained manner. Sangh has managed to create such human dynamos in thousands, nay lakhs, who work selflessly for the society without any pomp and show. These are extraordinary people who lead seemingly ordinary lives, not hankering for any recognition. As a Sangh song puts it -

*Shalabh ban jalna saral hai sneh ki jalti shikha par,
Swayam ko til til jalaa kar deep bananaa hee kathin hai,
Sadhana ka path kathin hai.*

(It is easy to be a moth and burn oneself over the glowing flame of love, but it is very difficult to be a lamp which burns self, atom by atom to give light to others. Path to dedicated service is, indeed, difficult.)

This memoir is a salute to all such souls. Shastri ji represents this rare breed of selfless human beings who make society a better place to live. My small contribution to this publication as its editor is my way of bowing to such souls humbly.

-Ratan Sharda
Bharat (India)

Foreword

Sharda ji – Unique and Ever Youthful

Man. Yadavrao Joshi ji, erstwhile *Sahsarkaryavah* (joint general secretary) of RSS, used to say, “Youth is not the prime of life, but a state of mind. You are as young as your faith and as old as your doubts; you are as young as your self confidence and as old as your fear.”

Observing the enthusiasm for life and his high level of activities in his action filled life we can, undoubtedly, say that Man. Shastri ji is ever youthful even at an age of 85 years. He can be called the grand old man or the *Pitamah* of Vishwa Vibhag. His enthusiasm to think of new ideas and bring to life, new projects with personal efforts can put young people half his age to embarrassment. This enthusiasm is well complemented by his sweet and persuasive speech. In Sangh, a good karyakarta is described as one “*jiske pair mein chakkar aur munh mein shakkar hai*”, i.e. one who is constantly on the move and whose speech is as sweet as sugar. Sharda ji’s speech that pleases everybody who comes in his contact reminds me of a Sanskrit *shlok* -

*(Priya vakya pradaanena sarve tushyanti jantavah,
Tasmaat tadva vaktavyam vachane kaa daridrataa.)*

That is, sweet talk pleases everybody therefore we should speak sweetly and should not be miserly in this regard. Many brothers have complained happily that sometimes they would not be in agreement to some proposals of Shastri ji but he always managed to persuade them with his sweet tongue.

Shastri ji doesn’t use his pleasant speech only to please people, but as an intelligent organizer he uses his persuasive skills in his work. He thinks positively that every person who comes in his contact can be of use for Sangh. With this in mind he persuades that person to work for the cause. Man. Ramnath ji Seedhar, now in UK, has been at the forefront of nearly every new project in Kenya with Shastri ji. He mentions how people would be forced to agree to some ideas of Shastri ji due to his sweet persuasive speech.

He organized the first Sangh shakha of Bharatiya Swyamsevak Sangh in Kenya in 1947. He played a major role in starting the Sangh shakhas in Mauritius and UK too. After reaching Canada he helped improve Sangh work there and came up with many new ideas for new projects. While doing all this, he looked out for new karyakartas and motivated them to take up

responsibilities of Sangh and other related projects, including the *sewa karya* (social service projects).

As he carried out all this work, he took a totally egoless and selfless view that all this was possible only because of Sangh and his other karyakarta colleagues. Whenever talks veer around his contribution to Sangh work, he is genuinely diffident and is keen to give credit to others. There is an old saying in Sanskrit –

*(Angushthodaka maatrena shafari farfaraayate,
Agaadh jala sanchaari na garvam yaati Rohitah.)*

It means that a small fish creates big flutter as it swishes around in a vessel filled with hardly thumb deep water, as if to draw everybody's attention. But, a large fish (Rohit), swims calmly in deep waters of an ocean silently. Shastri ji's humility and attempt to stay away from limelight is of this rare class. Even as he does so much, his mental attitude is that he has hardly done anything. He could easily have led a leisurely life after retirement in Canada, but his 'youth' and 'enthusiasm' would not allow him to do so. Earlier on, he distributed Sangh and Hinduism related literature in Canada and then established an institute teaching Indian languages, especially Sanskrit and continued his services to his culture and society around him. He firmly believes that 'resting is rusting'.

He was against putting down his memories in the form of a book. But, after we convinced him that people will be inspired to know through these memoirs, the beginning of the Sangh work in Kenya and its growth in other countries later on, he relented. So, he has put on paper his memories, the brief story about his life and the memories about his Sangh work.

Shastri ji is the 'reference point' of the *Vishwa Vibhag*. His gentle, humble, self abnegating personality should be an inspiration to all of us. With this thought, this is a small attempt at putting together his memoirs. All those brothers and sisters who have contributed in this endeavour deserve our thanks. Shastri ji's nephew Shri Ratan Sharda has inherited the quality of perseverance from Shastri ji. He has managed to gather this material from him with insistent persuasion. He has edited and given final shape to this book. Our heartfelt thanks to him too.

- Shankar Tatwawadi
Sanyojak, Vishwa Vibhag,
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh.

Prologue

For the last few years several friends, swayamsevaks and Sangh karyakartas and even my family members were telling me that I should write the story of Sangh expansion overseas, specially the first steps of Hindu philosophy as a social movement outside Bharat.

I was hesitant all this time to write it because in Sangh we usually don't mention individuals easily when we talk about things accomplished by the organization. We don't like mentioning the word "I" too much because that is against organizational ethos of self promotion and avoiding egotist view. So, I first I tried writing this account and wrote about 50 pages about the beginning of Sangh in Kenya, England and Canada with the help of friends and students of Hindu Institute of Learning. But I wrote it under *nom de plume* of 'Amuk Sharma'. My dear nephew Ratan Sharda, a devoted and dedicated karyakarta of RSS in Mumbai would have none of it and persuaded me again and again to write the story in first person. He played a clever trick on me by seeking permission of Mananeeya Dr. Shankar rao ji and Mananeeya Yashwant Pathak for this. Two other senior adhikaris also called me to tell that I should go ahead with the story in first person. As an obedient swayamsevak I could not say "No" to them.

My life has been virtually a journey around the globe for me. It began in a small village from where I moved to a city to learn and earn. From there I migrated to Kenya where major part of my active social and family life was spent. The movement to UK and finally to Canada took me nearly full circle from East to West. Wherever I went, I thought and worked as a Hindu for the Hindu society and the local community as Sangh had taught me. Thus, these are the memoirs of a socially committed Hindu whose life's journey has taken him around the globe. I only represent in this book, thousands of such swayamsevaks who are working for the society in different parts of the world.

I apologize, if by chance some where in the book, I have written some words in self praise, inadvertently. Sangh work through out life has grounded me to the firm belief that social work is always a team effort.

I heartily thank Vishwa Sangh adhikaris and karyakartas of Vishwa Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai and Vishwa Niketan, Delhi who helped Ratan ji give shape to this book; members of my family, my sons and grandchildren

who also contributed some sweet memories about my life. I also thank all the swayamsevaks of Kenya, UK and Canada who contributed to this book and without whom new horizons of Hindu awakening would not have opened up.

As I glance back over my life through these memoirs I remember with great gratitude, my guides and guardians Man. Chamanlal ji, Man. Madhav rao Muley and Man. Bhide ji who guided me through out my Sangh life. Such noble people mould lives of countless people like me with their exemplary lives.

- **Jagdish Chandra Sharda Shastri**
Toronto, Canada.

Chapter 1 – My Roots

I come from a small village, Charik, five miles from a town called Moga, which was at that time a *tehsil* centre – something like a county centre. It was and still is one of the largest grains procurement market in Punjab. This town is near the well known industrial city of Ludhiana on one side and the Pakistan border of today on the other. Punjab is considered as one of the most prosperous states of independent India. Even in undivided Bharat it was the most prosperous state with a typically happy go lucky attitude to life.

My parents and my grandmother were role models for me. They sowed the seeds of three major virtues in my life. My grandmother looked after all of us - six brothers and one sister. She helped us in many ways in our upbringing and was a real embodiment of affection. Thus, I inherited my affectionate nature from my grandmother.

My grandmother played another role in my upbringing. Our village school had only four standards, that is, it went up to junior primary. After this, we had to go to a nearby town like Moga that had a middle school, high school, and a college. My grandmother owned a house in Moga, inherited from her parents. My grandmother had no brother. Although it was not common for a woman then to inherit property, some parents did share their property with their daughters. She went and settled down in the town, so that any child who wanted to study beyond primary could go there and stay with her. She would look after our meals and well-being. So she helped all my siblings and me to receive education in the middle school, high school and college. She was, really, a true embodiment not only of love, but also of *sewa* (selfless service to fellow beings.) She helped not only my family, but also our friends. You could always find a couple of young boys from our village who were friends of one of my brothers, staying at our house for their education. On weekends the whole family from the town would go back to the village to enjoy a get-together. They stayed on during the weekend in our country house in Charik, connected with a *kuchcha* road (dirt track) to Moga. Today, Moga is a district head quarter with all modern amenities and well connected roads to all the neighbouring villages.

My mother toiled hard from morning till evening for the family, from fetching firewood and water, to cleaning house etc. She sowed the seed of *sewa*, or sustained selfless service in my life, and also the readiness for hard

work. I think I need to talk about her daily duties to give you an idea about the tough life she and women like her in villages, generally, lived. She was a living personification of hard work. She used to get up very early in the morning. First, she would grind the wheat flour for the day in the manual grinding machine made of heavy grinding stones. Then, after making enough flour for the day for the family for two meals, she would churn the milk, take out the butter from the churned milk, keep the buttermilk for the family and also save some yogurt or curd for the day. After that she would feed the animals. We always had a horse, a cow and a buffalo in our house. After that my father would milk the cows and the buffalo. My mother always kept a dog and a cat as pets. After preparing meals for us for our school, she would take the dog for a walk while the cat followed them. This was her daily routine. Apart from this routine, there were other ad-hoc mundane jobs like applying a fresh coat to the house and flooring with processed cow dung, weaving *durries* (cotton floor mats), embroidering clothes and helping neighbours in their work!

On weekends she worked even harder. While other people relaxed and rested on weekends, her responsibilities would increase further because my father, being a very social person, was visited by many unannounced guests. In those days, there were no telephones, nor did people write letters. They just travelled to other towns or villages on work or social visit. On the way they would come to our house to take a break from the journey and enjoy a little break. So, as per our Hindu tradition of treating a guest like god, my mother would make tea and offer snacks to them. Sometimes, they stayed overnight and she would prepare meals for them. Thus, I always saw her working very, very hard and her sacrifices were a great inspiration for me throughout my life.

My father was a three-in-one personality. He was a renowned priest, a good astrologer, and best of all, a highly respected *ayurvedic* physician. Since he was, virtually, an all-rounder and very helpful to others, people were fond of him. Not only did he follow these three vocations, but he was also a very social person and quite popular in the surrounding villages. In the early morning hours, when he sat for prayers and meditation in his room our doors remained open; and many people from our village and surrounding villages would gather there to consult him, especially regarding matters of health. After finishing his prayers, he would talk with them one by one and give them his advice, medication and prescriptions. People left our home contentedly. By around ten o'clock, he would finish his duties towards the congregation and

the family, take lunch and rest for an hour or so. When the afternoon heat of a summer day abated, he would ride on horseback to one of the neighbouring villages, where he would stay at the house of the head of the village, and those who wanted to consult him on matters of health, astrology etc. would come to meet him there. He was very popular in the surrounding villages. He visited every village where he was invited, and helped everyone who came to him. If there was a wedding or some special event, he would stay there till late night. When he returned home, his bag would be full of fruits, grains, and green vegetables, because in those days, people offered these as gifts to show their love and appreciation, and we used to be very happy to receive him with his gifts.

To my mind, his best quality was his great ability to arbitrate and settle disputes among people. He would invite the disputing parties home, offer them a cup of tea; and then would try to diffuse their differences and bring about reconciliation. People who arrived highly upset and angry would leave pacified. This was the spirit of brotherhood that he could bring about.

I inherited these qualities of great affection and sociability, helping others through *sewa* and settling differences, and an ability to work hard from my father, grandmother and mother.

Later I found in *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS - a national association of socio-community volunteer workers, generally referred to as Sangh), a combination of all these virtues which I had already inherited. Sangh provided me the opportunity to apply these salutary qualities like affection for society, *sewa*, skills of reconciliation and hard work in real life. Sangh inculcates these virtues in people. At the same time the main mission of Sangh is to organize and unify the society. This is the reason why I was attracted to Sangh, why I joined Sangh and why I like Sangh and have stayed on as its *swayamsevak* (a volunteer) for decades. I have worked to organize and unify the Hindu society as a *swayamsevak* of Sangh.

Chapter 2 – Introduction to Sangh

I was studying at a school called Sanatan Dharma Hindu High School in Amritsar where I saw some youth and children, mostly teenagers, playing, not the modern games, but typically Indian and scout games. I saw that all those children were playing games and doing other exercises with great discipline under one instructor. All of them were cheerful, joking, laughing and everyone was talking to each other very affectionately and respectfully. I was quite impressed with this kind of team spirit, its methodology of playing, and the way they were enjoying all this. This was one of the reasons why I felt like joining this group.

The first time that I joined the group, the chief instructor of the group came to me and asked my name and all other personal details like my school, class, what I was studying, my home etc. At the end of the games everyone sat down in a circle and this gentleman introduced me to the group, as if I were a big man. I was just a teenage student then. I was quite touched by the way they cared for me and others. The members of the group told me that I was most welcome to join them and hoped that I would also bring other friends along. So, from then onwards I started going for these activities, though not regularly, because my main interest was my studies. I always wanted to outshine others in studies and attain a leading position in class. But, whenever I found time I joined this group. This was the beginning of my interest in these activities.

My interest was further enhanced when I started giving private tuitions to a girl whose elder brother was also enrolled in this same organization. He was doing his Master's Degree from Khalsa College and at the same time he was supervising several other branches of this organization. He was sort of a leader in that area. He told me about the branch that was running in my school. I told him that I was aware of it, that I liked this activity very much and went there sometimes. But he said, "No, if you really want to get the full benefit and improve your health, self-discipline and time management then you should go there regularly." After that I became more regular. Shri Raghavendra Vaidya, the elder brother became very close to me and helped me in every possible way. He was very affectionate and gave personal attention to my well being. After I finished the tuition, his father would call me and offer me affectionate hospitality. This kind of positive affection helped me a lot during those hard days.

I liked this organization because this was the only organization that, as I observed it in those days, always stuck to schedules and discipline. People used to arrive punctually, disperse at determined time and the programs were also well planned good and interesting activities. For the first three-quarters of an hour we would do physical exercises, practised yoga, played interesting games. Then we would sit down in a circle and discuss some current social issues like the evils of the caste system or problems of inequality, or how to unite the community, especially the Hindu community. In each meeting there was, always, this type of discussion in which every person was encouraged to participate. I liked the way they taught us life skills, like how to interact with others, how to treat elders and how to respect parents and teachers. I had not come across any other club or organization that taught these important things in life. This was the second reason why my interest in this organization deepened.

There were several branches (*shakhas*) of this organization in Amritsar, the town where I was studying. Once a month all the shakhas would get together in a big field. At such gatherings they would organize several types of competitions, scout games and, sometimes, big games too. It was all very wonderful. I never heard any foul language from anyone. Everyone used to address even young boys with a “*Ji*”, the respectful address that we use in India for seniors. This was something new and unique to me - that even people who were twenty or thirty years old would call a junior student with a “*Ji*”! This was in sharp contrast to my experience during my visits to other clubs or associations where I would always find them quarrelling or using foul language. I failed to see any discipline, and hardly any punctuality. But this organization taught me and others all these things and, more importantly it taught us to respect and love each other.

It was not just affection, there was a deep desire to help each other selflessly. After three or four years I noticed that this spirit of service was extended as the purpose of life itself. We were told that if any relative, friend or neighbour regardless of whether we knew them or not, needed any help; we should go out of way to help him or her. At bigger gatherings some guest or expert would speak on topics such as social and neighbourhood service, doing well in education, or being good member of the family. I liked all these teachings. But, what I liked especially was their emphasis on Unity of the Nation.

Sometimes, if someone did not seem to be in good spirits or unhappy, the leader of the group would meet him separately after the programme and enquire about the reason for his listlessness. On finding the cause of his unhappiness he would empathize and try to console that person. And, if per chance someone offended anybody while playing or used some offensive words, he wouldn't shout at him on the spot, he would just pacify him a little and at the end of the programme he would personally call him and advise him, "Look, we are all brothers. We should not use such language." It was always done individually in private, not in public. He never condemned any person in public. The leader gave individual attention to each swayamsevak and encouraged him for his good qualities. I admired this trait of always being positive and always exuding positivity. These simple and fascinating habits inculcated by the shakha leaders nurtured and nourished good citizenship practices.

This kind of spirit of service encouraged me a lot. Thus, began my life-long journey with this organization – *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) or simply *Sangh*. Over the years, I became very regular in Sangh shakha, that is, a branch of RSS.

Chapter 3 – Growing up in Amritsar

Amritsar is the place where I was initiated into Sangh work. But apart from that, there are many other more interesting things that bind me to Amritsar. I was only fifteen when my father – *Baiji* - as we addressed him, took me to Amritsar where we stayed at *Killa Bhangian* temple. Pandit Dwarkanath, a holy man, was its chief priest. Baiji put me fully in his charge for my care and education. He was a distant relative of our family, and his father was a very intimate friend of my father. It was in Amritsar that I did most of my studies. I found in Pt. Dwarkanath ji a true guru and my guardian. Apart from my three Sanskrit teachers at The Hindu College, I give him the credit of my brilliant success in obtaining honours in Hindi and Sanskrit in first class.

I was not doing regular schooling, but studying only Sanskrit. This school was a separate school yet part of a big high school. I pursued Sanskrit because my father wanted me to become an *Ayurveda* practitioner. As most of the books on Ayurveda are in Sanskrit it was necessary to learn Sanskrit. Unfortunately, when I was just sixteen, my father died within a few months of a freak accident while preparing some ayurvedic medicine. I somehow carried on with my studies through tuitions and scholarships. This exercise continued until I obtained the Shastri Honours degree in 1938 at the age of eighteen. Before gaining acceptance at an Ayurveda College, it was a preliminary requirement to do an honours degree.

Apart from my education, second reason why I like the city is that it is socially vibrant. I made some of the dearest friends from my childhood in this city. If people ask me, “what’s your hobby or interest?” I tell them, “Making friends.” This city helped me indulge in this hobby. Third reason for Amritsar being close to my heart is that I began my career as a teacher after completing my education and finishing my intermediate exam in English here. For four years I worked for two girls’ schools teaching Sanskrit and Hindi classes. Thus, I was initiated into my teaching profession in Amritsar.

Amritsar is well known for its Golden Temple, which is the principal shrine of the Sikhs and the headquarter of their religion. There were other good things too. One was the Hindu temple Durgyana, which was built on lines of the Golden Temple, and had similar architectural style.

Amritsar is a place where I learned to stand on my own feet and became self-reliant. Although I did get some financial support from my three elder brothers after demise of my father at a relatively young age, it wasn't quite enough as they themselves had very limited resources. So I started teaching widows. In those days the widows, unfortunately, were not allowed to remarry. I found it a very cruel custom in our society. And most of the girls in those days did not even go to school. If a woman became a widow she had to depend on either her own parents or on her in-laws for the rest of her life. In most cases she was considered a burden. The widows who belonged to rich families wanted to learn Hindi or Sanskrit, so they could at least read religious books in their spare time, or write letters to their relatives in Hindi. My guru ji found two tuition jobs for me with which I was able to make ends meet.

When I appeared in the High Proficiency of Sanskrit examination, *Visharad*, in 1936, I stood second in the whole province of Greater Punjab (Punjab before partition had thirty-six districts). Because, of this I got a merit scholarship for about two years which provided quite a good financial support to me. In 1940, against my will and desire and despite my protests, my brothers virtually forced me to get married. This thrust a new big responsibility on me. Fortunately, my wife's parents agreed to leave me alone for two years, till I got a regular job and started earning, which was in 1942.

Getting into full fledged teaching job was a major turning point in my life. Up to that time I was not regular in Sangh. But in 1942 Sangh adhikaris persuaded me to go to a training camp. In those days it was known as O.T.C. - Officer's Training Camp, what is nowadays, called Sangh Shiksha Varg (SSV). When I declared my intention to go to this training camp, my eldest brother objected. He said, "First, take care of your wife and your money matters. You should not waste time on such useless things." I was upset with his remarks and I lost my temper. I told him, "Pandit ji, please! I know Sangh is a very good organization, the best youth organization in Bharat. It undertakes many useful activities for society. Whether I'm poor or rich, I don't mind. I must get my training of youth leadership. I will listen to you in any other matter, and I'll consult you and other brothers, but leave me free to work for Sangh." This determination had a salutary effect on my brother. Though he was very upset with me at that time, after this incident he never interfered in my social activities that I carried out through Sangh.

I remember the interesting times I spent in the training camp in Ambala. It was monsoon time and it would rain heavily almost every day. There were lots of mosquitoes and unexpected disturbances in our daily routine and training because of rains. But it did not deter us from carrying on with our work. If the rain was not heavy, we carried on our outdoor activities - games, exercises, training in using *lathi* (sticks), sword, *lezeems* (a typically Indian drill regime that originated from Maharashtra) and *niyuddha* (a martial art like ju-jitsu). If the rain was too heavy, we were taken into a big hall, where someone would give a lecture followed by a question and answer session. I enjoyed those session very much.

After returning from the camp, I became a very regular *swyamsevak*. The *swyamsevaks* and leaders of Sangh of those days, mostly in their twenties and thirties, were very dynamic people and still I remember some names. First of all I recall Kapur Chand Jain, who introduced me to Sangh when I was a student at Hindu Sanskrit College. The next person who inspired me was Raghavendra Nath Vaidya, to whose sister I gave private tuition. Then, I came to know other good leaders of Sangh, like Sardar Vatan Singh ji, and Shri Balbir Shastri. I had a good number of friends from my previous college who were also working as teachers and I introduced most of them to Sangh. I remember one young man in particular. His name was Madan Mohan Guglani. Madan Mohan was very close to me because when I was learning English for Intermediate and we took private tuition together with him and his sister Kamla. They became very close friends of mine because their father was an intimate friend of my guru, Pt. Dwarkanath ji. The name of Madan's father was Karam Chand Guglani. Unfortunately, when the brother and sister were only eighteen or nineteen, their father passed away. Karam Chand Guglani was the president of the school where I was teaching. He was also a great social worker, good poet, literary personality and a very popular person. After his death the brother and sister were, almost, orphans as their mother and grandmother did not have any means of income. By that time I had a job, and for some time I supported them till Madan's sister got a job in West Punjab which is now part of Pakistan. Then she started supporting her mother, grandmother and younger brother. Later on Madan proved to be a great literary person. He completed his education, and became a well-known Hindi author, Mohan Rakesh. He did not stick to Sangh and because of his suffering due to poverty, he became almost an atheist and a Communist. He used his talents to write several books, one of which, *Adhe Adhurey* became a path breaking Hindi drama and was also made into a film.

I should not forget to mention two more famous names of that time in Amritsar. They were two wrestlers, one Hindu and the other a Muslim. The Hindu wrestler was called Bijli Pahalwan, meaning the wrestler of Lightning Speed. The Muslim wrestler was known as Fauja Pahalwan, that is soldier like wrestler. Both had many wrestler followers. It was a common occurrence that whenever there was a match between their followers, regardless of who won or who was defeated, it was always followed by a Muslim-Hindu riot! There was a special aura about Bijli Pahalwan that made me his great admirer. I used to go with my friend to visit him at his big house. He was very rich. We used to visit his house because he had tamed a lion that would always sit by his side. We found this awe inspiring. All the necessary precautions used to be taken to see to it that the lion would not be provoked and he never harmed anybody, and usually when we visited Bijli Pahalwan, we would sit near the lion and stroke it. I liked this sensation very much.

Fauja Pahalwan was a sort of ruffian or bully and known as a bad character. When people went to the Hindu Temple, known as Lakshmi Narayan Mandir or Durgyana, they had to pass through the neighbourhood in which Fauja lived. Every other day Hindus would hear the stories of his and his followers' misbehavior. The women, especially, did not feel safe as these men would tease, abuse and sometimes, even kidnap Hindu girls. Hindus were fed up with this wrestler's atrocities. So, a daring young man decided to get rid of him. I am doubtful whether he consulted anybody else. This person, who must have been in his late twenties, planned and finally killed him one day. A shock wave went through the city when news spread that somebody had murdered Fauja Pahalwan. There were talks that this person had escaped to Calcutta. He was never caught by the police. We never learned where he settled later. I can only presume that some people in Calcutta must have kept him safe and found him a job.

So from 1935 to 1946, for almost eleven years, I was a part of Amritsar that is why I like this city even now. I left India in 1946. Later, whenever I went to India from Kenya, I made it a point to visit Amritsar.

Chapter 4 – Passage to Kenya

From 1942 to 1946 I taught in two girls' schools in Amritsar. The first school was Krishna Kanya Vidyalaya. The second one was Ram Kanya Mahavidyalay where I was the Vice Principal and taught Hindi classes to prepare the students for *Prabhakar*, an honours degree from the Punjab University, Lahore, the capital of undivided Punjab at that time.

In 1944 I responded to an advertisement published in a daily newspaper for a teaching job at Arya Samaj Girls' School in Nairobi, Kenya. My intuition told me that this job was for me. Next day I applied and within a month my application was approved by virtue of my teaching experience at the girls' schools in Amritsar. In Amritsar my salary was sixty five Rupees per month, while they offered me three hundred twenty three Kenyan Shillings per month. At that time one shilling was almost equal to a rupee in value so it was a wonderfully big jump! Who would let go such an opportunity? This was during the Second World War and, unfortunately, a British ship had recently been sunk by the Japanese in the Indian ocean off the coast of Mombassa, the main port of Kenya. So, when I asked my mother's permission to leave for Kenya she did not allow me to go because of the risk involved.

In early 1946 when the war was over, I reapplied for the job. Luckily, the Arya Samaj offered the job to me again. I wrote for a reference to my three relatives in Kenya who were executive members of S.D. Girls' School, another school in Nairobi. They recommended me to their own Board and offered me a better salary there and I, naturally, accepted the job. Now, I had to get ready to leave India and go to Kenya. I resigned from Ram Kanya Mahavidyalay and received a memorable farewell party. After that, I started preparing for Kenya which meant visiting the relatives, friends and blood relations, and also arranging for money for the passage.

One of the people I especially visited was Pt. Dwarkanath ji - my guru, guardian and guide after my father's death. He had taken care about my education, finance and every other thing all these years. He was so kind that when I got married, he bought us a house a few miles away in a suburb of Amritsar in the countryside near a canal where people used to go for a walk or swim. He used to visit us on weekends and we enjoyed his company, while my wife offered him good hospitality. So close became our relationship that I looked at him as my foster father. When I gave him the news that I wanted to

go to Kenya, he felt sad but gave his go ahead. Perhaps, he was expecting that when he went back to his native town on retirement, we would look after him and actually my wife and I had similar intentions. But, that was not to be, because of my compulsions to find a good job to support the family. Luckily his two younger brothers were also in Kenya and I thought that when I settled there I would invite him to stay there with us. He would then enjoy a good happy old age because three families would be looking after him.

During this period, people in India were in highly agitated mood because a Muslim leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah, had demanded from British, the partition of India to carve out a separate homeland for Muslims. As is well known, the British always believed in divide and rule policy and rather than discouraging him, they encouraged him in this dangerous game. The people of India were in doubt whether the scheme of partition would be acceptable to Indian leaders, the British government, or Jinnah. It was a time of suspicion and uncertainty and the youth, especially the Hindu youth, were also agitated. Sangh being the biggest youth organization, was deeply concerned. Sangh did not want India to be partitioned and expected riots. Sangh youth used to discuss about how to face the riots, how to control them and prevent them in the eventuality of partition.

When I went to see my Sangh colleagues to bid goodbye, they were upset because they did not want me to leave at that crucial juncture and wished that I was with them in Sangh work. But, Shri Chamanlal ji and other *karyakartas* (senior leaders of Sangh) thought I might lose this chance to go abroad if I stayed back in Bharat. I also promised them that wherever I go, Sangh will go with me; and wherever I went, I would organize Sangh work. They believed in me and acceded to my request, albeit reluctantly.

May and July were the summer holidays and I used this time for preparations. I wound up all my social obligations in Amritsar, visited all my friends and companions who were with me in social or community service, bid farewell to all those with whom I had some literary connections. Everyone wished me good luck. While they were showering so much affection on me, they were also a little sad. After this, I went to my village, Charik, and I stayed there with my mother and grandmother and two of my brothers who were also living there. Of my five brothers, two were working in Indonesia and two were in the village. The eldest one was in Moga working as a teacher. I spent a few days with each of my brothers who were in India, and also a few days

with my sister and brother-in-law in Moga. But, I spent most of my time with my mother and grandmother, whom I loved very much. They were both sad and happy for me that I was getting a good job.

After these farewells I went to see my guru's father, Pt. Ralaram, who lived near Moga in another village and had been a very close friend of my father. It was he who had originally advised my father to take me to Amritsar. They were very good friends because they had three common meeting grounds. The first was their common profession. Both were *vaidyas* (Ayurvedic physicians). Other reasons were their common hobbies, namely, playing chess and horse riding. They were always ready to buy the best horses in the area. After my father's death I looked upto my guru's father for emotional support and whenever I went for holidays to my village or town I always made it a point to visit my guru's father. He loved me just like my own father and it was a pleasure to see him.

I needed some money for the passage because I did not have enough savings. One of my brothers was running a small provision store in the village and he gave me some money, but it was not enough. Then I wrote letters to my wife's brother-in-law (my wife's sister's husband), who was a teacher in Kenya, and my guruji's two younger brothers. All of them assured me, "Don't worry, we will give you as much money as you need," and my brother-in-law sent me enough for my passage and some shopping that I needed to do.

This was how I prepared myself for this major journey of my life. Then I went to Mumbai and stayed there for a few days. At that time my elder brother, Nandlal ji, had not come from Indonesia to settle down in Mumbai yet. From Bombay, as Mumbai was known at that time, I took a ship called the S.S. Vasna and began my journey to Kenya. I recall that it was September 1946, but I do not remember the exact date. There were some interesting incidents during the journey and an epoch making moment. I will mention these in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Voyage to Mombassa

The voyage to Mombassa was my very first sea journey and it was the month of September. The first three days were quite good. Seeing new faces, meeting new people and watching the crew, all this was very interesting. Western people, mostly British, were in the first class and only a few of them were in second class. Several Indian businessmen were also journeying by second class. I was a passenger of the deck, where people mostly spread their beddings and blankets on the floor of the third, the bottom floor of the ship. Though I was married and had two children, yet I traveled alone. I left my family in care of my in-laws and my elder brothers, so the children could continue their schooling.

Deck class, really, was a poor show. Although most of the passengers ate in the dining hall, some of the people there had brought their food with them. The disorderliness of the deck class passengers – their bedding strewn about, scattered shoes at the foot of the beddings, and soiled pillows and bags at the head of it - was a scene ugly beyond description. But for me everything was new and it all seemed so interesting that I did not feel bored at all. Being friendly by nature, I made some new acquaintances of young men of my age who were put up near my own bedding and usually went with them for lunch and dinner.

On the fourth day at sea the weather started getting rough and most people were overcome with seasickness. In those days, most of the passengers were either women with children or young adults who had completed their school or college education in India. There were only a very few of us, like me, who were traveling to begin our promised job in Kenya. Most of the families were going to Kenya to join the heads of their families who were either in government or in railway clerical jobs, technician jobs, or managers of small *dukkas*. A dukka, in African slang, meant a small shop in which cheap goods were available along with groceries, clothes, cutlery, and other odds and ends. While children and young people were not much affected by the rough sea, women often became seasick. We frequently found them throwing up whatever they had eaten. It was a horrible sight. Seasickness is very contagious. You see someone throwing up and you also start vomiting.

On the fifth or sixth day I decided to go to the top deck in the open air. I felt much better as I watched the rise and fall of the huge waves of the storm.

I was really enjoying the sight. It was afternoon, and soon another young man, who must have been in his late teens, joined me. Meeting this young man completely changed the atmosphere and despite the rough weather and stormy sea, the whole journey became quite interesting and exhilarating. He belonged to the same youth organisation as I did! I spotted him as a *swyamsevak* by his khaki half-pants of Sangh. I came to know that he was a swyamsevak from Gujarat, Manek Lal Rughani.

It took us about two weeks to reach Mombassa and every evening Manek Lal, some other young men and I used to meet on the deck and play some games. At the end we would sing *Sangh prarthana* (prayer). We continued this practice for almost ten days. Starting with two people we were seventeen like minded people by the time we reached Mombassa seaport. Some were already swyamsevaks while others had become swyamsevaks on the deck.

As I was writing these memoirs in November 2005, I received a phone call, one which really gave me a very pleasant shock. One of my friends in England called and told me, "I have met a person who knows you, because fifty-nine years ago he traveled with you and another young man, Manek Lal." He told me that this other traveling companion of mine was Prabhudas Karia and he had given my phone number to him. He also gave me Prabhudas's phone number, so I called Prabhudas immediately. I was so excited that I can't even describe this excitement. When I spoke to him, he clearly remembered and mentioned that when I was traveling with Manek Lal back in 1946, he had joined us soon after, and he was with us till the end of the journey. He had also attended a shakha in Kenya after that for sometime. He mentioned that he was with us when we started that shakha. This chat with Prabhudas Karia refreshed all the sweet memories of that voyage.

So, this was the beginning of Sangh work abroad. Thus, I should mention that the first Sangh shakha outside Bharat was held on board the ship S.S. Vasna in September 1946.

One day, while on the ship, all the seventeen of us who had made friends only during the voyage, exchanged addresses. Each one of us felt that the time had come when they would part because not everyone lived in Nairobi. Some lived in other small towns and would be going there. In those days most ordinary people did not have telephones. Only businessmen or

professional people had this luxury. So, it was customary to exchange addresses. The ship dropped anchor at Mombassa port, as far as I remember, sometime in the third or fourth week of September, 1946.

I do not remember the time and date of disembarkation in Mombassa. Perhaps, it was late in the afternoon when we arrived. All the families of my shakha colleagues on ship came to receive them and everyone was quickly introduced. Then we parted smilingly saying good bye to each other and went to our respective hosts with a promise to meet again in Nairobi, capital of Kenya, as soon as we had settled down in our respective towns. We had such an affectionate and warm reception that it really thrilled us. We also promised to do well in our future studies or jobs, and to start a branch of Sangh in each town.

Chapter 6 – A New Beginning in Kenya

Our arrival in Kenya itself was an event for me. As we disembarked, it was very interesting to note how people were received in Kenya. Usually, when a ship arrived, not only would the parents or family members come to receive the people joining them; but sometimes their extended relatives also came to the harbour to receive them. It was like a big gathering when a ship arrived at the port. We felt thrilled when we saw so many people at the Mombassa port gathered there to receive their friends or relatives arriving from this long voyage. My host had come along with his two brothers, so also had my brother-in law's brother-in-law (my wife's sister's husband, called *sadubhai* in our mother tongue) with his family! In those days very few people had cars. But, it was considered highly respectable to request some friend or relative who had a car to come to the airport to receive the new arrivals. Kashi Ram, my *sadubhai*'s brother-in-law (*behnoi*) had also borrowed a friend's car. His friend and two or three members of the family were also in the car. They had all come to receive me at the port though I hadn't known them before. Naturally, I was very happy with their reception. They wanted me to stay with them for two or three days. So, I stayed with them, perhaps, for three days. Then, they booked my seat on a train to Nairobi where I was to join the new job the following week.

Nairobi is about three hundred miles away from Mombassa. When I arrived in Nairobi, my brother-in-law (*sadubhai*) Amarnath ji came to receive me, accompanied by his two brothers and took me to his house. In those days, Indians did not have big houses. They usually rented a single room, one bedroom apartment, or a house with one or two bedrooms at the most. Amarnath ji, my principal host, had only two rooms.

Sanatan Dharma Girls' School, where I was to work, was to open in the second week of September. I had about ten days at my disposal. Amarnath ji took me around the city and showed me interesting places. Then, I was invited one by one by his brothers and ten days passed off very quickly. I was so overwhelmed with their hospitality that I cannot but make a note of it. Then, Amarnath ji took me to my school. He was the general secretary of the board of directors, so it was with authority that he introduced me to them and showed me around. The school was only for junior classes from grade one to grade seven and it was attached to a big temple, Sanatan Dharma Mandir. It was a newly built school and I was quite pleased to see the simple building with a very cosy atmosphere.

I stayed with my Amarnath ji for about ten days and later the school provided me a place in the guest house which was attached to the temple. This guest house had seven or eight rooms where people from India were provided lodging till they found a place for themselves. A teacher was also given a room till he found a place to stay. The school Principal, Mr. Dinanath Saint, also had a room there. Therefore, we became very good friends. Our food was cooked by one African servant. In the evenings, we usually went together for some social activities or for a walk or to meet people. Mr. Saint, also from India, was a widower with two sons. Though he was actually a *Sant* (Hindi word for Saint), as per his original name, he changed his surname to *Saint* (English word for Sant), because he had taught in India at some Christian school!

After I joined the school, I had to accept three challenges. The atmosphere was new, the teaching methods were different and thirdly, the syllabi were different. Everything was quite different from the schools in Amritsar. Students' age group was between six and fifteen. I had to prove myself as a good teacher, so I had to work hard on that side. Because of my good teaching experience, I did not find it very difficult to adjust to the new job at school.

Attached to the school was a big library on the first floor of the school hall. The school hall was used for two purposes - for school assembly on working days and for conducting religious lectures or other talks on the weekends. In the morning all the students would get together in the hall and recite the prayer followed by some announcements by the headmaster. I was introduced very well in the assembly on my first day of school, it was very encouraging.

I started my new life enthusiastically in cheerful spirits I taught during the day and in the evenings I always had some appointment with relatives, friends, young people etc. I was only twenty four at that time, so it was very easy to make friends. I also tried to acquaint myself with the members of the school committee and struck friendship with the priests of the temple. The priests respected me by virtue of my Sanskrit Honour's degree as they were not blessed with as much education in Sanskrit and I could also help them in their work

In those days things were simple, especially when I compare those schools with the ones in Canada or England. I remember something very amusing and worth describing. Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is on highlands with a very temperate climate. It is neither too cold nor too warm and you can, generally, manage with a sweater. But, initially I found it a little cold because I had come from a warm place. People may not believe it, but I used to carry a blanket which I even wore in the class sometimes because I felt cold! Some other teachers also did that, while the ladies came in shawls. Looking back, it seems so strange as I visualize myself wearing a blanket in class and teaching!

It was a good group of teachers. Except for three, all the other members of staff were women. Very soon I became friends with my colleagues. In the morning, there would be the assembly first, then a routine break during which the students had their lunch or snacks. In the evening the teachers, by turns, would accompany the students going home on the school bus. Because this bus had a driver but no conductor, a teacher had to conduct it. The bus used to go round to all the far and near places, with the teacher standing like a conductor, holding a handle attached to the ceiling of the bus. He would see to it that every student was dropped safely to the nearest possible point near the door of her house. The teacher was dropped off last, and the bus was parked back in school. The bus was also useful to the boys' school. Only the girls' school had the bus and the younger boys up to grade four were also allowed to travel on the bus. This multi-purpose use of the bus and the teacher seemed quite interesting to me.

Teaching in Kenya

I started teaching in the first or second week of October 1946 and worked for three and a half years as a teacher. Then I was promoted to the position of Acting Principal. In 1953, I went back to India on four months' vacation and studied for Bachelor's Degree in English. I had already received training as a teacher in Kenya. With this Bachelor's Degree in English I got a government job with much better prospects and benefits. I worked for almost twenty-four years in three government high schools as a Hindi, History, and English teacher.

I was mostly stationed in Nakuru, the fourth biggest town in Kenya, but I was also transferred for a few years to the remote township of Kericho in the heart of the biggest tea plantation area in Kenya. Kenya is a beautiful country because of its weather and captivating natural landscape, but Kericho

is like a beauty spot on the face of Mother Kenya. Towards the end of my career there, for the last term of four years, I was transferred back to a prestigious high school in Nairobi.

In those days, the British people ran schools, more or less, on racial basis. Indian schools and African schools were separate, and so were European schools. All the schools used to be in different localities. Thus, the whole social and the resulting education system were highly racial. I felt very strange and uncomfortable with this segregation. With different schools for Whites, Indians and Blacks, their locality, and facilities, it was almost like apartheid. The heads of administration and the inspectors were mostly Europeans, but the headmasters of government Indian schools were mostly Indians. Menial jobs of cleaning etc. were done by the native Kenyans. It was a sad state of affairs and saddened my heart. But as migrants we could not do much about it, or else the fate of others who wanted to come to Kenya for better prospects, too, would be jeopardized.

In general, there was no discipline related problems in schools because Indian children were quite well disciplined. It was easier for me because my school was a girls' school and we always notice that there is more discipline among girls than boys. I believe that another reason why there was no indiscipline problem in Kenyan schools was because the rod ruled the roost. Teachers were free to thrash the students. I'm ashamed to look back and realize that I also followed the same law of the jungle. I usually used my left hand for thrashing the naughty and misbehaving students. Later on, I came to know from my wife and other parents that the students had nick-named me "left-hand drive, no signal". Now when I am in Canada, I feel strongly about how backward we teachers were in Kenya regarding humane behaviour.

After Uhuru (Independence) a program of Africanization came in quickly. Our retirement age was reduced to 55, so I retired in 1977.

Chapter 7 – First Sangh Shakha in Kenya

Even as I was settling down in Nairobi, I was interested in contacting like-minded people who would like to join me in starting a Sangh shakha, and this was the only activity I pursued. During school hours I would be busy with teaching in the school and after school hours, my main interest was to contact people to talk about Sangh work in Bharat and to find people who already knew about Sangh.

Whenever I visited any family, I made it a point to talk to the youth in the family, and after or before dinner I would say, “We have an organization that helps youth in leadership training. Would you like to be part of such an activity?” I would explain to them that we start with small scout games, or sometimes, big games. But, the purpose of the games was just getting together in an enjoyable way. Most of the youth would welcome this idea because the name of Sangh had already reached Kenya as a result of its service projects, but more so for its stand against partition. Sangh was against the partition, even though it was certain that India would be partitioned, because the British supported the Muslims. Most Hindus did not like their motherland being partitioned and most of them had a very strong feelings against it. Thus, even Indians in Kenya knew about Sangh’s stand and youth concurred with it. Most of the people were agreeable to the idea of joining Sangh.

All the preliminary ground work was done by December, in about four months. I had made several acquaintances during this time. My swayamsevak friend from the ship voyage, Manek Lal, was living with his father in a place called Nyeri, about ninety miles from Nairobi. His father owned a store there, but there was no high school in Nyeri. So Manek Lal stayed with his father for two to three months and in January he came to join a school in Nairobi where his mother’s brother, his *mama*, lived. He stayed with them and joined a night school to learn English and to pass his matriculation - Senior Cambridge examination. I felt highly encouraged when he joined me every evening to meet different families and youth. We also kept in touch with the people whom we had met on the ship. Some of them belonged to Nairobi, so slowly we built up a good well-knit group of close friends to start Sangh karya in Kenya.

By December, everyone was enthused and determined to start a branch of Sangh in the New Year. On 14th January 1947, on the holy *Makar Sankranti* day, we met for the first time as a shakha, and first day of shakha was conducted. In other words the Sangh abroad officially came into being on that day. As I write these memoirs in 2005, it is interesting and fulfilling to note that the launch of Sangh abroad, which is now a force in community service and service to multicultural communities in forty countries, took place on the 14th January 1947 in Nairobi, Kenya. The organization running these shakhas in Kenya was, later, named *Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS)*.

From 1947 to 1977 my attachment to Sangh work in East Africa was so consistent and so intimate that there was not a single week, let alone a month, when I was not involved in its activities. As BSS grew, communities other than Hindus also joined Sangh - there were many Sikhs, and also a few Parsis.

Chapter 8 – Social Conditions in Kenya

To get a feel about how we Indians fared in Kenya and the reason why Indians in East African countries migrated over a period of time, I must describe the social and political conditions of this region during those times. It will also give you an idea about the way Sangh grew in the Indian society there.

Most Indians in Kenya took up clerical and semi-skilled jobs in the railways, post offices, banks, and British-owned industries. It was really an irony that poor natives, the owners of the country, worked only as house servants, farm labourers, or did menial jobs with very low wages. Indians, who were illiterate, opened small dukkas wherever they found a convenient place.

In 1894, the British recruited Indian workers mainly to build railways and staff other departments like customs, banks, or post offices. Most of these Indians belonged to the lower-middle class in India and had a hard time securing jobs there. So they found the jobs and salary structure in Kenya quite attractive. It was almost four times of what they could get in India.

I have mentioned earlier that the overall pattern of society in Kenya in those days was apartheid based. The British and other Europeans either possessed large farms sold to them at a very low price in appreciation of their army service, or they held top jobs in government departments and railways. They used to have separate schools for each major community. Whites would have the best locales. Indians being in business would manage to have their schools mostly in the heart of the city and the schools for poor Blacks would have the last choice in poor areas. It was a very sad and unhappy scenario. In spite of segregation, all the three main communities of Kenya lived in peace. Due to good administration there was very little crime, just limited to small thefts. For some years after India's partition there was some tension, or a sort of indifferent relationship between the Indian Hindu and Muslim communities, but there was no open reaction or hostility. The partition did not affect their normal life or work.

Army personnel were mainly British with a few lower jobs given to Indians. Africans were petty soldiers only. The police force was chiefly Indian except the top jobs which were, naturally, given to the British. There was a

small legislative assembly composed mostly of Europeans and a few top nominated Indian businessmen or lawyers and very few Africans.

In 1948 the first Indian High Commissioner established a Consulate in Nairobi. At that time the Africans and Indians started coming into direct contact, because some Kenyan students had started going to India for higher education after passing their senior Cambridge examination.

Until 1963, when Kenya became independent, there was no local educational authority to set the examination papers. Cambridge University of England set the exams, including that of Kiswahili - the commonly spoken language of Kenya. The examinations were held in Kenya. Most of the students were Indians, a few Europeans, and only very few Africans. A local examination authority did set the examination papers of KPE (Kenya Preliminary Exam) which went up to middle school. Papers were mostly set by local European teachers and inspectors.

Gradually, African leadership came into existence and prominence. It comprised of bright students sent on government scholarships to the UK for higher education. Most of these students came from the British loyalist families of African chiefs. These newly educated African young people were inspired by the Indian liberation movement, and they began to contact the Indian High Commissioner, Shri Appa Pant. He himself was the son of a former king of Oundh, a small princely state in Maharashtra. Thus, the seed of freedom movement was sown in the African mind. Their leader, Mr. Jomo Kenyatta, a graduate of the London School of Economics, belonged to the Kikuyu Tribe. With caution and secrecy, educated African youth from other tribes joined him. We may call this the beginning of the freedom movement in Kenya that started in early 1950s.

There was nothing like non-violence in the African blood. So, in the late 1950s this ordinary freedom struggle turned into a secret but violent agitation, known as '*Mau Mau*' which I believe means something like "Kill, Kill." Some of the farm labourers working on the large European farms started robbing and murdering the landlords and their family members. This scenario was getting very scary for the Europeans and the government had to increase the army and police forces by almost four times. Even then, it seemed impossible to bring the situation under control. Mr. Appa Pant advised their leaders to follow the Gandhian way of non-violent passive resistance and,

thus, he won the praise and cooperation of both the British government and the African leaders.

During this time I was active in the Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS) work. Mr. Pant advised BSS to invite Mr. Jomo Kenyatta's team of freedom fighters to our annual camp to be held at Githunguri on Kenyatta's own farmland. What a great opportunity! About three hundred participants of the camp could see the 'cream of the crop' of African leadership, including two of the future presidents of independent Kenya, Mr. Jomo Kenyatta and Mr. Arap Moi. This intimate contact with the top leaders of Kenya's freedom movement was actually the first ever close bonding between Indians and the mainstream Africans.

It was not safe for the Indian community to openly support the Africans on this issue because the British would look at the hundred thousand odd community with suspicion and, hence, Indians had to keep a balanced relationship with Africans and the British rulers. We could only show limited inward sympathy with the Kenya freedom fighters. The British were quite convinced about the loyalty of the Indian. So much so that the top officers in the administration quite often attended big Indian community programmes as honoured guests. One such programme was held in 1951-52. This was an exhibition of "Ramayana in pictures" arranged on the 26th January, the Indian Republic Day. Sir Phillip Mitchell, the then Governor of Kenya, performed the opening ceremony of this exhibition. Many of the paintings of different events of Ramayana were done by the King of Oundh, the father of Mr. Appa Pant.

The period between 1954 and 1963 was a highly turbulent one in the Kenyan history. On the one hand there was continued violence on European farms where families were not safe at all, while on the other hand in every small or big town Indian shops and big businesses were occasionally vandalized and looted. This scared the Indian community, and people started sending their children for higher education to India while a few rich businessmen sent their wards to England.

At that time, there was only one small university in Nairobi where most of the students were Indian and only a few Africans. Africans did not take admission to the university because most of them could not afford the fees. On request of the Indian high commissioner, the Indian government financed the building of a university wing and named it *Mahatma Gandhi*

Wing. A big part of financial contribution was shared by the rich Indian business community, and this gesture helped earn the goodwill of both the British rulers and the African community.

There was major upheaval in 1963, especially in the lives of Indians, when Kenya became independent. The African government could not control law and order situation and British civil servants retired on pension. Indians in civil services were forced to retire at the age of fifty five to make room for Africans. Thefts, robberies, vandalism and murders of businessmen became a common, almost daily affair, and everyday Indians prepared themselves to expect any bad news the following day. Most of the Indians held dual citizenship and had two passports – Indian and British. Some businessmen left for India, but most chose to migrate to England. A few also went to the U.S. and Canada. Thus, the temporary disturbances and adverse situation in Kenya proved for them to be a blessing in disguise.

The Indian population, which was more than two hundred thousand in 1963, was gradually reduced to less than sixty thousand. Only the Indians who owned big industries or businesses opted to stay there. For them Kenyan citizenship and passports were made compulsory. Gradually, they became very prosperous in their new home, Kenya. This section of community is still there and is very affluent, although, not at all safe.

As I look back, my lasting impression of Kenya is that of beautiful Kenyan Highlands. Its best beauty lay in its wild life. Indians had an exceptionally comfortable life and the community was very cohesive. I can say, even today, that it is one of the best places in the world to live if (and it is a big If!) there were good law and order situation and no political disturbance.

Chapter 9 – Expansion of Sangh in Kenya

As I write these memoirs in 2005, I think back about the previous three Sangh camps in Bharat, called *Vishwa Sangh Shibirs* (Global Sangh Camps), held in Bangalore (1990), Gujarat (1995), and at Keshav Srishti, Bombay (2000). I have attended all the three camps. During those camps I felt as if I had undertaken a pilgrimage – *tirth yatra*. To my mind, tirth yatra means not only a visit to a sacred river or holy place, but any place where good people meet with good intentions, for a good cause. Therefore, I call these shibirs or camps as tirth yatra, or travel to holy places. In fact, though I was doubtful whether I could attend the fourth camp to be held near Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 2005, I managed to attend that too! Since time immemorial, Hindus hold the *Kumbh Mela*, which is a holy gathering for the people of India both from within Bharat and abroad, every twelve years. These VSS camps, with delegates from HSS of different countries, BSS and other Hindu organizations, are held every five years, therefore for me they are like *ardha kumbhis*, or semi kumbh melas. Here we deliberate on the present and future of Hindu society living outside Bharat, the future road map of Hindu organizations, and all related matters.

Last, almost, sixty years of the expansion of Sangh work around the world has seen three clear phases. The first phase, between 1947 and 1957, saw the beginning of Sangh work outside Bharat in Kenya and its neighbouring countries Uganda and Tanzania; and its blossoming in that region. Over these ten years Sangh branches were also opened in Burma, England, United States, Nepal and Hong Kong. The swayamsevaks who went out of India to these countries started shakhas there, but there was no formal co-ordination. Only Man. Chamanlal ji had regular contact with the workers of Sangh in these countries by letters, phone or word of mouth.

The second phase began when late Man. Lakshman Shrikrishna Bhide was appointed the first *pracharak* abroad by *Param Poojaniya* Shri Guru ji. Although Man. Chamanlal ji had tried to co-ordinate Sangh work abroad for many years from Delhi, things were not properly organized as Sangh work spread rapidly to different countries. To co-ordinate BSS and HSS work abroad Bhide ji made his headquarters in Kenya. Luckily, BSS in Nairobi had built a beautiful building in the sacred memory of late Shri Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, a *pracharak* and the first general secretary of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the predecessor of BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). Deendayal ji was

murdered in India in a train by some anti-national leftist group, but his killers were never apprehended. Bhide ji worked for many years from this place until he returned to Bharat.

The third phase evolved when the headquarters of Sangh were shifted from Nairobi in Kenya to Leicester in England. It was felt that England was a better place to co-ordinate the growing Sangh activity around the world. Sangh appointed another senior pracharak, Dr. Shankar Rao Tatwawadi ji, to co-ordinate the work in diverse countries and societies.

In Kenya our organization was named Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (Bharatiya means Indian) - BSS instead of RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). BSS was not officially affiliated with RSS, because in Kenya we followed an independent *karya paddhati* (working methodology) which was better suited to the East African situation, legally correct and acceptable in a foreign land.

Basically, the BSS follows the same ideology of RSS, that of uniting and organizing the Hindu community which possessed all the qualities of a highly civilized and cultured society, except for the stark absence of unity, discipline, organizational qualities and assertiveness. BSS is not a reactionary movement but a proactive and positive one, to build up the Hindu society's strengths and remove caste, creed and linguistic barriers or differences. Swayamsevaks are taught to serve the whole Indian population in every possible way, especially when there are natural calamities like earthquake, famine and floods etc. In India, Sangh workers have also volunteered for work during wars. Although BSS is mainly concerned with Hindu society, it has also worked for and served the needs of indigenous poor and illiterate Africans by organizing medical aid camps, food camps, and blood banks for them.

The structure of Hindu society in Kenya during those times was built on sectarian, caste or linguistic basis. The population had many organizations—Sanatan Dharma, Arya Samaj, Krishna Consciousness Society, Swaminarayan, Brahmosamaj, Surat District Association, etc. Most of the immigrants in East Africa were from Punjab and Gujarat, but a small section was also from Maharashtra, Goa, South India while there were a few from other Indian states as well. The society as a whole lacked cohesion, harmony and a spirit of unity or sense of oneness.

In this scenario grew the Sangh work that started bringing *shishus* (small children), *baals* (young boys), *taruns* (youth), and a few *praudh* (senior citizens) from all sections of the society into shakhas. Being well disciplined, motivated and of a high moral character, these people started working in their own community groups also. This brought communities into close contact with each other and took them out of their self created isolation. These new groups started inviting other groups, sects and organizations to their major functions and celebrations. In ten years (1947-1957) there were shakhas in all the major towns of Kenya and in all the major cities of East Africa, namely Uganda, Tanzania, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Within a period of twenty years Hindu society had turned into a close, well-knit community in these countries.

All the Kenyan karyakartas were either working at full-time jobs or studying. They could manage the local shakhas well, but extra effort was required for more remote areas. Then some young karyakartas came forward and offered to tour other towns and countries during their vacation. Some of them went as far as Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. I had the good luck to visit all these countries, and another neighbouring country, Zambia.

Like some of the young karyakartas, I too used most of my free vacation time to visit different towns in Kenya and East Africa. I left all the work and responsibility of my children's education to Kaushalya, my wife. During these long holidays I asked her to guide their activities and studies, and to ensure that they were in good company. I gave them strict instruction to never be absent from daily shakha. (Kenya is the only country abroad which follows the method of daily shakhas even up to now). Once a year, mostly during December vacation, I took my family with me to the towns I toured. Being a teacher in Kenya was the best possible job because we got three vacations of three weeks, four weeks and five weeks respectively at the end of each term of three months in a year.

We also had another privilege. Every four to five years we got a paid overseas vacation of at least four months. So, we got a chance to visit India, on an average, every five years. We enjoyed the same facilities if we wanted to spend our vacation in the U.K. So, in 1966 while my family went to India, I went to England where my two eldest sons were studying.

I want to mention some of the karyakartas by name, especially those who worked regularly to expand Sangh work in other towns and East African countries. They were Shri Iqbalrai Dutta, Shri Uttambhai Chauhan, Shri Jagdish Mitra Sood (then karyavaha of Kenya), Shri Praveen Ruparelia (a university student, now karyavaha of U.K.), Shri Purushottam Rao (now editor of *Amar Bharati*, a quarterly magazine published in Kenya), and many more. Many young workers pursued Sangh activities and they made a really wonderful team.

I will not do justice to the many such karyakartas whose names I have forgotten and my apologies to them while I mention some more names. They are Sarvashri Ramnath Seedhar, Mulkhraj Sharma, Jayantibhai Chheda, Chunibhai Haria, Pishauri Lal Bhalla, Krishan Rawal, Nirbhay Ram, Shantibhai Shah, Amrit Lal Shah, Kuldeep Nehra, Lal Chand Punj, Narendra Shah, Dinesh Shah, Amrit Shah, Hasmukh Shah, Zaver Chand, Uttambhai Shah, Dhiraj Lal Shah, Mani Lal Shah, Premchand Shah, Jaswant Lal Sharma, Solanky, Tarlok Singh Nandhra, Jaipal Manchanda, Dayabhyai Patel and Manibhai Patel. I remember five more names - Vibhakar Patel, originally from Eldoret, Shyam Aptikar (Mahsaude ji), and three Velji bhai(s) – one from Kisumu, second from Nairobi and the third one from Nakuru. Shri Velji bhai Shah of Nakuru was introduced to Shakha by his sons, Amrit and Hasmukh. He later proved a great asset to Sangh, and was promoted to membership of the Central *Karyakari Mandal* (the executive committee). I again apologize for missing other names.

I remember two of Veljibhai's humorous anecdotes. When asked why he liked shakha, he said, "All sports clubs have some membership fees, but Sangh charges no fee yet gives the best opportunity of physical exercises, games and sports. And second reason of my liking it is..," he continued, "it has cured my asthma." Velji bhai of Kisumu also has an interesting story. In Sangh there is a custom of adding "*Ji*" at the end of everyone's name to show love and respect. We add that even to the names of children. Therefore, one swayamsevak used to call him Velji ji bhai! Eventually he was persuaded that in this case "*Ji*" should not be used because it sounded funny.

Many young karyakartas went to England after completing higher education in Kenya. At that time there was only one university in Nairobi and one in Uganda, and preference for admission was given to African students because they could not afford overseas education. Though we lost these young

karyakartas for Sangh work in Kenya, it was a blessing in disguise. Most of the young men were so engrossed in Sangh work that wherever they settled in England they started shakhas. In this way, former Kenyan swayamsevaks joined hands with those who had come from India to study or settle in Britain. Now U.K., instead of Kenya, became the main centre of Sangh work outside India with head quarters in Leicester.

Chapter 10 - Sangh Growth around the World (1957-77)

The arrival of the first full time pracharak, Man. Lakshman Shrikrishna Bhide, in Kenya was a turning point in the history of Sangh abroad. Soon after his arrival in Kenya, Shri Bhide ji acquainted himself with his new environment and met the senior workers of Sangh all over East Africa.

Uganda, Tanganyika, Zambia

Laxmanrao ji started touring regularly with a definite plan of expansion. The result was that in the following ten years Sangh work touched even the small remote townships. We are greatly indebted to late Shri Chamanlal ji, who kept records of active swayamsevaks who left India to go to other countries for better prospects. These contacts proved very useful and enabled Bhide ji to expand Sangh work in other countries from his new headquarters in Nairobi. A network of shakhas spread in small towns like Kitali, Kissie in Kenya, Masaka, Jinja and Mabale in Uganda, and Tanga and Mwanza in Tanganyika. After consolidating Sangh work in East Africa, he started touring other countries for which he received the contact addresses from Man. Chamanlal ji.

I accompanied Shri Bhide ji to Zambia. In an interesting twist of events I had to spend a night in police lock up at the airport. I will talk about it later. We stayed there for a week, contacting different people who had some connection with Sangh in India, or with Shri Chamanlal in Delhi. We also invited other community and social workers to come to a meeting held in the Hindu Community Centre. Thus, shakha of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh began in Zambia.

Burma

From 1960 Sangh work started growing not only in Kenya but also in other countries. The next place where Sangh shakha started after Kenya was Burma (Myanmar). It was started there by a doctor, Dr. Mangal Sein, originally from Burma, but who had received his education in India and had become a swayamsevak at that time. On completing his medical education, he started Sangh work in Rangoon, and from there it gradually spread to other towns. After a few years, Dr. Mangal Sein migrated to India, and the Sangh work in Burma was taken up by another dedicated pracharak, Shri Ramprakash Dhir. Dr. Mangal Sein soon became interested in Indian politics,

and joined Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the forerunner of BJP. He became a very popular leader and was elected to the state assembly, and became a senior minister in the government of state of Haryana.

Mauritius, Seychelles and Madagascar

For further expansion, Shri Bhide ji began travelling to nearby island-countries in the Indian Ocean. He was occasionally accompanied by one or the other local karyakartas. His aim was to establish Sangh work in Mauritius, a country I had already visited on my vacations and had established some contacts, and a shakha was already running there. On way to Mauritius, he broke his journey at Seychelles, where a former karyakarta of Kenya, Shri Krishan Chand Varma, was working in the post office. Varma ji had done some groundwork which enabled Bhide ji to stay there for a week and start a regular shakha.

From Seychelles, Bhide ji flew to Madagascar where some Indian businessmen had settled. Madagascar had earlier been a French colony, and later on it was conquered by the British. Due to language problems, starting of a shakha was difficult there because we needed to send a karyakarta who knew French. Bhide ji stayed with some businessmen, and then flew to Mauritius.

This was Bhide ji's first visit to Mauritius, and he was accompanied by another young karyakarta whose name I cannot recall. More than fifty percent population of Mauritius is of Indian origin and it speaks English, French and Hindi. The mixed Franco-African population of Mauritius is known as Creoles. Their language, Creole, is also a mix of part African and part French. It is the primary language spoken by the working class in Mauritius. Shri Bhide ji found it quite easy to start shakhas there for two reasons. Firstly, people from Mauritius often traveled to India for higher education, so they were aware of Sangh work and secondly, I had passed on the addresses of people whom I had contacted during my earlier trip to him. I still remember some important names - the three Sukhdev brothers, Shri Ramdharry Singh (owner of the big Sun Rays Hotel and my chief host), and the Chandermauli family.

Hong Kong

One of the Kenyan swayamsevaks, Shri Anil Pota, had gone to Hong Kong to start his business there. Hong Kong has a lot of Sindhi Hindus who had left Pakistan after partition and settled in Singapore and Hong Kong. Some of them already knew about Sangh and many of them were swayamsevaks from Hyderabad (Sindh) and Karachi. With their help Anil Pota ji had started a shakha there. Shri Bhide ji went to Hong Kong and consolidated this work. He also went to Myanmar and established more contacts in Thailand and Singapore.

My visit to Paris and England in 1966

In 1966, I went to UNESCO's headquarters in Paris for three months as a volunteer. I also had a chance to move around with a couple of swayamsevaks in Paris, an experience I will recount separately. From May to July I stayed there, and during the second week of August I went to England.

In U.K., I wanted to meet Shri Ramnath Seedhar, a former karyakarta of Kenya, Shri M.C. Satyanarayan, a swayamsevak from Bangalore, and Shri Kulwant Chhaggar, also from Kenya. Because they were living far away from each other in London, we decided to meet at a central place and the place of appointment we decided on was the British Museum. I well remember the date and time - it was 14th August evening. Unfortunately, it was not a good day for India because it was the day of her partition, but the cause for which we were meeting was great. The agenda was whether it was possible to start the Sangh shakhas there formally, although some shakhas were already running in Leeds, Bradford and Birmingham. We were happy to learn that Shri Satyanarayan ji had already established some contacts with the swayamsevaks from East Africa, India and other British colonies. I remember two other colleagues, Shri Raman Khatri from Surat and Shri Srivastava who were assisting Shri Satya Narayan ji. During the discussion we realized that holding daily shakhas in England was not possible because of the long distances and the pace of life there. It was decided that we should have weekly shakhas instead.

We also decided to hold a meeting on 15th August, Independence Day of India, indeed an auspicious day. We divided the work of contacting all known swayamsevaks and sympathizers, and decided to meet at Shri Kulwant Chhaggar's house in the evening. Meanwhile, we came to know that Shri Atal

Behari Vajpayee, the future external affairs minister and Prime Minister of India, was by chance in London. Shri Satyanarayan and Raman Khatri went to see him at the hotel on the morning of 15th August and he kindly agreed to chair that meeting. What a good luck! A senior Sangh pracharak and India's fast rising leader was to preside over the meeting. All the participants were extremely delighted by his presence. At the start of the meeting, Shri Ramnath, Shri Satyanarayan and Shri Kulwant ji gave a brief report about their efforts to start Sangh work in England, and about their background in India and Kenya. Then all the participants, around thirty five, introduced themselves to one another. It was quite a thrilling experience as most of us came from different places but felt a sort of oneness because of our involvement in Sangh. This was the first ever planned formal meeting of Sangh workers abroad.

Man. Atal ji told me in confidence, that he knew Shri Satyanarayan ji very well from Bangalore and he was the most suitable person to be *karyavaha* of HSS in U.K. But, we had to wait for approval from Man. Madhavrao Muley, Sarkaryavah of RSS at that time. Within two weeks we got the information through Man. Chamanlal ji that Shri. M.C. Satyanarayan would be the *karyavaha* of U.K. It was unanimously decided to have Shri Ramnath ji as *mukhya shikshak* of London shakha, Shri Kulwant Chhaggar as *shikshak* and Shri Raman Khatri as *gat nayak*.

Each of the participants had resolved to start shakhas in the locality where he lived. They spent two months preparing the ground, and started shakhas on the Hindu festival day of Vijayadashmi (*Dussera*) Day of 1966.

Sangh work has spread across UK now and it has the highest number of shakhas overseas. During these years many British colonies got freedom one after another and some of the people from there migrated to UK. Thus, Sangh work spread rapidly all over the UK, especially in England and it has become the centre of HSS work worldwide. The organizational work in UK and Europe is currently looked after by HSS pracharak Shri Ram Vaidya. There are about forty other countries in the world where there are sizeable numbers of shakhas and many more where HSS has established good contacts with Hindu community there.

Chapter 11 – Strengthening of HSS in Canada

After retiring from my teaching job with the Ministry of Education in Kenya, I went to the U.K. and settled in Leeds with my two youngest children, son Arun and daughter Sushma. They were in their final years of university. My elder daughter Asha was married and living with her husband and two children in Kenya. I stayed for three years in England (1977-1980), and received enough pension to maintain myself and my wife. So I was fully self-reliant both financially and physically. My health was so good that I even got a job as a welfare officer at a community centre in Liverpool. I wanted to see Arun and Sushma complete their education and get married. Luckily, both of them completed their education by 1980, and Sushma got married.

My two eldest sons, Surendra and Kamlesh, had already migrated to Canada sometime in the late 1970s. Soon, they got good jobs and proposed to sponsor me to Canada. They did not have any difficulty in getting my immigration papers cleared. So I came to Canada in 1980. In 1981, I had to go back to England to get my son Arun married. After his marriage, I felt I had performed all my duties to my family. Thus, at the age of fifty-eight I was fully retired from my professional and family responsibilities and free to serve the society around me in any possible way.

After arriving in Toronto, I compared life in both the countries, England and Canada. I was free to choose to settle in either of the countries, but I liked Canada more than England for a variety of reasons and chose it as my home for rest of my life. The most attractive facet of life in Canada for me was its multi-cultural harmony. From 1981 onwards I have lived in Canada.

To my great joy I found Sangh work already going on in Canada. In the late 1970s, after finding suitable jobs, my sons had got in touch with Shri Labhamal Sabharwal who had established friendly contacts with the swayamsevaks who had arrived from India and settled in Canada. Under the guidance and leadership of Sabharwal ji, Surendra and Kamlesh and other swayamsevaks got together to start a regular shakha, for which my younger son Kamlesh was given the responsibility. There was so much enthusiasm in the group that Sangh work progressed quickly.

I was impressed by the dedication of swayamsevaks and Sabharwal ji. My son Surendra hosted most of the swayamsevak visitors from India, U.K.

and Kenya. I also recall that five karyakartas used to pick up the swayamsevaks in their cars from their residences to take them to the *sanghasthan* (where shakhas are held), and then drop them back after the shakha. Weekend visits to one another's houses were frequent where we had tea parties and dinners. The families of the swayamsevaks were so close and helpful to each other that it seemed as if all of them were an extended family of uncles, aunties, cousins, nephews and nieces.

I was given the responsibility of *kendriya karyalaya* (central office) and the co-ordination of Sangh work. For the next fifteen years, till I was seventy-five, I was occupied enjoyably and usefully. During week days I passed time in the book business and teaching, and on weekends I enjoyed my Sangh work so much that I never even realized how soon those fifteen years, from 1981 to 1996, rolled by. Though I was supposed to have retired when I was fifty-five, from my teaching job in Kenya, yet I worked for twenty years in UK and Canada as actively as if I were a young man in my forties. Gradually, Sangh work grew and evolved, and in addition to the shakhas in Toronto and suburbs, shakhas were started in Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Guelph and Kitchener. We held regular general camps for all Sangh families and training camps for the youth. By 1995 Sangh work was in full swing in Canada, especially in Greater Toronto.

The growth of Sangh in these fifteen years was quite satisfactory. We always felt the need for a full-time pracharak for its coordination as there were several shakhas and contact *vargas* (workshops) in and around Toronto. The three main shakhas namely Mandir shakha in downtown Toronto, Manu shakha in Scarborough and Markham, and Shivaji shakha in Brampton and Mississauga were functioning very productively. A great team of young karyakartas came forward, under whose guidance the number of swayamsevaks grew tremendously. The number of participants in these shakhas were always between one hundred and one hundred fifty. At a *vanabhoj* (picnic) and special programmes numbers often grew to three hundred, especially when a senior pracharak or a dignitary came on a tour from Bharat, Kenya, England or the U.S.A.

In other parts of Canada the two best shakhas were in Calgary and Edmonton. The Sangh work in Calgary grew under the leadership of Valji Bhai Dattani and his sons who had migrated from Uganda to Calgary. In

Edmonton, Sangh grew well under the leadership of two very active karyakartas, Shri Brahma Swarup Verma and Shri Ramprakash Gupta.

My whole family was actively involved in Sangh work. I remember that in one *Guru Dakshina Utsav*, when the budget for the year is anonymously donated by swayamsevaks, all the thirteen members of the Sharda family were present!

The most active karyakartas during this period were Sarvashri L.M. Sabharwal, Ratilal Solanky, Daulat Mistry, Dinesh Mistry, Kamlesh Sharda, Indrakant Patel, Sat Wadhwa, Kulin Mehra, Damodar Godse, Jammu Kumar and Rajkumar Sharma. My apologies to those whose names I have forgotten to mention.

Luckily many senior Sangh pracharaks and dignitaries from Bharat, England and U.S.A. visited Canada to give us guidance and boost Sangh work. Some important names that I can mention are - Sarvashri Lakshman Shrikrishna Bhide, Dr. Shankar Tatwawadi (now chief coordinator of the Vishwa Sangh), Dr. Mahesh Mehta (President V.H.P., U.S.A.), Professor Rajendra Singh, popularly called Rajju Bhaiyya (Sarkaryavah or General Secretary of RSS at that time), H. V. Seshadri (Sahsarkaryavah of RSS at that time), Atal Behari Vajpayee (former Prime Minister), Lal Krishna Advani (former Deputy Prime Minister and Home minister), Dr. Ved Prakash Nanda (Sanghchalak U.S.A. and Chairman of International Jurists' Association), Dr. R.S. Dwivedi (Sahasanghchalak, U.S.A.), Dr. Manohar Shinde (Karyavaha, U.S.A.), Man. Sudarshan ji (present Sarsanghchalak, RSS), Dr. Bhisma Agnihotri (Vice-Chancellor of a Law University in the U.S.A.), and many more.

During these fifteen to twenty years we have celebrated all the six utsavas of Sangh every year. The ITC (Instructors Training Camp) for training instructors and a general camp for families are also regularly held annually. In the first ITC, a third-year trained karyakarta from U.K., Shri Kanubhai, was invited to organize the camp.

On the occasion of birth centenary of the founder of RSS, Param Poojaniya Dr. K. B. Hedgewar in 1989, the top leadership of HSS took a decision that the elderly people should delegate their Sangh duties to dedicated young workers, and former should work as *vanaprasthi* (one retired from

regular job and family commitments) pracharaks and karyakartas in sewa (social service) Projects of their choice. So, all the top senior karyakartas in their sixties or seventies relinquished their positions in favour of the younger karyakartas, who were between twenty to forty years of age. Passing on the Sangh work in their hands, the senior karyakartas, including me, took up responsibilities in the affiliated organisations like VHP, Sewa International Canada, FISI (Friends of India Society International), Bharat Vikas Parishad and Hindu Vidya Mandir, now called Hindu Institute of Learning.

There was no *Hindu Sevika Samiti* at that time, but girls and women generally attended various utsavas and Family Camps. In 2001, Hindu Sevika Samiti was formed, and more and more women started participating in the organisational setup. Shri Rajkumar Sharma, a vanaprasthi pracharak, was appointed to co-ordinate and look after Sangh work. He was assisted by Shri Shambhu Das Gupta and Shri Kulin Mehra.

As the Sangh work progressed, two committed women came forward and put in outstanding efforts. Shrimati Hari Ganga Ben encouraged Sangh work among the women, and Sushri Asha Sehegal excelled sewa work. The latter headed the organisation, Sewa International Canada. During the last fifteen years this organisation has collected a good amount of contributions to serve the backward Tribal areas and slums in India, especially in Orissa and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. Asha Sehegal drew inspiration from the *Pramukh Sanchalika* i.e. Head of Rashtra Sevika Samiti in Bharat. She also accompanied me to the Vishwa Sangh Shibir in Bangalore in 1990.

I was keenly interested in doing some work for the multicultural society of Greater Toronto through education. Therefore, I involved myself actively in the Hindu Institute of Learning, which teaches Indian languages, arts and culture.

Chapter 12 – Hindu Institute of Learning *(Hindu Vidya Mandir)*

A large number of social service (sewa) projects were initiated all over the world on the occasion of birth centenary celebrations of the founder of RSS, Param Poojaniya Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1989. In Canada two major projects were started. The first one was Sewa International Canada which was organized to help the deprived sections of the Indian population and proposed to assist the Sewa Bharti projects, like *Ekal Vidyalayas* (single teacher schools in tribal areas), and Mobile Medical Vans that helped disabled persons, leprosy patients etc.

The second project was to serve the community and the multicultural society of Canada through a specific kind of education, namely, teaching Indian languages, art and culture. The organisation formed for this purpose was named Hindu Vidya Mandir, now known as Hindu Institute of Learning (HIL) as this name can be easily understood by the multi-lingual people of Canada.

Because the history of HIL is quite interesting and inspiring, I want to share it with the readers in a little more detail. This project was mainly inspired by two other great educational projects - Vidya Bharati in Bharat, an organisation which is running thousands of schools in the slums and educationally backward areas, and Hindu University in Florida run by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) U.S.A. This Sewa Bharti concept was the practical outcome of the vision of the third Sarsanghchalak, Poojaniya Balasaheb Deoras.

After I got free from my responsibilities of regular Sangh work, I started working full-time and whole-heartedly for the educational sewa project, Vidya Bharati, the educational NGO and an affiliate organization of RSS.

Before I continue further, I must back-track a little to give a back ground to my involvement in this project. On our arrival in Canada, sometimes my wife and I felt lonely in the evenings during the week, so we joined Asian Education Supplies, a part time business in books run by my two sons and one of their friends. This store began by selling greeting cards, especially Diwali cards and Rakhis. Later, the book business was introduced, and finally we

started supplying books on a large scale to libraries throughout Canada, and even to some libraries in the U.S.A. We supplied books of all the major religions, literary works and general subjects.

Hindi Teaching Initiative

The idea of teaching Hindi began in a simple way. One day a gentleman approached my younger son to teach Hindi to his Canadian wife and two children. My son requested that I take up this work. I accepted it for merely five dollars per hour! Another teaching opportunity came because we lived near the Dovercourt Library and the school nearby wanted a part-time Hindi teacher. I applied for the job and got it. Similar vacancies occurred in two other junior schools and again I got these jobs. But lack of discipline in these classes was not to my liking, so I decided to teach only adults. I put a hand-written note on the notice board of a coin laundry, 'Persons interested in learning Hindi please call' and gave my telephone number. Within a week I got two students. I still remember their names; one was Kanhai, an immigrant from Trinidad, and the second was a Canadian woman, Pat (Patricia) who was married to an Indian gentleman, Mr. Gauri Rohatgi.

Another opportunity to teach Hindi arose because I came to know that the Board of Education was teaching languages of different ethnic groups like Greek, Chinese, Italian, etc. in their night classes, but no Indian language was being taught there. I took courage and wrote a letter to the Director of Education stating that Hindi is the national language of India and many Indians and Canadians would be interested in learning this language. I also sent a list of some interested men and women. The idea appealed to the Director and thus Hindi was introduced into the Continuing Education Department at Jarvis Collegiate Institute. As luck would have it, I was appointed as the Hindi teacher in the General Interest Courses programme. The Institute offered these classes for only six months of the year in the fall and winter. After six months some students approached me and said, "Sir, what's the use of these classes? In next six months, we will forget all this that we have learnt so far. Why don't you continue to teach us?" I liked the idea, and started private classes in a small basement suite on Bloor Street, from where we were running our book shop. The response was very encouraging and the small room was always full.

The Ontario School of Indian Languages

In 1984, I registered The Ontario School of Indian Languages as my own personal venture. Under its auspices several classes were started in our basement suite, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Indian music and Ramayana. The experiment was very successful. The response was so good that I started looking for a bigger place. An ambition was born – “why not build our own school?” Most of the Sanskrit and Hindi students came from Jarvis Collegiate, while others were from the Hindu community originally from the Caribbean Islands, especially Guyana and Trinidad and a few from Fiji. A few of the students were children of Indian immigrants.

1984 to 1989 were the formative years of the Ontario School of Indian Languages. During these years, the number of adult students was never less than fifty and sometimes went up to seventy-five. School children used to come for music and classical dance classes, taught by Shri Chandi Pitambar, the music teacher and Ms. Sally Jones, the dance teacher. Although a Canadian by birth, Sally has learnt classical Indian dances from an Indian guru, and is a brilliant teacher of classical dance. Later on, she specialized in dramatics and organizes big plays and classical concerts for the general public. She always performed a classical dance at our annual functions. She had come in touch with the school through the Hindi classes at Jarvis Collegiate.

In 1989, as mentioned earlier, senior karyakartas including me gave way to younger karyakartas to handle day to day HSS responsibilities while elders were asked to take up any sewa karya of their choice or start new ones as vanprasthis. So, wherever there was a shakha, some kind of service projects were taken up. An idea flashed into my mind – “why not start an educational project to serve not only the Hindu society, but also the multicultural society of Canada?” So, The Ontario School of Indian Languages was dedicated to serve the Canadian society in general and its new name was Hindu Vidya Mandir (Hindu Institute of Learning in English). Thus, HIL was born.

At the time of writing this particular chapter in 2006, the HIL is seventeen years old. Its enthusiastic promoters, students, school committee members, the board of directors and well-wishers are actively trying their best to establish HIL on a sound financial footing and making every possible effort to promote and develop it. In the last seventeen years we have contacted

several leading personalities of the Indo-Canadian society, including the office bearers of various temples. But till recently results had not been that satisfactory. Most of them did support the organisation individually but very few came forward to support it collectively and whole-heartedly. Usually they would say that when they have money, they will build their own school. But the concept of HIL is different. We believe that the whole Hindu community should share this project collectively and present it as a gift to the multicultural society of Canada. We believe that the whole community should show their pride by serving this great country that we have adopted and that has adopted us.

Nevertheless, Vishnu Mandir did help us a little in the beginning. So did Bharat Sewashram Sangh. To date, the best support has come from Vedic Cultural Centre (*Arya Samaj*) where most of the HIL functions are held.

The Turning Point in the History of HIL

About two years ago, Shri Swami Kishore Vyas ji, the head of Sant Gyaneshwar Ashram International, was invited to address a meeting of Sangh karyakartas at Shri Ramesh Aggrawal's house. He was accompanied by Shri Arvind Lal, popularly known as Jeff Lal, an energetic, dynamic and generous leader of our community; and chairman of Sant Gyaneshwar Mandir (SGM), Brampton, Canada.

During the question-answer session I asked Swami ji a question, "Why are temples not interested in building a community schools collectively like Christian Churches, Islamic centres, and other ethnic groups?" Pujya Swami ji gave a very convincing answer to this. He said that in Bharat, the temples had built big schools and he advised us not to give up hope. He suggested that if we really wanted temples' help, some of our active members should join their committees and start encouraging them to participate in this project.

The Sangh karyakartas and I, as also Shri Arvind (Jeff) Lal, were fully convinced about this line of thinking. On the following day Shri Lal told Swami ji that SGM would build a Hindu School sometime in the future and the next day he announced this noble idea to the congregation. When I heard about this, I made an appointment with Swami ji, and we met at Shri Jeff Lal's house that same evening. Shri Gauri Rohatgi and Shri Rajkumar Sharma also

accompanied me. During the discussion, we proposed to Shri Jeff Lal that he should join hands with the Hindu Institute of Learning (HIL), a school which had already been functioning well for the last sixteen years, and had also earned appreciation from our community and many multicultural groups. Pujya Swami ji liked the idea very much, and supported this proposal, to which Shri Jeff Lal readily agreed. The following Sunday we held a joint meeting of the HIL executive and the SGM committee under the chairmanship of Swami ji. Most of the members liked the idea very much, because HIL had efficient manpower and the Mandir had money power. It seemed as if Sudama (HIL) had finally met Krishna (Shri Jeff Lal). Since then Shri Jeff Lal has started working hand in hand with HIL. He is one of our directors and the chairman of HIL's finance committee.

It was our long cherished desire that the HIL should have its own *Shishu Shiksha Mandir* (Montessori School). Our Vice President, Shri Rakesh Sharma, is an expert in this area and runs a very good Montessori school. On his advice we requested Shri Jeff Lal to take the lead in this project. Meanwhile, Swami ji came to Toronto and Shri Jeff Lal consulted him to get his blessings to go ahead with the new project. By God's grace, Jeff Lal set aside a ten thousand square feet plot for the Montessori School and agreed to finance its construction too. On the 1st of September, 2006, the *Bhoomi Poojan* (ground-breaking ceremony) was performed, and a foundation stone was laid by Pujya Swami ji. He gave the Shishu Mandir a beautiful name - *HIMA* - Hindu Institute Montessori Academy (Hima is another name of Goddess Gauri - Parvati). Hindi will be a compulsory subject here.

We had been looking for a suitable place for classes for adults and school children near a subway with parking facilities in the Greater Toronto Area. Fortunately, the ground floor of the Sharda Bhavan fell vacant in July 2006. Some of the directors of the Board approached my sons to rent this suite to the HIL. My sons not only agreed with this good suggestion, but rented it on a much reduced rate. It was a lucky break for us. We occupied this place from 1st August 2006, and classes have already begun in a modest form. We now aspire to introduce day and night classes for learning Indian languages, specifically Hindi and Sanskrit, Indian music (vocal and instrumental), classical dance, yoga, and cultural subjects like Gita, Ramayan, and Upanishads etc. Our Principal, Dr. Ratnakar Narale, is a great scholar of Sanskrit and has to his credit many good books like *Ratnakar Gita*, *Hindi for English Speaking People*, *Sanskrit for English Speaking People*, and *Learning*

Hindi through English Medium. The President and the Principal are being assisted in running the school by an efficient full-time secretary, Sushri Sushmita Vaidya. The most active members who are helping us in some effective ways are Sarvashri Rakesh Sharma, Navinbhai Mehta, Chander Khanna, Dr. Amit Sharda, Gauri Rohatgi, Kailashnath Bhatnagar, Mohan Sookdeo, Jai Sookdeo, Uma Sookdeo, Joseph Skulj and Ellen Shifrin.

Sangh Parivar and HIL

For fifteen years after my arrival in Canada I was almost entirely involved in Sangh work. Even HIL was secondary to it and as a Sangh karyakarta I also participated in some other organisations affiliated with HSS viz. Vishwa Hindu Parishad, FISI (Friends of India Society International), Bharat Vikas Parishad, FOBJP (Friends of BJP in Overseas), and above all Sewa International Canada. These six organisations together form a *Sangh Parivar* in Canada. Of these, Sewa International Canada and the Hindu Institute of Learning have been most active and consistent. Karyakartas like Shrimati Asha Sehegal, Sarvashri L.M. Sabharwal, Kamlesh Sharda, Narendra Bhalla and Ashok Gautam have been trying *yathashakti* (to the best of their strength, within their limitations of time and circumstances) to run their respective organisations:

When I turned seventy-five I began to focus fully on the Sangh inspired project, HIL. Since then, I have been concentrating all my time and energy to promote this educational project alone. We have a small but diligent team of workers whom I mentioned above.

Since its very inception the HIL was lucky enough to get some very sincere helping hands. In 1989 three adult students came forward to help us. One of them was a lawyer Shri Roopnarine Beharrysingh, and other two held very high positions in Canadian Civil service in the office of Solicitor General of Canada, namely Shri Saywak Ramlal and Shri Anant Krishna Ganeshan. Together they did the crucial job of getting the HIL registered with the government as a non-profit charitable organisation. Shri Navin Mehta, a Sanskrit student and Shri Gauri Rohatgi, a friend, are with us since the start of the organisation. We may very well call them founding fathers of the Institute. Our first Principal, Shri T. Venkatacharya, is a great Sanskrit scholar. He had retired as the Head of Sanskrit Department at the University of Toronto. He

resigned from the HIL some years back because of his age and ill health, and he was replaced by our present Principal, Dr. Ratnakar Narale.

Friends of HIL

I will now try to mention some other good friends of HIL. I call the adult students of HIL as our first group of friends who have been our great strength. Every student learned more or less the subjects we taught at the institute. The most popular classes have been Sanskrit, Hindi, music, classical dance, and Ramayana. Sometimes we also got students for Tamil, Gujarati, and other languages. Some of them helped as volunteers, doing different jobs for the school. In fact for the first fourteen years, we had no part-time or full-time secretary. Some of the nice students volunteered their services for office work.

I remember student volunteers like Ms. Dinah Nawbatt, Christianne Levesque, Darci Kennedy, Sally Kristo, and Susan Ramsundersingh. Christianne was quite outstanding. She always came four hours before the lessons and helped in office work. If we had a bigger workload she would come twice a week. When necessary she would willingly offer voluntary ride to me, like Shri Gauri Rohatgi did. For at least five years Dinah and Christianne attended all the Board meetings. As a goodwill gesture, the School did not charge fees from the volunteer students. The only difficulty with this arrangement was that sometimes the volunteers were not available on a specific required day, so we had to get two secretaries who would work part-time when necessary.

For the last three years a very efficient Hindi student, Ms. Ellen Shifrin, has been doing a lot of service for the Institute in many ways, especially in computer work, emailing and designing labels and posters for the school. We have got the full benefit of her long-time teaching experience. Running of the school office has become quite smooth and regular now with the appointment of a full-time office secretary while Ellen still offers voluntary support.

Every student has helped the Institute grow and most students have always donated generously for the building fund in addition to paying fees. There are three students who are among the top twenty donors and some

students need special mention. They brought prestige to the school and we feel proud and privileged by their participation.

Let me start with Shri Navin Mehta who was a Sanskrit student and one of the founding members of HIL and the first Treasurer, he is still whole heartedly with us. Shri Saywak Ramlal was the first General Secretary who actively worked for the Institute during the first five years.

Dr. John Macleod was doing a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto before getting a scholarship from the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute. He was our Hindi student for three years. After spending two years in India and specializing in Indian History, he became Associate Professor in Louisville University Kentucky, U.S. He proved so bright in his career that after twelve years he is the Head of the History Department there now. He remains in constant touch with us and usually writes his letters to us in Hindi. We consider him a part and parcel of the HIL.

Another regular supporter is Dr. Pinayur Raja Gopal who is a professor Emeritus. He was head of Department of Mathematics in York University. On retirement he joined Hindi and Sanskrit classes of HIL for two years and he is a regular and generous donor of HIL. He is a very active worker in 'Quakers' - a social service organization for the refugee immigrants.

There are some more interesting people whom I recall as I look back at the growth of HIL.

Two Polish ladies Mrs. Elizabeth Baloi and her daughter-in-law joined the Sanskrit class because they were very much interested in a spiritual path known as "Blue Star" founded by a Trinidadian Hindu Swami ji. This group is kind of Indian Theosophical Society. They try to find common points of spiritual interest from different religions and meditate together. I found it interesting because I had never seen a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law coming to the same class.

Miss Sasha Sall was the first Sikh girl in our institute, who was interested in becoming a Yoga teacher and therefore learning Sanskrit. All parents usually send their children for higher education to colleges and universities, but here is a unique example of a brilliant student, Ms. Susan

Ramsundersingh, 26 years old at the time, who offered financial support to her mother to do a three years' Nursing course.

David Hunsburger, a software professional, is one of the brightest students of Hindi advanced class. He is with HIL for the last ten years and is a man of ideas. In every Annual Dinner program, he contributes a new item like skit, jokes or short-play presented by the students.

Joseph Skulj is with HIL for the last six to seven years. He is of Slovenian origin and, by profession, a retired chemical engineer. His main interest is linguistics. He is pretty confident that out of all European languages, Slovenian language has more Sanskrit words in it and as a Sanskrit student he is constantly busy in finding similarities between the two languages. He has already discovered one thousand words that are either same or similar in both the languages. He has also found grammatical similarities in both the languages. He has presented two papers on the subject in Slovenian University, one on Linguistic similarities and the second on genetic similarities.

I am sorry to say that I have forgotten the name of the lady who was from '*First Nations*' who was working in some Government Department for the earlier Canadian ethnic groups and joined Hindi class just to study whether there were some common words in Hindi and in her languages.

Dr. David Galdbloom is the head of a big hospital on Queens Road, Mental Health Centre. He is the chief psychiatrist there. He joined the Hindi classes at Jarvis Collegiate Institute and then continued with intermediate class at HIL. He is quite an interesting and humorous person. I asked his purpose of learning and he told that occasionally he wants to speak in Hindi with his mentally disturbed patients of Indian origin.

Bob Buckie read the HIL poster at a barber shop and joined HIL to learn Sanskrit. Once he toured India and realized that most of the Indian languages are daughters of Sanskrit. Every Indian language including South Indian languages have 20% to 40% Sanskrit words. He is a person of multi-linguistic interests. For the last few years he went, at least for three months, to Saudi Arabia to teach English to the richest young boy of the world, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. Along with the prince he also taught other children of the Royal family. He got a very high salary for three months, but

he did it at the cost of losing his job as a librarian in Canada and he had to drop out from Sanskrit classes because of his unemployment. Unfortunately he did not find any suitable job for three years and worked part-time for a nominal pay at HIL. He proved a great asset to HIL, being a multi-talented person and is still helping HIL in many ways. Now he has found a good permanent job as a librarian. His wife also worked part-time for HIL.

Kevin and Krista Burda are a special couple for me who joined HIL about 15 years ago. Both of them have inclination towards spiritualism. Kevin is fond of Yoga and psychiatry while Krista is inclined towards *Sant Mat* - a sect of Hinduism - originally known as Radha Soami. Both follow their own ways, though Krista always tries to persuade him towards her choice. I could guess that there is a reason for their inclination when they joined the class as strangers, both were divorcees and depression and despair were writ large on their faces. Both were gentle in nature. They joined the Hindi classes either to pass time or to travel to India where Hindi could be useful for communication. Kevin being an Anglo-Indian, had a natural interest in visiting India. Krista wished to visit her Guru at '*Radha Soami Satsang, Beas*', the headquarter of the sect in Punjab, India. Being very good students and knowledgeable persons, I liked them. In those days Kevin's main hobby was horse racing. I taught him a game of cards known as Sweep and we played this game atleast once a week. Incidentally, I came to know Kevin's full story later on. Apart from being a divorcee, he had two other reasons for being mentally disturbed at that time. The first reason was not being treated kindly by his parents in his childhood; second reason was segregation and discrimination by the principal of the college where he taught, although he was in no way inferior to other staff members who were mostly white Canadians. He wrote a book on Electronics and requested his Canadian principal to write a foreword for it. The principal agreed to write a foreword on condition that his name be included as a co-writer. This event was a big shock in Kevin's life and upset him very much. I do not know Krista's story. But, because of Hindi classes at HIL they came together and got married.

Ron Bachew belongs to the same village from Trinidad, to which one of our top financial supporter Mr. Ramjeet Ramprasad does. Ron came into contact with HIL through him because he always sends donation for HIL through Ron who manages his accounts and takes care of his income tax related matters. Ron is a civil servant, holding a high position in the Ministry of Health. He got interested in Hindi because of his love for Hindi movies. For

the last five years he has carried out several duties for HIL voluntarily. He is a very good co-coordinator of the class along with other volunteers.

Wellah Looky, a lady of African origin, needs special mention. I was surprised to see her in Hindi class and came to know that although an African, she is very much interested in Hindi movies and music. She was born in France and her parents live in Paris. Her main language is French. I have lived in Kenya for many years, but never have I come across any African lady so highly qualified, polite and cultured like Wellah. She is an M.B.A. from U.S. and is now working in Canada on a well paid job.

HIL is proud of another extraordinary student, Michael Dana. He learnt Hindi because he often visited Mumbai to give music for some Hindi movies. He was the music director of three movies including Ms. Deepa Mehta's *Water* and has given music for seven American movies including a hit movie *Exotica*.

Maureen Levinas requires special mention because she worked so hard to learn Hindi that within a year she has been promoted to advanced class. Asked "Why are you so eager to learn Hindi?" she says, "Because I am addicted to Hindi movies!" I have hardly come across any non-Indian or Western person who has watched so many Hindi movies. She has watched at least three hundred movies and she is a die hard fan of Shahrukh Khan.

To conclude, I may say that I can go on mentioning name after name of students, distinguished teachers and executive members who joined HIL either to learn or teach some art or culture or Indian language and contributed to HIL'S progress, promotion, and reputation. After seventeen years of hard work by executive members, staff, students, well wishes and donors of HIL, it has become an established educational organization with ambitions to buy or build its own premises.

Chapter 13 - Sangh and Hindu Society Abroad

As I look back at sixty eventful years of Sangh work in Hindu society outside India since it stuck roots in Kenya in 1947, I have a sense of satisfaction for what I could contribute to Hindu society through Sangh and later on also to Canadian society at large. I also feel a sense of fulfillment for what Sangh has achieved in these six decades, but I feel a lot more can still be accomplished and needs to be done. I consider myself a humble karyakarta and I am generally disinclined to offer my analysis on Sangh work etc. But, I have been told that the readers may not get a feeling of completeness unless I say something on the overall impact of Sangh on Hindu society and its future as per my assessment. So, I am putting down a few thoughts, though reluctantly!

The biggest impact of Sangh on Hindu society has been that many of the Hindus have started feeling a sense of oneness in the society wherever Sangh work has got organized. This has been witnessed in many big public programs organized successfully by Sangh in different parts of the world. These programs are attended by the whole cross-section of the Hindu society, coming from different parts of India, speaking different languages, following different religions or sects, without any discrimination and distinction of caste. This has not yet been accomplished by other Indian organizations and temples that are still dominated by particular regional or linguistic groups. The Hindu society abroad was as divided as it used to be in Bharat before Sangh work started here. No doubt we have thousands of Hindu temples and hundreds of other organizations formed to serve the Hindu society, but none of them commands pan-Hindu following. Most of them are established for a particular sect or regional or linguistic group. Even their names indicate this tendency. For example, we have Tamil Temple, Gujarati Temple, Arya Samaj, Surat District Association, Maratha Mandal etc. etc. There is nothing wrong in it. But we do need better and well defined co-ordination with each other to come together to help and serve the society holistically as and when required.

People who have joined Sangh or organizations influenced by Sangh have definitely developed a feeling 'to give something back to the society that has made them what they are'. As a result, several sewa projects of HSS are being supported well by the Hindu society in general.

In most of the countries the work is carried out in the name of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), while in Kenya it is called Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS) and in Myanmar it is Sanatan Dharma Swayamsevak Sangh (SDSS). In a few other countries also the names differ. They are inspired by RSS, but their working methodology varies according to the situation of their respective country. Even the prayer sung in shakhas is different from the Indian prayer. Their main objective is same i.e. uniting and organizing Hindu society and work for eliminating its weaknesses. Outside Bharat, Sangh is more of a socio-cultural kind of organization undertaking multi dimensional voluntary community service projects.

Sangh work abroad is being carried out in many ways. It strengthens its organization by spreading a shakha network and related activities like training camps, annual camps and picnics. Volunteers collect contributions for various social service projects in India, including schools. They also undertake social service in their own countries. Some schools are run under its banner for teaching Indian languages, art and culture. Hindu Institute of Learning is such an organization in Greater Toronto Area while V.H.P of USA, an affiliate of Sangh, has established a Hindu University in Florida to promote Sanskrit. HSS tries to form federations of Hindu temples and organizations in various countries for better co-ordination and a better sense of participation within community. Sangh swayamsevaks and like minded people promote different organizations to make friends with the mainstream society and ethnic groups in their respective countries. This has helped create a positive image of Hindus and India in their adopted countries and resulted in more harmonious relations with the local communities.

In Canada and USA thousands of people take keen interest in learning Yoga, Sanskrit and Indian philosophy. Many of them follow various spiritual groups like Chinmay Mission, Saibaba Satsang, Ramkrishna Mission etc. Infact, many of these Western people are more Hindus than the actual Hindus of India. They might have Western names, but their actions and lives are Dharmic or spiritual like Hindus. They often visit their spiritual Gurus in India. In my view, Sangh needs to keep social and family contact with such people.

Strong sense of pride in our culture cemented by Sangh has resulted in an assertive Hindu society. It does not take any insult or defamation lying down anymore whenever it is targeted by different groups. They protest in an

organized and legally permissible manner under the leadership of organizations affiliated to or influenced by Sangh and do not rest till a remedy is found through the local authorities in their respective countries.

A positive outcome of Sangh work has been the positive influence it had on the young generation. Young swayamsevaks even outside India are generally free from addictions like smoking, drinking and drugs. The young generation attending the shakhas and its programs has not forgotten its Indian roots, and feels proud of it.

However, I personally feel that Sangh work abroad so far has touched only the tip of the ice-berg. Very small percentage of society is actively participating in Sangh activities and its associated programs. Another thing which I feel concerned about is that up to high school level the teenagers and youth remain quite active in Sangh activities, but as soon as they enter university their interest is diluted, diminished and in some cases completely lost due to excessive pressure of career building or other distractions. I also feel that we have not been as successful as we should have been in inculcating in the society, especially among the youth, the valuable virtues like self-discipline, team work, systematic and well organized working ethos that everyone learns from Sangh. We may partly blame lack of these virtues on parents. They get so involved in their careers and enjoying the luxuries of life that they do not get time to impart good *sanskaras* (morals and value systems) to their children.

But, these shortcomings cannot take away the creditable influence Sangh has had on the Hindu community outside Bharat. It has provided anchor to Indians away from India and given emotional and intellectual support when they needed it most in the earlier years of their migration when they were not strong enough and Indian government also did not pay much attention to them.

The swayamsevaks outside India feel that the biggest challenge before them is to promote Indian culture and values amongst youth, who are following West even where it is contrary to our cultural values. It is not an easy job to involve them in Sangh activities, but in several universities in U.S., Canada and South Asia, young Sangh volunteers have formed Hindu youth organizations and they are growing very well. Still a lot of effort is required to make these associations strong, constructive and attractive enough so that more and more young students can join them.

The future of Sangh abroad is, surely, very bright as it fulfills the need for unity, organizational strength and discipline within society and provides an emotional and moral anchor to Indian society. HSS has established contacts all over the world, in about hundred countries wherever Hindus in general and swayamsevaks in particular have settled. We saw swayamsevaks from 34 countries converge in Bharat for the last 'Vishwa Sangh Shibir' held in Karnavati, Gujarat in December 2005, investing huge amount of time and money of their own to do something for their respective societies.

Exertions of Sangh swayamsevaks will definitely make Hindu society abroad, a strong, assertive, united and well disciplined force to make our dream of "*Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*" (whole world is one family) a reality.

Chapter 14 - Some Unforgettable Personal Memories

Beaten up for timidity!

In my village primary school which offered studies only from class one to class four; I was considered one of the top students. In those days, the visiting school inspectors asked questions to students to judge the teacher's capability and efficiency in teaching. Now a days the inspector just sits in the class, observes the teacher's lesson and at the end of the lesson, gives comments to the teacher privately for further improvement and then submits the report to the Board of Education.

I was, perhaps, ten years old and in grade four at the time. Inspection of the school was due and our Head Master, a *maulvi* called all the good students separately and told us to raise our hands confidently if the inspector asks a question. The *maulvi* specifically instructed me to be always the first to reply the inspector's question. After all, the inspection day dawned, but being timid, I felt afraid. When the inspector asked a question in his booming voice, I not only failed to raise my hand but became so nervous that I could not give any answer to his questions while other students managed to give some answers rightly or wrongly.

The inspection was finally over and the *maulvi* realized that the inspector was not satisfied with the class. He detained three top students including myself and gave us a good thrashing, shouting "you put me to shame"!

My Education

In Sanatan Dharma School there was a student, Thakurdas. He was appointed as the 'head monitor'. He was liked by all the teachers and most of the students. He was very poor and because of his intelligence and hard work in studies he got a scholarship and paid no fees. I was in grade five and Thakurdas became my role model. I started dreaming that one day I will be like him, rather be next to him in the same school. But my studies were cut off in the middle of the year as I had to leave the school to accompany my elder brother who had got a job in Ambala. He had recently married and my Bhabhi who came from countryside was too scared and shy to go to a strange place

and stay alone during my brother's long office hours. So my father advised me to accompany them in Ambala.

I was put in another school there and I started working hard like my school idol, Thakurdas. We had hardly stayed there for three months when my brother got a transfer to another far away city, Kanpur, in U.P. He opted to go there for sake of his career, and I and my Bhabhi were sent back to my village Charik like an unstamped envelop!

Now, my father thought of a different plan for me. He wanted me to leave the usual type of schooling and join a Sanskrit *pathshala* (school). He wanted someone from the family to carry on his brilliant work. Because none of my brothers could do that, the task fell to me. He wanted me to become a *Vaidya* (Ayurvedic physician) for which the requirement was a Sanskrit's Honors Degree. So, I joined the Sanskrit pathshala, adjacent to S. D. Primary School in Moga and studied there for fifteen months and passed the *Pragya* (primary proficiency in Sanskrit) with good marks. After that I had to go for higher Sanskrit studies either to Amritsar or Lahore. *Baiji* (as we called our father respectfully) preferred my going to Amritsar as his friend Pt. Ralaram's elder son Pt. Dwarkanath ji was there to look after me and my studies. Baiji took me personally to Amritsar, where we stayed at Killa Bhangian Temple. Incidentally '*bhangian*' means people who drink '*bhang*' or marijuana! Baiji put me fully in his charge for my care and education. I may add here that I really regard Pt. Dwarkanath ji as *Gurur Brahma* (Guru is Supreme God) and guardian. He looked after me for eight years, until I was married in 1940.

Most of the devotees in the temple, out of respect, called him '*Babaji*'. About a dozen students lived in the rooms above the second floor of the temple. I was only fifteen then and most of them were much older than me. Every student was assigned some duty. Some of them used to collect food from the house of *yajamanas* (host or donors for the priests and students). In the evenings the students used to cook the food in turns for all. Most of the grocery was donated by devotees. I being the youngest, had only two duties to perform - to get up early in the morning before the *morning arati* (religious service) and clean the covered surrounding area of the temple and to serve food to three dignitaries - the *pujari* (priest), the assistant *mahant* (assistant to my Guru ji) and to my Guru ji.

A very good culture was inculcated by joint efforts of the above mentioned three persons. We were supposed to live a highly puritanical life -

no smoking, no bad language, no wrong times for sleep and no tea. If anyone was interested, he could go to the tea shop and have tea out of his own pocket. Different students went to different schools. Some went for *Jyotish vidya* (astrology), some for *Karmakand* (training for performing religious rituals), some for regular Sanskrit lessons for obtaining Sanskrit University degree. I was in the last group.

There were several Sanskrit pathshalas in Amritsar. Therefore, Amritsar was considered as a holy city and Varanasi of Punjab, and it was also known as a city of Golden Temple of Sikhs. I was advised to join Hindu Sabha Sanskrit Vidyalaya, situated in Hindu Sabha High School. I joined *Visharad* class (High Proficiency in Sanskrit). Inspired by my school time hero Thakurdas from my previous school, I started working hard to reach the top of my class. Three Sanskrit teachers Pt. Devidatta Sharma, Pt. Labdharam Shastri and the principal Pt. Meherchand Pushkarna liked me very much and encouraged me to do my best. Within two years I was considered as one of the top students of the class.

Stricken by Fate

A few weeks before the examination, I got bad news about my father's serious illness. I went to see him at Charik, two weeks before these examinations. I was shocked to hear the story about his sudden illness. Being a Vaidya, he was making some *Suvarna Bhasma* (medicine made out of Gold) which contains richest elements of nourishment that cure many diseases. He had put some sulphur in a pan and put it on the stove. Sulphur melted and liquid sulphur fell on the fire by mistake, throwing up poisonous flames and smoke which affected his lungs seriously as he tried to remove the pan from the stove. It caused permanent damage to his lungs and eventually proved fatal within six months. Infact, Baiji himself predicted that he would not live beyond six months after this mishap.

When I saw Baiji, he could hardly breathe and could speak only in a faint voice. He hugged me tightly, shedding tears that saddened me immensely. I told him that I would postpone appearing in the examination that year (in 1936) and stay back with him to take his care. Baiji knew of my progress in Sanskrit and told me emphatically to go to Amritsar for examination and blessed me with instructions that I should get the best result. I went back to Amritsar half heartedly and tried to concentrate on my studies. I

was quiet upset and unhappy because of Baiji's fast declining health but I appeared in the examinations somehow. I was quite satisfied with my performance and went back to my village, hoping for good results. I was too young to help my father in any way except sitting by his side and serving him with water, milk or medicine. After two months my results came out and they were really thrilling. I had stood second in the entire Punjab province, the pre-partition Punjab consisting of thirty six districts. More than me my beloved Baiji was happy, on whose lips my family saw a broad smile after a long time. Within a week his health deteriorated so much that on the Hindu holy day of *Nirjala Ekadashi*, he showed signs of his last moments. All the family members were sitting around his bed. In a faint voice he murmured, "Lord Krishna has come with a chariot to carry me to heaven", and he breathed his last. He was just fifty two at that time. While the whole family was crying around him, I was so shocked and stunned that I could not even cry.

Baiji was such a popular person among the relatives, friends, his patients, yajamanas (hosts), and community at large that people witnessed the largest ever crowd for his cremation. Telegrams after telegrams poured in from his admirers from far off places to the bereaved family. Pt. Ralaram ji came almost every week on his horse back to our house and my Guru Pt. Dwarkanath ji consoled the family with a detailed letter, assuring that he would do his best to help me get the Honors degree in Sanskrit.

After a month I went back to Amritsar and resumed my studies. Although my brothers wrote me letters occasionally and sent some money to encourage me, it was Pt. Dwarkanath ji alone who never let me feel like an orphan. Fortunately for me, my principal gave me the good news that I had received a scholarship from a local business house that had established a trust to help Sanskrit students. It was a scholarship for twenty months, amounting to Rupees twelve per month. In today's terms, this amount means one third of a Canadian dollar. But in those days it was quite a substantial amount for me. Out of that I used to spend two rupees on purchasing books for *Rishi Pustakalaya*- a library established by me in honor of my late respected father, Pandit Rishi Ram. Then onwards, I managed my studies through tuitions.

Pilfering of Flowers

When I was just a child, we had two homes - main one in my native village, Charik, and the second one, grandma's home, in the nearby town of

Moga that she had inherited from her parents. Up to grade four we studied in our village school. Then from class five onwards we were sent to town where 'Bobiji' my paternal grand mother looked after us very affectionately. After passing grade four, I was also sent there by my parents. My eldest brother Pandit Bhavadatt was teaching in Sanatan Dharma Middle School. Being a Hindi and Sanskrit teacher, all the staff members as well as students used to address him as *Pandit ji*, so much so that all his five brothers also started addressing him as *Pandit ji* at home.

It was a newly built school, with a big hall in the middle and four rooms on each side. Head master's office was at one corner of the compound and opposite to it at the other end, there were servants' quarters where Kesar Singh, a middle aged Gurkha used to live. He was caretaker of the school, doing several duties. He used to bring mail from the post office and he was a sort of security guard and supervised the sweeper too. Even gardening was his job in which he was really good.

From the day I entered the school, a bed of flowers in the garden of the school fascinated me most. I liked to pass this flower bed while going to the class and also while leaving the school in the afternoon. I was too young to know the name of those flowers. But I can still, in my eighties, remember their shape and color vividly. They were of shining light blue color with fascinating fragrance and silk-like soft petals. In one of the beds, along the path leading to the class rooms, there stood a sign board in big letters – 'plucking of flowers prohibited'. Whenever I read that signboard, my mind reacted strongly and prompted me that I must pluck and possess those fine, fascinating flowers. Every day this desire turned into craving and finally a craze. I began to think of a plan to fulfill this desire almost everyday.

It was customary that the whole family in Moga, including Bobiji went to Charik on weekends. Some of our friends used to visit us and there would always be some unannounced guests passing by. With the help of house-maids, my mother, sister and Bhabhi ji used to cook special dishes. As is a common custom in Punjab in summer days, we used to sleep on the roof of the house. Small children would gather around Bobiji who used to tell them interesting stories. Pandit ji and other guests used to gather around Baiji either to play Chess or to chit chat. Other elder brothers and their visiting friends used to play a game of cards.

I planned that I would pluck the flowers on a Sunday and forego the weekend fun in the village. On one weekend I got a God sent opportunity when Bobiji had to stay back in Moga because one of her friend's son was getting married and her presence was necessary. When all the members went to Charik, I told them that I would stay with Bobiji. By that time I had already inquired about Kesar Singh's and the sweeper's plans for the school on Sundays. They had a free day on Sunday when the sweeper's family would go to meet relatives and Kesar Singh would go to meet his other Gurkha friends. I decided to try my luck at that time and fulfill my long cherished desire of plucking those pretty flowers.

I reached the school before eleven in the morning. Standing in front of the main gate for a few minutes I looked around and confirmed that there was neither Kesar Singh nor the sweeper in the school which left the field open for me. I climbed the gate carefully and jumped into the compound. My favorite flowers seemed to be smiling at me. I cautiously touched and embraced the plants, then starting plucking the flowers one by one and put them in cloth bag that I had brought. I felt as if I had found some hidden treasure of beauty. With my bag filled to half, I went back to the gate, climbed it and looked around. To my surprise and shock, I saw Kesar Singh walking fast towards the school and he was not too far!

I was non-plussed. I was so stunned, nervous and panicky that I trembled with fear. Taking a little courage, I finally decided to jump down and it was then that Kesar Singh saw me. He shouted "Who are you? Why are you there?" and started running towards the gate. With desperation of 'do or die', or as we say in Hindi "*marta kya na karata*", I started running in the opposite direction as fast as I could, stumbling here and there as if in dream - when you want to run but your legs refuse to support you. Being a young boy, I ran faster than Kesar Singh and went on running till I was out of sight, hiding myself in a corn field. I peeped through the plants to confirm that poor Kesar Singh had gone back. After an hour, I went to the back of the farm, took a detour to reach the main road and jogged back fast to my house holding my bag tightly. When I reached home, I found my favorite flowers withering. With a mixed feeling of delight and fear, I started thinking whether I should go to school next day or not. Meanwhile Bobiji came back and told me to accompany her in the evening to attend the wedding of her friend's son. She observed the paleness on my face and asked why I looked so low spirited. I gave an excuse that I had quarreled with a boy while playing with my friends.

By the time Bobiji and I returned from the marriage ceremony by night, my brothers had come back from Charik. While they seemed to have a good sleep, I had a nearly sleepless night. I checked the bag of flowers under my bed, and to my dismay they had almost entirely withered. All kinds of questions crowded my mind, “Why did I pluck them? Just to possess them? Would Kesar Singh recognize me next day? If he did, what will be the consequences?” I felt feverish with fear. I told Pandit ji the next morning that he should not mind my absence in the school on that day and he kindly agreed.

On Tuesday I took courage to go to school. It seemed that on Monday Kesar Singh, the Head Master and some teachers noticed that several plants had been ripped off, most of them being the blue flowers. Kesar Singh had told them that he saw one boy on Sunday jumping down the gate and carrying a bag and he suspected that the same boy must have played this mischief. They found one student absent from grade five and that was me, the younger brother of Pandit ji. The head-master and Kesar Singh felt that I could be the suspect boy. In the evening, Pandit ji came home and asked me to tell the truth about this evil act. By that time I had realized my mistake. At the time of pilfering the flowers I had only thought of possessing these beautiful things. I had not realized how long the beauty of those flowers will last. (Later on in life I read in one of the poem of Nobel Laureate Ravindranath Tagore that everybody not only wants to appreciate the beauty, but wants to possess it.). I took courage and admitted that I plucked those flowers because I liked them very much. Pandit ji was very upset and mad with anger at me and gave me two-three stinging slaps. Next day Pandit ji went to the headmaster and apologized for my misbehaviour and told him that he had thrashed me enough for my silly mistake. The head-master was very sensible. He called me and asked me why I had done that act. In a very apologetic tone I said “Sir, I liked those flowers so much that I could not resist my craving to pluck them. But now I realize my mistake because the beauty of plucked flowers could not last even for twenty four hours, while they might have lasted for weeks on the plants and I could enjoy their beauty for all that time.” After listening to me, he asked me “Do you promise me not to do this kind of mischief in future?” I sincerely promised him that I would not.

Next morning, on Wednesday the head-master gave me a surprise in the assembly. After the prayers, he made me stand on a chair where I could be seen by all the students and teachers and announced “This boy is very fond of

flowers. We appreciate his sense of beauty. As a reward, for next month he will stay back for one hour after school and water all the plants in the garden, so that more flowers can grow, but not pilfered.” I got a great applause from the assembly. It was a pleasant surprise for me. But, to this day I cannot make out whether it was a punishment or reward.

Teacher of Widows

During my student days in Amritsar, Pt. Dwarkanath ji was so kind that he saw to it that I had enough income to live comfortably and fulfill my basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Luckily, there was no fee in the school. Those were the days when many orthodox families did not send their daughters to schools although girls` schools were being opened. These schools were funded either by the government or the community. If, unfortunately, a girl from a rich family became a widow, the parents did want her to learn a little Hindi or Sanskrit for reading religious books like *Hanuman Chalisa*, *Ramayana* or *Bhajans*. There were no adult education schools in those days. The widows were not allowed to remarry .They were not allowed to go anywhere without being accompanied by some family member, except to the temples.

There were two such women who were regular visitors to our temple. Their parents requested Pandit ji to find a good teacher for them and, naturally, my Guru ji proposed my name and I started teaching them. Both were hard-working and intelligent. The first one, Chandarani, had two children and the second one, Harbhajan Kaur, had one. Their hopes were pinned on their children and they hoped to become self-reliant. Apart from my subject, Harbhajan also studied English. Both of them studied so well that they passed their Hindi degree in honours - *Prabhakar*, just two years after me.

Those were the days when community girls` schools were being established rapidly, thanks to the reformist movement of Arya Samaj which took the lead in building ‘DAV’ (*Dayanand Arya Vidyalay*) Schools in Punjab and people following Sanatan Dharma also followed suit with SD (Sanatan Dharma) Schools. Women teachers got jobs immediately due to shortage of lady teachers and also because the board of girls` schools preferred ladies teachers. However, sometimes a few male teachers had to be appointed, but the head master would have to be a lady. So Chandarani found a job in Ram Kanya Vidyalay, while I already had a job in Krishna Kanya Vidyalaya. From

1942 to end of 1944, I taught there. By that time Chandarani became the head mistress of her school and recommended my name to her school committee. They offered me a little higher salary than what I was getting in my school. Luckily, I got this job as a deputy head master. This is how Chandarani showed her gratitude to me as a teacher.

Harbhajan Kaur continued her study till she finished her Masters degree in English. She was more qualified than Chandarani. By this time I had already gone to Kenya as a teacher where I was qualified to teach junior schools only after receiving part time teacher training course, and I was qualified to teach only Hindi and Sanskrit. So, after completing my six year contract with S.D.Girls' School, Nairobi, I came back to India and joined DAV College in Moga for completing B.A. in English. What a coincidence! Harbhajan Kaur was my English professor. I felt highly flattered when she introduced me in her class as her former Hindi teacher.

A Miracle

In 1954, I got a job in a Government school called Manengai High School at Nakuru. I gave this news to my close friends, Shri Shrinivas Bharadwaj and Shri Ved Prakash Shukla, who taught there in Lake Primary school and also happened to be my distant relatives, connected with BSS (Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh).

I reached Nakuru late at night after nine by train. My friends picked me from the station in their car. About quarter of a mile from their house, Shrinivas took a sharp turn. We were so excited with this coming together and were chatting so absorbedly that we did not hear any thudding sound of something falling off from the boot of the car which was half open due to too much luggage. We reached my friend's house in about fifteen minutes, took dinner and soon went to bed because I was very tired. It was only next morning, while I was arranging the luggage in the room that I realized that my main trunk containing the best of my clothes, very important documents and other valuables was missing. I was immensely shocked.

My friends were getting ready for the school. I was also supposed to report to my principal. But all the official documents were in that lost trunk! When I told my friends about my lost trunk, they also got worried. Shrinivas asked me to get into the car and started driving the car slowly to look at both

sides of the narrow road to check if, by chance, the trunk had fallen on the road side. While he was looking for the trunk, I was praying from the depth of my heart.

When we reached the corner from where we had turned the car towards my friend's house, we saw my trunk lying near the bridge over a dry drain. What a pleasant surprise! A place where a poor African would steal even a torn handkerchief, no one had touched or noticed my valuable trunk. I thanked God for His grace.

One Night's Lockup in the Airport

I had accompanied Man. Bhide ji to Zambia during his first trip. Bhide ji had an Indian passport with a proper visa to Zambia. I had a British passport and since Zambia was under British rule at that time, my friends told me that I did not need a visa. When we arrived in Zambia the immigration authorities allowed Bhide ji to pass through, but they stopped me. To my horror, all passengers were cleared except me. In such a big airport building I was alone with a few policemen and security guards - all the other officers had also left. Imagine my condition! No food, no drinks, nothing! But luckily, I had a friend in Zambia, a swayamsevak from Kenya, who held an important position in the Zambian parliament. This friend was a lawyer and advisor to the speaker of the Assembly. I gave his phone number to Bhide ji. He contacted my friend, Jitendra Vinayak, who in turn contacted the British High Commission. But he learned that the office was closed for the weekend and I had to stay in the airport until Monday morning. I don't know how, but somehow he managed to contact the British High Commissioner, told my story and the Commissioner approached the government to help me. Thankfully, I got out the next morning. Shri Sukhdev Kaura, who is in Canada for the last ten years, knows about the incident as he was in Zambia during that period. Whenever we meet, we often talk of that episode, which was a bitter experience but has become a sweet memory now.

UNESCO volunteer in Paris

My official long overseas leave of five month was due in 1966 summer. I wanted to use it in some productive way, doing some voluntary job in my own field. I read in some newspapers that UNESCO welcomes volunteers in some educational projects. So I applied to UNESCO and luckily,

I was offered some research jobs in the Department of Adult Education and Youth Organizations in the world. Being a Sangh karyakarta, I wanted to study the youth organizations of the world and compare them with RSS. I was not interested in adult education at that time.

There was also a hidden desire in my mind that after doing that project, I might have better prospects of finding a job somewhere else in the world that might be better than my job of a secondary school teacher at that time. I was glad and excited. UNESCO did not pay any salary for these three months but paid for my lodging and boarding, the minimum a volunteer could expect.

The terms of service in the Education Department of Kenya were very liberal. The teachers were paid for all the vacations, actual salary plus passage either to India or Britain. It could be first class sea passage or economy class air passage. I preferred to take first class sea passage to London. It was a twenty one day journey. I do not remember the name of the steamer. But it was very luxurious journey and I enjoyed the best weather in Britain and Paris, which is between May to August. Being a vegetarian, I did not like the food as the food on the ship was mostly fish, meats with very few vegetarian dishes. Up to forty four years of my life I had never eaten even eggs as per the tradition of my *Rishi parivar*. But my friends advised me not to be so rigid on food, as otherwise my health may suffer in European conditions. They recommended that I eat eggs atleast, as it would be necessary in European weather to have enough proteins, and eggs are rich in proteins. Finally, rather reluctantly, I started eating eggs during my sea travel. By the end of June I reached London. It was a memorable trip. It stopped at three places for a day or two. The first stop was Suez Canal where we were driven to Cairo to see its historical sites and pyramids. Next stop was at Gibraltar, a beautiful small island. I was very happy to see many wealthy Sindhi Indians very well settled there. Final stop was at Rome where we went to see the Vatican and many other places around there.

In London I was received by my dear youngest brother Balwant with his wife Pushpa and my two sons Surendra and Kamlesh who were studying at Bradford and Leeds Universities. I was very happy to see that some friends from Nakuru, Nairobi and Mombassa and India had joined my sons for higher education there. They were Devendra and Usha from Mombassa, Naresh, Janak and Sukhdev from Nairobi, Bhim and Ashok Suri from India. They

made a good team. Luckily there was a doctor from Nagpur, Dr. K. P. Hardas, who was practicing there and was a very active RSS swayamsevak. He encouraged the young group to start a weekly shakha there. When I went to Bradford, I attended the shakhas and felt very delighted with the initiative of swayamsevaks from Kenya and India. Later on another active swayamsewak, Virendra Sharda (my elder brother Nandlal's son) from Mumbai joined the team and energized it. He had come to do M. Phil. at Leeds University. He formed Leeds University Union Hindu Society with the help of Kamlesh Sharda and was its founder president. This organization is still functioning. As a secretary of Hindu Charitable Trust, Leeds, Virendra along with the above team helped in establishing the Hindu Temple in Leeds. Dr. K. P. Hardas was the founder president of this trust.

On the last weekend of May, I came back to London from Bradford and then went to Paris. I saw at several crossings, news-papers lying under a weight. People would pick up the papers and leave the money. Paper seller would simply collect the money in the evening. The honesty of this society was tested again in another personal incident. I forgot, once again, one of my suitcases on the London Railway station! On reaching Paris, I stayed with a friend who was working for the Indian Consulate. I called the Lost and Found Property department at London station and, to my pleasant surprise, they had it in their safe custody. I collected it after coming back from UNESCO. Apparently, some person had seen the unattended suitcase, laying on the platform and deposited it with Lost and Found Property Department.

Next morning I went to UNESCO Head Office by taxi. It was a huge multistoried building with a glorious structure, the kind of which I had not seen in Nairobi. On reaching the right floor and right place, I was received by the Head of the Department (HOD) personally and he spent about an hour with me briefing me about the duties I had to perform during these three months.

They had reports from Education ministries of 150 countries. I was to concentrate on African Education Systems and compare them with the existing one on developed countries of Europe and America. Being a Sangh swayamsevak, I was more interested in studying the second wing of the department 'Youth Activities and Organizations of the World'. I mainly studied two large youth organizations. One was 'The Scout Association', which was most popular in the British Colonies and was doing a very good

service by teaching the youth different ways of serving their native communities. I found that the most active youth organizations were in Germany. I compared those two organizations with RSS which could fairly be assessed and may be regarded as one of the three best youth organizations as per UNESCO norms.

In the last two weeks of my three month work at UNESCO, I submitted two separate reports to the HOD - One on 'Adult Education' and the second on 'Youth Activities'. I forget HOD's name, but I remember that he was French, very knowledgeable, polite and impressive. He appreciated my reports and seemed to be quite satisfied with my work, though I do not know what action he took on those two reports later on.

In the last week of my stay, the above referred HOD invited all the volunteers, almost twenty, for a farewell dinner. These volunteers had a good multi-racial representation. I felt flattered to be invited to the party, but was really disappointed when I came to know that everyone had to pay for the dinner. What a thanks giving dinner! I was not used to such kind of invitations either in Kenya or India.

A very interesting event during that stay was my meeting with the Deputy Head of UNESCO who was an Indian, named Mr. Shastri. I took his appointment and was surprised to see him - a Tamil speaking gentleman, *tilak* on his head and picture of Nataraja on the wall behind his seat. He received me warmly, ordered coffee for both of us and had quite a friendly chat. I found that he was not at all proud of his high post as an Indian. The only similarity between us was that I possessed an academic degree of Shastri and his surname was Shastri!

I could not benefit from the Adult Education Program as there was no such thing in Education Ministry in Kenya, nor did I get a new opening in career. But in my studies of youth organizations, I found and understood several things that were useful for my Sangh work, indirectly. My experience in UNESCO also helped me to broaden my outlook. I realized that apart from uniting our own Hindu nation, we should also establish good friendly relationship with the people of other countries and races.

RSS friends in Paris

For the first few days I felt very lonely in the big crowded city of Paris. Three months before going to Paris, I had taken a simple French course in Kenya. It was too elementary to understand and speak French fluently. French people were very firm about their language and not happy to speak English with a newcomer. If I asked any question in French on the streets, they would answer in French or in broken English which I could hardly understand. Therefore, to see the important places or sites I always preferred to join some tourist groups accompanied by a bilingual guide. He would explain everything in French as well as in English.

To make my after office hours time interesting, I started searching for some Indian companions. It was my usual habit to contact Man. Chamanlal ji at RSS karyalaya in Jhandewalan, Delhi whenever I visited a new country or town. He was such a great organizer that he would give you contacts and addresses of any country or city. He, kindly, gave me addresses of two swayamsevaks there - Shri Ramesh, younger brother of our present Sarsanghchalak Man. Sudarshan ji, and Shri Jeetendra Tuli. Both were doing engineering in different colleges there. The third contact was my own host Shri Bharadwaj who was working for Indian Consulate in Paris. With his help, I went to see Ramesh ji and Jeetendra ji. All of us were very happy to meet each other and decided to spend our weekends together.

None of us had a car, so we had to travel by public transport, that is bus and train. We visited all the famous tourist sites and historical places of Paris and because of them, my stay at that strange place became very interesting and enjoyable. Every Sunday, we would visit Ramakrishna Mission and attend spiritual programs, meditation etc., then have Indian vegetarian meal. This was my first experience in a Western country, where such spiritual programs were attended mostly by the Westerners and very few Indians. I found it very encouraging that Europeans were so eager to follow the Indian spiritual path with so much devotion and dedication. Most of them were turning pure vegetarian as if they were *Vaishnavas* (a Hindu sect that is strictly vegetarian)

After leaving Paris my friendship continued with these three people. Both Ramesh ji and Jeetendra ji are now well settled in U.S. with their families and our participation in Sangh activities has continued wherever we have lived.

Shyama

During the days when I was in my twenties, a wife did not call her husband by his name, nor did the husband call his spouse by name in Bharat. Therefore, after marriage I gave my *dharmapatni* (wife) Kaushalyadevi, a new name - *Shyama*. She was happy with this name because it sounded like one of Lord Krishna's names - Shyam.

In 21st century, now, couples talk freely about their consorts and consider it a good gesture to mention good qualities of life-partners in public. But, this new couple was shy to each other in this matter. Now, I am writing a few things about my wife here because she was very supportive in my life and Sangh work; and I wouldn't have been able to devote so much of time and energy for Sangh work and social work without her co-operation and help.

In Kenya, I used to get three to five weeks' vacation after each term of about three months. I used to travel throughout East Africa even in Indian Ocean Islands - Seychelles, Madagascar, especially in Mauritius which is considered a 'Pearl of Indian Ocean.' The only purpose of this travel would be to establish new shakhas and to keep in touch with the existing ones. Many times I had to accompany pracharaks like Man. Lakshman rao Bhide ji and other senior adhikaris and karyakartas from Bharat. I would hardly find time to stay with my family during those long vacations. It was Shyama's co-operation and help that made it possible for me to give so much of time to Sangh work.

She looked after our five childrens' education, their home-work, games and other pastimes and took great pains to see that they were in good company and attended the local shakhas. Even in daily routine, after school hours I was always busy in different kinds of Sangh activities or other social work. It was she who looked after children's home-work and their daily necessities. Thus, the credit goes to her for bringing up our children in such a way that today they are well educated, qualified and well established in their respective professions. They got education up to high school in Kenya and then they were sent to U.K. for their higher education. My youngest brother Balwant, who is no more, and his good wife Pushpa, from whom the children always got great parental attention, love and care there, need special mention.

Other contribution of Kaushalya was her life long hospitality to an unending flow of visitors and guests wherever we lived, may it be in Kenya, U.K. or Canada. During our fifty years of life together, I do not remember a week when we had no guests or visitors. During our seventeen years' stay in Kenya in Nakuru, I cannot think of a time when we had no guests or visitors. We used to have guests and visitors frequently because it was a central place amidst Nairobi, Kisumu and Eldoret. Swayamsevaks, friends and relatives going to or coming from all these places usually had a short break at our house or sometimes a night stay also.

I specially recall a day on Vijaydashmi Utsav in Nairobi when swayamsevaks from Kisumu and Eldoret came in ten car loads and stayed with us for dinner, thanks to Shyama`s spirit of hospitality. She cooked food for all of them with the help of her three best friends. All the guests, after late dinner, left for Nairobi with broad smiles on their lips.

Shyama`s main hobby and interest was 'Nature Cure'. She really hated allopathic treatment although she had to take it when she was seriously ill. She always advised our family and friends to use naturopathy for minor ailments. She subscribed to *arogya* (health) magazines from Gorakhpur and read many books on this subject. She went twice to Gorakhpur to take a three months` residential course in her late fifties. She specialized in massage and trained one gentleman and a lady in Toronto in this system. She gave free consultation and recommended patients to contribute whatever they deemed appropriate to these trained masseurs.

Her other interests were embroidery, sewing and planting flowers. When she was in Kenya and U.K. she was too busy to pursue her interests due to her family commitments. But when we arrived in Toronto, she was quite free to pursue all those activities. Except on weekends, I was never at home in the evenings as I used to go to college to teach Hindi. During these lonely evenings she usually invited some of her friends to share her hobbies or read the naturopathy books in Hindi. Incidentally, her two friends were her namesakes. One Kaushalya was from Trinidad and other was a Canadian.

While taking up all these responsibilities, she never expressed any grudge or temper against me, Sangh or anybody. It is but natural that I have been missing her for the last fourteen years, but accustomed to traditional ways and being shy I do not discuss it with anybody. Instead, I compensate my

loss and remember her in three ways – One, I have preserved the plants which she planted, two - I feed the pigeons and birds every morning with bread and grains, as she used to do; and three – I drink my cup of tea in the morning, sitting on a sofa looking at her two photographs on the wall - the first one after marriage and the second one taken before her *swargawas* (passing away).

Before I conclude, I recall the saying that ‘behind every successful and great man there is a woman’ and I must say that this is also true for an ordinary man like me. Whatever I have achieved in my life, Shyama’s supporting hands and encouraging pat was always there. Hospitality, tolerance and serenity were the other names of Shyama. Today, I express my sincere gratitude to my late wife for being such a source of happiness to me and the support she gave me in everything I did.

Chapter 15 - Our Shastri ji: as His Associates Know Him

Through out his highly active public life, Shri Jagdish Chandra Sharda, or Shastri ji, as he is popularly known, may have touched lives of hundreds of fellow human beings. We thought that it would be a good idea to get atleast a few of his erstwhile colleagues, family members and students to talk about him. This could help us get a glimpse of his personality which a self deprecating person like him does not like to talk about.

Ajatshatru with Unparallel Dedication to the Cause of Hindu Unity

Many a years back, while doing my Sangh Shiksha Varg (OTC) training camp I had an opportunity to see Man. Lakshman rao Bhide ji and Man. Chamanlal ji very closely. I always used to watch the big fat passport of Man. Bhide ji with fascination and his travel plans were really enchanting for me during my young age. I was, probably, twenty one or twenty two years old then.

During a lecture by Man. Bhide ji, a name came up which has remained ingrained in my memory since then. It was Jagdish Chandra Sharda Shastri ji and the other name which came with similar references during the *bauddhik* (intellectual discourse) was Manek bhai Rughani ji. The whole story, of two young men organizing a shakha on a ship, then becoming close friends and deciding to start Sangh work outside Bharat for the first time; and all these events being witnessed by the *Surya Devta* (Sun god)! The whole scenario was fascinating and some sort of a romantic story for me. Subsequently, I was sent to Assam as a Sangh pracharak and though these names lingered in my mind, I never thought I would have an opportunity to meet these stalwarts.

In 1987, I went out of Bharat for the first time as a researcher to England. Sangh activities there gave me many opportunities to visit different shakhas and attend several family and swayamsevak camps in different parts of the England. These two names started haunting me there, again. Whenever swayamsevaks from Kenya talked about Sangh work there, Jagdish ji and Manek bhai were the names talked about by every one – irrespective of the age group.

One fine morning, Jayantibhai was talking to me and said, “Yashwant, we are going to visit Manek bhai today”. That was very interesting for me as the memories I had cherished about these names, were with me for more than 12 years by now. We had a very good chat with Manek bhai. We met his family, and again name of Man. Jagdish ji came up several times during the discussion and my curiosity for meeting this person grew even further. But, it was not till my first visit to Canada in 1989, that I got an opportunity to see him personally.

Later on, during my stay at Ann Arbor, I had a chance to go to Toronto and visit the Toronto downtown shakha. I distinctly remember that when I met Jagdish ji, the *sankhya* (numbers) that day was not as expected and he was very apologetic, “today we have very few swayamsevaks, but normally we have good sankhya...”, and so on. Once shakha was over he was ready with a plan for *sampark* (contacting people) like a typically seasoned karyakarta and we discussed the Sangh work and its growth in Canada in detail. During this first meeting, I could not believe my eyes that I was standing in front of a person who was the hero of the romantic story we had heard over a decade ago. Very unassuming, soft spoken and if not introduced, nobody would have felt his presence in a group. He was so loving and so involved with Sangh work that all the discussion we had was, in some way or the other, related to Sangh work only.

From 1993, due to Man. Bhide ji’s operation, our adhkari assigned me the responsibility of Africa zone for Sangh work as a part of Videsh Vibhag - as Sangh work abroad was known at that time. (Once Man. Yadavrao ji told us, “why call it Videsh Vibhag, call it Vishwa Vibhag”; and this is how this current change in nomenclature took place.)

My first visit to Kenya took place in 1993 in September and here I had, really, the first hand exposure to the impact of these wonderful karyarkartas of Vishwa Vibhag. I could never believe that our swayamsevaks so far away from their motherland, were so much dedicated to the cause of the Hindu unity. I could feel the sacrifices made by all these senior swayamsevaks for developing Sangh work outside Bharat, first in Kenya and later on in many countries. Many a times, we have heard that Kenya’s Sangh work for HSS is like Sangh work in Nagpur for Bharat’s RSS. People from Kenya have traveled to many countries and wherever they went they have started shakhas and Sangh work there. This whole phenomenon has its primary inspiration in

Man. Jagdish ji. He has done it himself and has also inspired many swayamsevaks to do the same. People like Jayantibhai Chheda, Iqbalrai Dutta ji, Jagdish Sood ji, Ramnath ji and many more karyakartas have done so many wonderful deeds outside Bharat that these can simply be called miracles.

Jagdish ji himself went to Kenya as a school teacher and worked there ceaselessly for the Sangh work. He also traveled to many other countries to start new shakhas and have discussions with the Hindu community there. His soft spoken nature was always a winning card in the game of Sangh building.

After moving from Kenya, with a short stay in England, Jagdish ji moved to Canada and immediately joined hands with Labhamal ji and other karyakartas, and jumped into active Sangh work there. His critical and lasting contribution to the Hindu community as well as Canadian community is the Hindu Institute of Learning (HIL) at Toronto. Many native Canadian people are involved with Jagdish ji in this project and he has worked selflessly for this project for last several years. Thousands of kids and adults have learnt many Indian languages and acquired knowledge about Hindu culture through the Hindu Institute of Learning.

Subsequently, I have had several occasions to meet Man. Jagdish ji and seek his guidance for Sangh work as well as Vishwa Vibhag work. In 2005, during my trip to Toronto Man. Jagdish ji's body, at around 85, did show symptoms of ageing; but the mind was as fresh and youthful as it would have been in 1946 when he was traveling on a ship with a promise to senior karyakartas of those time to take Sangh wherever he went and thus, lay the foundation of Vishwa Vibhag. We were discussing the Vishwa Sangh Shibir (this is probably third incarnation of Sangh work outside Bharat – from Videsh Vibhag to Vishwa Vibhag and now Vishwa Sangh). We karyakartas were insisting with Man. Jagdish ji that he must come for the forthcoming Vishwa Sangh Shibir. We felt that without his presence it would not be complete. He said politely, “*Prabhu Ichha* - God's wish, if he allows I will be there.” The body might have probably been 85 years old, but the response was the same, that of the person on his maiden voyage in 1946!

When we saw him at the Vishwa Sangh Shibir in Gandhinagar, everybody was very happy. It was because, since shibir of year 2000, we were missing Man. Bhide ji and Man. Chamanlal ji; and the presence of Man. Jagdish ji filled this vacuum that we all felt.

Once Jagdish ji insisted that he should get the birthdates of all the Vishwa Sangh pracharaks. Now, every one gets a message on his birthday. There are blessings from him waiting for the concerned person on the day, either through a personal call or email. We feel we always learn some new things whenever we meet him. He has taught many of us without posing as a professor or a teacher. But his life and dedication itself for the cause of Hindu unity is a great source of inspiration for all of us. The coolheaded calm, never getting anxious, irritated and be out of focus are the qualities, we all need to adopt and many of us have learnt these from Man. Jagdish ji.

Now it is time for 2010 Vishwa Sangh Shibir, we are looking forward to visiting Toronto and hope to rekindle the spirit of that young man who traveled in a ship to Kenya in 1946. I am sure that the presence of Jagdish ji at the VSS will be very inspiring to all of us and the many new swayamsevaks who have heard the romantic story of first shakha aboard a ship and will be blessed by his presence.

Our dearest Jagdish ji, the Vishwa Sangh Shibir is coming. Let us plan a trip to beloved Bharatmata. Your dear swayamsevaks are looking forward to meeting you in person.

We all wish a very long and healthy life to this gentle soul who always rekindles in us the spirit of that young fellow who planted the seedling of the Vishwa Sangh in 1946.

- Dr Yashwant Pathak

Joint co-ordinator, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh,
Chairman and Professor
Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
College of Pharmacy, Sullivan University, USA.

Shastri ji – an Eternal Fount of Enthusiasm

I still remember vividly, the first time I met Man. Shastri ji in Nairobi while attending a function, having travelled from Mombassa way back in 1969-70. I saw in him a very humble person, full of nectar, respectful to all - whether children, youth or elderly, and always cheerful. I have never seen

anger on his face. He is a fatherly figure for all, well-respected and available to give positive ideas to expand Sangh work.

When Shastri ji left Kenya to settle in UK and later on to Canada, a void was felt in Kenya similar to what we felt when Man. (Late) Jagdish ji Sood left Kenya for UK in 1975. However, due to very effective and cohesive network of other senior karyakartas, impact of the loss was minimized. This is the contribution of our revered adhikaris – to train other swayamsevaks to shoulder responsibilities, not knowing when the circumstances might change, whether through migration or some natural causes. It is always a joy to meet Man. Shastri ji when he visits UK from Canada, and exchange views on various subjects.

In the last two Vishwa Sangh Shibirs (December 2000 and 2006) Man. Shastri ji made an effort to be amongst participants despite physical disabilities. It is a clear reflection of his commitment to Sangh ideology, that is to be amongst brethren despite bearing physical pain. Similarly in December 1987, when BSS Kenya was celebrating 40 years of Sangh work, Man. Shastri ji was present as a guiding force during the four days of Shibir in Ruiru near Nairobi.

One can only imagine sense of joy when one thinks of both Man. Shastri ji and Man. Late Manek Lal Rughani ji standing on the deck of the ship and performing *Dhwaj pranam* (saluting the flag). These two stalwarts laid the seeds of Sangh work in Kenya. Today, despite his age touching eighty six and his physical disabilities, he radiates joy and happiness whenever one happens to speak to Shastri ji even by phone, it is always enjoyable to speak to him. I feel privileged to have been in association with Man. Shastri ji for almost forty years i.e. since 1968 and wish him a very healthy life.

- Surendra Shah
Sampark Pramukh, HSS, UK

Brotherhood in practice

I remember Man. Shastri ji's visit to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (England) with late Man. Bhide ji. The visit took place in winter of 1978. They had travelled by car to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne which was snow bound and the temperatures had plummeted down to -15⁰ C. They stayed there only for one

day at Shri Anandvrat ji's home. One may wonder why did they undertake such an arduous journey? The reason was that they had wanted to visit two students (sons of two karyakartas from Kenya) who were studying at the Newcastle University. The students were I (son of Shri Angiradev Prinja) and Asheesh (son of Shri Jagdish Sood). I was studying for my M.Sc. and Asheesh was doing his B.Sc. Both of us were highly touched by this visit. Shastri ji, accompanied by Bhide ji, had come all the way in such an adverse weather to visit the sons of their karyakarta 'brothers'. It was brotherhood of *shakha* put in practice.

- Nawalkant Prinja
Senior Karyakarta, HSS, UK

Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah

As Dadaji's grandchildren, we all have special moments, days that we all keep close to our hearts. Through our *sanskaras* and general affection for our elders, we preserve his words, and more importantly his actions as methods of living a *Dharmic* existence.

For me Dadaji is the personification of the phrase *Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah* (the protector of dharma is protected by dharma). I have a plethora of personal examples where simply keeping a few hours of his company has instilled within me a sense of cultured existence. For the purpose of providing just a small example of what he means in my life, I will try to describe my travels with him to Charik, our paternal village, and origin of my family's lineage.

In 2000, Dadaji and I travelled to Punjab visiting Amritsar, and Charik before the start of that year's Vishwa Sangh Shibir in Keshav Srishti, a social service project complex with residential school near Mumbai. In this few days' tour I was very fortunate to visit each of Dadaji's places where he had stayed while he was studying for his Honours degree of Arts in Sanskrit. After completing this study, Dadaji had officially become a Shastri -a day of pride for his family and friends.

As he and I spoke to the local school master and saw the temple (which was his dormitory during student days), I realized the very modest upbringing of my family, and more importantly his great achievements and his

lineage. On this travel Dadaji, with tears of joy, met his students who had eventually become heads of the schools where he had learnt and taught before marriage. Dadaji would be on a cycle rickshaw, while I ran behind taking photographs. This image is also a true analogy for our relationship. Dadaji's enthusiasm and intelligence moves mentally at a pace that I can only chase from behind and catch-up when he decides to slow down a bit for me. Even after more than fifty years of leaving a school like lakhs of others in Bharat, he can still rightfully command respect and admiration. Even in Charik he holds modesty, love and tradition as sanskaras in perpetuity to those of his extended family and others. After decades of living outside Bharat, he is still completely at home at his place of birth. Like him, I feel strengthened while visiting India and more so when walking the same steps as my forefathers. Only on visiting these places with him have I, a Canadian citizen of Hindu origin, come to understand and appreciate all that I have - prosperity and equally a lineage of highly cultured women and men. Without doubt, these have been passed along to me by my parents and relations in Canada. However, Dadaji continues to be the fountainhead of these teachings, this Dharma.

As a grandson, raised by many mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, I have only one guru, that is my Dada ji. As a swayamsevak and a struggling *karmayogi*, Dada ji again provides me the leadership, the stamina and the intellectual prowess to show the path of a true *Sanghi*. His contribution to the samaj is already documented in this book. However, to this grandson, and a swayamsevak he is a testament about how principled living can help us achieve greatness.

-Vinay Kamlesh Sharda
(Grandson)

My Dada ji

My Dadaji is a remarkable man. He is one of those people you meet who has a greatness that emanates beyond their physical being. His reach and vision expands to a future grander than anything he saw during his humble upbringing. Dadaji has an enthusiasm for life that is infectious. He is always seeking knowledge and adventure. I believe these traits, in particular, have kept him young and allowed him to find his place in this ever-changing world.

I admire his ability to adapt to these changes and feel delighted in the new world.

His love of family and tradition has always been evident. We grandchildren have been proud to follow in his footsteps for social causes and promotion of Hindu culture. He is a role model to all people due to his open mindedness and love of life. In this tumultuous world he stands for humility, hospitality, and respect for every living creature. He has taught me to look beyond myself, to the impact I can have in the world, to be the best person I can, and to do it with genuine love and integrity. He epitomizes the belief that one person can make a difference in this world by leading by example and empowering those around them. Dadaji's presence is inspiring and his energy is contagious. Great people inhabit this earth, it is important that we stop and marvel at their accomplishments. I love my Dadaji, the man and the legend.

- Vandana Surendra Sharda
(Grand daughter)

A Tapasvi

It is said that circumstances condition the personality of an individual. My father went through a hard childhood. Early death of his father left him and his siblings in disarray with each one trying to find his feet. The womenfolk in those days were unable to take care of the family matters. They were brought up to take care of the household and were themselves dependent on the male members of the family. The painstaking years to survive in adverse conditions and educate himself as best as he could, would have broken a lesser person but moulded my father's personality into a highly disciplined soul with rock solid faith in God and a will to make the world a better place for the future generations. He had resolved to give people what had been deprived by fate to him. His introduction and eventual total immersion in RSS gave him the medium and the motivation for the rest of his life.

In Kenya BSS became his mission, his first love, the only love. Everything else was secondary. At retirement while others boasted of buildings and bank balances, he was proud of the growth of the BSS activities

in Africa and Europe. His efforts with the team of karyakartas having successfully overcome the cultural resistance, the African movements for independence and political hindrances; saw growth of Sangh to practically all major cities of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, England, parts of Europe, Canada and the USA.

With his unquestioning Hindu value system, he showed unbiased love to everyone irrespective of religion, caste, creed and color. I recall him bringing European and African acquaintances home to get to know them better when it was a custom to stick to one's own kin. His compassion towards the needy was remarkable. It was customary to see him walk home with total strangers and offer them food, shelter and whatever else he could, even at the cost of us going hungry. I remember, when with the winds of change, African countries became independent one after the other in quick succession, and when Belgian Congo became independent; the new African leadership forced the Indian expatriates to leave the country in a rush. My dad heard that the Belgian refugees would be passing through Nakuru (in Kenya) where we were living, early in the morning by train for the coastal city of Mombassa. He organized swyamsevaks to welcome them with tea and sandwiches at the station with my mother's help. This carried on for many a day till the refugee trains had transported all the Indians exiled from Belgians Congo. He never took any credit for this compassionate action and in fact it was never even mentioned. This story was narrated to me years later by my mother.

Even today at the ripe age of 86 he is more active in serving the society than anyone I know. This is admirable, considering that he is in constant pain from advanced arthritis. He does not want to feel that he is not being useful to the society. Once I asked him to record a message for us. Instead he recited a prayer written by him which essentially asked Mother to forgive him for not doing enough for the society in this life. It is the blessings of such a *tapasvi* that have and will guide us through many a year.

- Kamlesh Sharda
(Son)

Karmayogi Chacha ji

Jagdish Chacha ji is known to me, since I was a shy boy of eight years, as a transit visitor at my home in Bombay where my father - his elder brother Nandlal ji - had settled as a businessman. Chacha ji had left India in

1946 for Kenya as a teacher. He used to come back to Bombay every few years on his way to our native place in Punjab, or to Nagpur or Delhi to visit the RSS headquarters or meet Sangh adhikaris. He also went to other places in India to renew contacts with old RSS colleagues or to meet relatives of swayamsevaks of East Africa.

Even though he would stay with us only for a few days, there was always cheer all around. We were fascinated by his narration of experiences as a teacher and as a preacher of Hindu *sanskriti* through pioneering work of Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS). He had also helped in starting Sanatan Dharma and Arya Samaj Mandirs to unite the Hindus in East Africa.

These visits, even though short, have left unforgettable impressions on us. We remember him as a person radiating cheerfulness, energy, enthusiasm, compassion, hope and above all love for his motherland - *Bharatmata*. He is soft-spoken, yet determined person. He introduced all us four brothers to the local shakha of RSS in 1956-57 and since then three of us - Prem, Ratan and I are ardent karyakartas of Sangh undertaking various responsibilities in social, educational and political fields. Credit for this goes to Jagdish Chacha ji.

I visited Kenya many years back for a short stay with him in Nakuru and got an opportunity to visit Mombassa, Nairobi and Kissimmee in Kenya and Kampala and Jinja in Uganda. Everywhere I found only respect and love for him. He had family-like relations in all the towns where he had helped in founding BSS shakhas. I felt very proud of him.

I was in England from 1967 to 1970 to study for M. Phil. in Textile Technology at Leeds University. There also I was immediately accepted by the group of swayamsevaks who were Chacha ji's associates in East Africa and emigrated to U.K. They were enthusiastically uniting Hindus under the banners of Indian Association. Luckily Dr. K.P. Hardas, an experienced swayamsevak from Nagpur was practicing there. Under his guidance, the first shakha was started in Bradford and named Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS). Later on Hindu Charitable Trust was formed with Dr. Hardas as its founder president, while I was made its secretary. The trust was able to build a temple in Leeds. We also formed Leeds University Union Hindu Society, of which I was the founding president. I believe it was the first association of Hindu students in U.K. We had the honor to welcome many well known personalities from India such as Swami Satyamitrananda ji, Shri Sudhir Phadke (music

director), Man. Dada Saheb Apte (Gen. Secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad), Shri Jagannathrao Joshi (Bharatiya Jana Sangh) and others.

I am now 65 years old grandparent, with a strong urge to retire. But Chacha ji, at 85 years, is still going strong. He can not walk but is working tirelessly for promotion of Indian languages, arts and culture in Greater Toronto with the help of dedicated team of like minded persons. There also he is loved and respected by all Indian, Canadian and other ethnic groups. He is trying to establish a powerful Hindu Institute of Learning to achieve the above purpose and to prepare workers for the same.

May Almighty give him good health and long life to succeed in his mission and keep inspiring us to follow his footsteps, because that will only lead to achievement of the motto of Vishwa Sangh - “*Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*” (whole world is one family). May he fulfill the Vedic adage “*Jeevemh Sharadah Shatam*” (may we live for hundred years).

- **Virendra Sharda,**
(Newphew, India)

Nana ji – My ‘Mahatma’

One of Nanaji’s greatest achievements has been his vast contribution and life-long loyalty towards Sangh. It is an achievement that has been recognized by others within the community, world-over. But whilst I sit here, wondering where to begin in my writings about our Nanaji, I realize that what I want to touch upon is the other layers of Nanaji, which further define him in my eyes as the superstar grandfather that he is!

In hindsight the most amusing recollection I have of my regards towards my dear Nanaji, at a young age, is being adamant that my grandfather was a reincarnation of the late Mahatma Gandhi. Living abroad in London, we only had a chance to visit our family in Canada on family visits. And upon each visit, a realization dawned upon me that our grandfather was unlike those of my friend’s. My grandfather not only served to be the root of our maternal family, but also held to be a significant root within the community. I later recall the immense sense of disappointment of learning, during a lesson at

school, that the demise of Gandhi ji occurred long after the birth of my grandfather, thus eradicating my theory that indeed my grandfather was Mahatma Gandhi! It's funny how as young children we have no concept of age or time.

Every time we visited Canada, all us grandchildren would walk away with an array of treats in the form of books from Nanaji's bookshop and immerse ourselves in the treasure of Indian literature and culture. I was mesmerized by Nanaji and the poetry that came from conversations with him. I remember once looking out the window when Nanaji told me how nature has its own rhythm and rhyme. We sat in silence and watched the leaves on the trees dance in the wind. It was a magical moment. I felt I could sit for hours, listening to Nanaji's views, opinions and stories. And it is clear that he has this effect on everyone.

When my brother Bhuvnesh and I were young, my Mum used to tell us bed time stories in the shape of her childhood adventures. Listening to the stories told by my Mum, my Massi and my three Mamaji's it's true to say that as a young father, Nanaji was somewhat of a stringent disciplinarian. I think it's true to say of most parents from that generation. But both my Nanaji and Naniji did a wonderful job, striking a balance between their family and contributing to society, resulting in their truest legacy to date - five well educated, well settled and loving children all ingrained with high morals, values and zest for life.

Visiting Nanaji's flat in downtown Toronto is like a realm of memories in itself. Amongst everything that is in its specific place, (our Nanaji is extremely particular!) you will find an array of pictures of friends and family going right down to Nanaji's first, and most beautiful, great-grandson, Armaan (who's smile has the ability to fill the room with sunshine!). All of us are there, pictures from when we were all young (some rather embarrassing, I must say!) to our present state. But the greatest and most graceful picture of them all remains the focal point of the room- the picture of our late grandmother. Naniji was a beautiful, gentle and pure soul, who had the capacity to love all those around her, and was doted upon by all those who met her. Simplicity of life and nature was enough to bring a smile to her face and her heart. The strangest thing is, the minute you walk into Nanaji's apartment, you get a strong sense of Naniji's presence. Perhaps that is part of the reason

why Nanaji has chosen to always live independently in that same apartment: because there remains the fragrance of his soul mate. The most touching and beautiful sight is the sight of a man who loves his wife. And that love has remained, many many years after Nanaji's demise. To this day, Nanaji has remained a loving, faithful husband who still endeavors to bring happiness to his wife. Every morning, Nanaji goes out onto his balcony to feed the pigeons that Nanaji used to so affectionately enjoy doing many years back. And those same birds – 'Kaushalya's birds' as Nanaji has named them – have loyally remained guests of honour every morning and no doubt will remain to do so. This is just a small example of the portrait of the loving and affectionate husband that Nanaji is. It is a side to him that not many people may know, or indeed Nanaji is shy to show. But it is a side which needs to be celebrated, for the purity of it touches the heart. As a family man – both as husband, father and grand-father - Nanaji has fulfilled his roles with passion. He is the big tree who has provided constant shelter to all his children, and through his strong roots and sense of unity, kept our family close-knit, during a modern age when it is normal for each man to do his own.

Nanaji often says that all his students are like his extended family, and he showers the same amount of love, affection and respect towards them as he does his own family. His loyal students go on to become much loyal friends. Indeed, one of Nanaji's life goals has in fact been intertwined with his passion and belief in education, and he has been a pioneering force in the foundation of the Hindu Institute of Learning. And in the foundations of the school, may the passionate teacher affectionately known as 'Shastri ji' eternally continue to teach those who are so eager to learn. In this day and age, keeping the Indian languages and cultures alive in the Western world – where it could so easily start becoming diluted – is a beautiful gift to bestow upon the community. A few years ago, Nanaji suffered a mild heart-attack and I remember him saying that all he asked God for is to keep him healthy for as long as it takes to see his dream of the Hindu Institute becoming a reality. Such positivity and an unbreakable spirit my grand-father has, and we're all extremely proud of his achievements. I pray that we have the strength to follow his example; that is, to always stay true to ourselves, and follow our heart.

Of course I could write much more, and fill hundreds of pages full of stories and affections towards my grand-father, like how Nanaji likes to tell jokes everyday and swears by laughter being the best medicine. Everything I

have said is spoken on behalf of our family, especially my Mum, Sushma Pathak, who is the youngest of the Sharda children (and who I proudly say is a mini-version of my Nanaji – beautiful and pure-hearted) I also want to add a personal message to Nanaji to tell him how proud we are of him and how much we love him and acknowledge the rest of our family from England - my Dad, Vijay Pathak, my brother Bhuvnesh, my two younger sisters Divya and Jaya, my Massi Asha Bhardwaj and her daughter Jyoti and son and daughter-in-law, Sanjay and Parul. So I now take your leave with a final few words from the heart...

My grandfather is unlike any man that I have known. He possesses that rare quality of being an animated, free-soul rooted by self-respect, discipline and a sense of duty and responsibility - not only towards himself and his loved ones, but also towards his community. He is an academic who believes in expanding one's mind. His passion for learning and sharing knowledge being a life-long mission, encapsulated in his passion for teaching and guiding, which I have no doubt he will do until his last breath. He is a politician campaigning for peace, love and self-betterment. If I could possess even half these qualities, I would consider myself successful. J.C. Sharda may not be the reincarnation of Gandhi ji as I once thought, but he is my hero, and inspiration of goodness and achievement that I know all his children, grand-children and great-grandchildren alike, strive to be... and in my eyes, Nanaji shall always be my Mahatma - 'The Great One'.

- Hema Pathak
(Maternal Grand daughter, U.K.)

HIL students and colleagues recall their association

Shastri ji – My friend and Teacher

I first met ‘Shastri ji’ fifteen years ago. I was then a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto, specializing in Indian history, and I was in the final stages of writing my thesis. I had studied Hindi many years earlier, but without much success. When I saw that the Toronto Board of Education was offering a Hindi course, to be held in the evening once a week, I decided that it would be a good opportunity to improve my language skills. And so one day in the early autumn of 1992, I went to Jarvis Collegiate Institute, the oldest high school in Toronto, and found the classroom indicated on my registration form. I went in and found a seat among a crowd of men and women of all ages, who as I recall were about half of Indian origin and half of European origin. In a few minutes, a smiling gentleman in a brown suit walked in. He introduced himself as Jagdish Sharda, but explained that on account of his mastery of Sanskrit, he was known as Shastri ji. And so began my first class with Shastri ji.

Three months later, the course came to an end. Thanks to Shastri ji I had acquired a firm grounding in Hindi. He invited me to continue my study of the language in a smaller group, which met in the offices of Shastri ji’s business, Asian Educational Supplies on Dundas Street. Fortunately this was only a twenty-minute walk from the small apartment where my wife Mary and I then lived (like many newlyweds in Toronto at that time, we did not have a car). Under Shastri ji’s careful guidance, my Hindi improved constantly, as I learned new vocabulary, mastered unusual grammatical forms, and read extensively.

By this time, I had completed my Ph.D., and I had been awarded a research fellowship that would allow me to spend the 1993-1994 academic year in India. In September 1993, I left Toronto and took up residence in Delhi. Shastri ji had given me letters of introduction to a number of his friends and associates in India. I made the appropriate contacts, and I still remember the kindness that I met from the late Shri Chamanlal. Most important of all, I found to my delight that thanks to the firm grounding I had received from Shastri ji, I was able to communicate with all and sundry in

Hindi. I remained in correspondence with Shastri ji (those were the days before email, when people wrote letters), and I remember the sad occasion of Mrs. Sharda's death which occurred while I was in India.

Mary and I returned to Toronto in 1994. I continued to attend Shastri ji's Hindi classes, now in the Hindu Institute of Learning's rented premises on Bloor Street West. Then, I obtained a position teaching Indian history in the Department of History at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, U.S.A. Mary and I left Toronto (the city where both of us had been born, and had lived all our lives), and moved to Louisville. We have lived there ever since. We still remain in touch with Shastri ji, whom I regard as both a teacher and a friend. I see him on my visits to Toronto, and we chat on the phone several times a year.

I have felt blessed by my acquaintance with Shastri ji. He is a wonderful teacher and friend, who since coming to Canada, has devoted himself to teaching the languages and culture of India to Canadians of all backgrounds. I wish him many more years of happiness and good health in which he can continue his valuable work.

- John McLeod
(Ph. D. in History of India)

Journey of Discovery with Shastri ji

My acquaintance and friendship with Mr. Jagdish C. Sharda, affectionately called Shastri ji by most people in Canada, goes back to 1990's. It began in a rather circuitous way.

A good friend of mine, F. Gormek also an engineer, born in Slovenia, whose area of expertise is bridge design and repair, worked in Bangladesh for five years, as a participant of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) program. The program involved the repair of aging bridges that were built during the British colonial era and were in need of amelioration. Thus, he had an opportunity to work with the people, in a non-English environment, throughout the country. For vacations he traveled and visited many areas of the Indian sub-continent, especially in the Himalayas. In his youth, when Slovenia was occupied by the German army during the WW 2, he was conscripted and had served in the

German army with postings and was posted in various countries in Europe - Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia.

During his stay on the Indian sub-continent, he was surprised to learn that many of the elemental words in Bengali had similar meanings in his native Slovenian. Bengali words such as 'din' day; 'megh' cloud; 'agun' fire; 'rasa' juice; 'trteeya' third; 'choturtha' fourth; 'sastha' sixth; etc have corresponding words in Slovenian with similar meanings such as 'dan'; 'megla'; 'ogenj'; 'rosa'; 'tretji'; 'cetrti' (pron. che-tr-ti) etc. This was surprising to him, because Slovenia is in the central Europe bordering on Italy in the west and Austria and Hungary on the north; yet the elemental Bengali vocabulary is closer to Slovenian than the Italian, German and Hungarian linguistic neighbours. When F. Gormek returned to Canada, he spoke of his experiences; of his work and travels on the Indian sub-continent. He did this at a seminar for Canadian-Slovenian audience in Toronto, which I attended.

This linguistic element in the account of his travels, sparked an interest in my mind and I wanted to learn more about the languages of India especially Sanskrit, which I knew was an ancient language of India. Fortunately, Toronto is a very cosmopolitan city. Its inhabitants come from around the world and there is also a large community of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent. I went to an Indian store selling books, music tapes and CDs and asked for Sanskrit-English dictionary. The proprietor of the store told me very politely, that he did not have such a dictionary for sale, but he directed me to another bookstore not too far away, gave me the address and called ahead to tell them what I wanted and I was on the way.

It was in this store, named Asian Educational Supplies Ltd., that I was greeted graciously by an elderly gentleman who turned out to be Shastri ji. This was the beginning of the friendship with him. He told me that he would gladly sell me Sir Monier Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary. However, to get the best insights into Sanskrit, not just vocabulary but also grammar, he advised me and then gently persuaded me to take Sanskrit lessons at the Hindu Institute of Learning. At that time, Prof. Venkatacharya (Professor Emeritus of Sanskrit, University of Toronto) was teaching Sanskrit to the beginners. Later, when Prof. Venkatacharya retired from teaching, Shastri ji took over the classes at HIL.

During these classes, with Shastri ji's help, I discovered numerous linguistic and grammatical similarities between Sanskrit, particularly Vedic Sanskrit, and Slovenian which is a Slavic language. What was surprising to both of us was the fact that in some cases, Slovenian still preserves Sanskrit dual and many

inflective verb forms, no longer present in present day Indian languages such as Hindi and Punjabi. Some of these findings we summarized and presented in a paper.

I am listing a few of these papers to give readers some idea of the work I did with the help of HIL and Shastri ji.

- Indo-Aryan and Slavic affinities - Joseph Skulj, Jagdish C. Sharda.

Published in: *Proceedings of the First International Topical Conference: The Veneti within the Ethnogenesis of the Central-European Population* (2001), Ljubljana, Jutro p.112-121. ISBN: 961-6433-06-7

Later other scholars, Snejina Sonina (Ph. D.) and Petr Jandacek (M. A.) joined us, and together we wrote a paper which showed that linguistic similarities between Slavs and Indo-Aryans are not due to coincidence or borrowings, but are due to a common origin of a large percentage of Slavic and Indo-Aryan populations on the Indian sub-continent. Here again Shastri ji as the Sanskrit scholar and the Hindu Institute of Learning played a pivotal role in facilitating the following paper. The papers were -

- Linguistic and Genetic Correspondences between Slavs and Indians (Indo Aryans) provide Insights into their Pre-History - Joseph Skulj, Jagdish C. Sharda, Snejina Sonina, Petr Jandacek
- ‘Lexical self-dating’ evidence for a common agro-pastoral origin of Sanskrit ‘gopati’, ‘gospati’ and Slavic ‘gospod’, ‘gospodin’ meaning *lord/master/gentleman* more than 8,000 years ago. - Joseph Skulj, Jagdish C. Sharda, Ratnakar Narale, Snejina Sonina

Paper read at the Fourth International Topical Conference: Ancient Inhabitants of Europe, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 9-10 June 2006.vPublished in: *Vedic Science* Vol. 8 No. 1, 2006, Delhi, India. pp 5-25.

Now we are working on the following paper, which will be presented in Slovenia and then published in the *Proceedings* -

- Linguistic and Genetic Evidence for a Common Origin of the Indo-Aryans and the Slavs and their Divergences before the Evolution of Farming - Joseph Skulj, Jagdish C. Sharda, Snejina Sonina, Ratnakar Narale.

All the above papers have been published under the auspices of the Hindu Institute of Learning. Thus, for me, it has been a great journey of discovery with support from Mr. J. C. Sharda and HIL.

- Joseph Skulj (P. Eng.)
The Hindu Institute of Learning, Toronto

Sharda ji – Happy and Lively Teacher

I was very sad when Dr Ratnakar Narale's classes for the Toronto Board of Education came to an end. I wanted to learn more Hindi but only beginners' level was available at that venue. Dr Narale referred me to Sharda ji. Our association began on a cold and snowy January evening.

I clearly remember the first class in his living room that I attended. Not only was I going to learn Hindi, I was also going to learn about volunteering my services. This was two and a half years ago. During that time I have moved from the beginners' class on Tuesday backwards in time to join the advanced group on Monday nights. I have been to India twice where, as a result of my passion for Bollywood movies and Sharda ji's teaching and I was able to avoid some of the hassles of being in a foreign country totally unable to understand the language. I have met a wide assortment of people who perhaps I would not have otherwise encountered. I have broadened my horizons in ways that I could not have dreamt before becoming a student at HIL.

The classes are always entertaining – either because of Sharda ji's jokes or some blooper that a student has made (usually me!) and so the two hours that are devoted to Hindi *baat cheet* (conversation), grammar and reading zip quickly past. Sharda ji is admirable not only for teaching at his advanced age but also because of his devotion to causes in which he passionately believes.

To paraphrase Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem - "The Brook" --
Students may come and students may go but Sharda ji goes on forever.

- **Maureen Levinas**

Sangh, Shastri ji and HIL

I was born in Trinidad, West Indies. My father, Beharrysingh came to Trinidad from India in around 1905, supposedly from the province of Bihar. My mother, Rajcoomarie, was born in Trinidad. I have visited India on different occasions since retiring and even lived there at Puttapparthi, Shri Satya Sai Baba's Ashram for about a year and in Mukularanyam English School, Varanasi for two years.

I immigrated to England in 1956, where I worked, studied Law and practiced as a Solicitor. In England, in about the early 70's two young men, Bharat Shah and Kishore Ruparelia, from Kenya, introduced me to Sangh. Gradually, I met and befriended many other brother Sanghis. I had the good fortune of knowing Man. Bhide ji. He was a person of great human virtues—a perfect example of a great and good human being. A saintly figure, indeed.

On my visit to Canada in 1982 to meet my two children who were studying here, I met Sharda ji with introductions from Bharat and Kishore. Since then our acquaintance developed into friendship, and now I am like a younger brother to him. Our meeting and brotherliness developed more solidly when I moved from England to live permanently in Canada in December 1990. Now I have become a regular attendee of Sangh. In these early years Shastri ji was already engaged in his self-appointed mission of teaching Hindi and Sanskrit to Canadian public. I was able to be of a little help here in the matter of obtaining registration of The Hindu Institute of Learning as a charitable body under the laws of Canada. The Hindu Institute of Learning is a relatively small organization. But its usefulness and influence in the field of education and, indeed, of bringing Hindu culture to Canadians of all background is quite impressive. Over the years, Shastri ji's students have included not only Indians, but also Canadians. With Bharat's growing influence in the economic world, it is expected that more non-Indians will find it useful to study Hindi.

Students who are no longer attending the classes keep in touch with HIL. This is because of Shastri ji's charmingly, humble and magnetic

personality. He exudes love and friendship for all who come in his contact. Therefore, HIL is as much about family building as it is about building a teaching institution. This approach has also attracted teachers of outstanding academic achievements. Our former Sanskrit teacher was a retired professor of Sanskrit from University Of Toronto. Our present Sanskrit teacher is Dr. Ratnakar Narale, who has written several outstanding books. Narale ji is also the principal of HIL and teaches Hindi and Sanskrit.

In reviewing the success of the HIL it will be true to say that Shastri ji's leadership and guidance has been of paramount importance. He is every bit a remarkable Sanghi in action who has worked for society in Bharat, Kenya, U.K. and now Canada. When you look at Shastri ji, you see real evidence of the spirit and drive that must have propelled the founder of RSS, Doctor ji in this most laudable mission in the last century in Bharat.

- Roopnarine Beharrysingh

Reflections on J. C. Sharda ji and HIL

When I first met J.C. Sharda in the autumn of 2000, I found him very warm, friendly and inviting. When I told him I wanted to learn Hindi because I was going to India to work with disadvantaged people, he was encouraging. But, he told me that he would be interested in teaching me only if I was not going to do missionary work and convert people to Christianity. I convinced him that I was going to do social service, and thus began my involvement with HIL.

For three weeks that autumn Sharda ji taught me Hindi. I saw that he had a systematic way of teaching, and I appreciated that. Alas, the three weeks were soon over, but I continued in Michigan, where I was training for the service work.

I did not see Sharda ji again until I returned from New York in the autumn of 2004. I wanted to renew Hindi studies and contacted him. He greeted me enthusiastically and offered free Hindi classes in exchange for volunteering for HIL. And so I volunteered once a week, helping him to write letters both for HIL and for his personal business, as his arthritis prevented him from writing easily. I also did other tasks like going to the drug store, post office, and purchasing flowers for his daily pujas.

I attended the Tuesday evening class, where we beginners slowly went through a children's book that helped us learn to read and spell in Hindi. The method was to give each student a chunk of time, so if anyone new started (one can begin at any time) the whole class reviewed the beginning pages of this little book. We also did some conversation and grammar. Interspersed were Sharda ji's jokes, some of which were amusing, others, well, not so much. On the whole it was a relaxed and fun class. During this year Sharda ji invited me to HIL board meetings, and I attended a few.

After returning from India in the spring of 2006, I again volunteered for him, only this time I helped him write his memoirs. It was during this time that I heard about the context for Sharda ji's work, and learned about the RSS and HSS in greater detail.

I realized that I did not want to be a board member, as the men who were running it were doing a fine job, and did not seem to need a Canadian woman's perspective. Nonetheless, Sharda ji requested my attendance at various functions, especially when HIL established a relationship with a temple and an entrepreneur north of Toronto. This was a very exciting time for Sharda ji, and hopefully it will be successful. I hope he is able to fulfill his dream of seeing HIL well established soon.

- Ellen Shifrin

HIL – Serving the Multi-cultural Society of Canada

I have been taking Hindi lessons from Shri J.C. Sharda, here in Toronto, for the last 10 years. He and I have become good friends during the last 10 years. I am always amazed that a man of his years has such a constant source of energy, good cheer and love for his fellow men. Although he lives alone, every day he is in communication with many friends and acquaintances. He has a very busy schedule but always makes time to chat or visit with friends.

The Hindu Institute of Learning (HIL) strives to serve the multi-cultural community of Toronto. Through their classes and social events, they have attracted people of many cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Toronto is a highly multi-cultural city and we value organizations that bring people together to share their values and beliefs.

My personal interest in the HIL comes from living for two years in New Delhi as a student. Since returning to Canada, I have always felt that a part of me is Indian. My relationship with the HIL gives me great pleasure to learn more about the language and culture, and to share ideas and discussion with people of Indian origin. Our weekly Hindi class is educational, interesting and fun. It will surely be great to see HIL grow from strength to strength and fulfill the vision Shastri ji has for it, and I see myself as a part of this growth.

- **David Hunsburger**

Shri Shastri ji of Hindu Institute of Learning

When thinking of true dedication to the propagation of Indian culture, languages and arts in Canada, one name stands out above all names, and that special person is the selfless, motivated, magnetic, energetic and amiable eighty five years young President of The Hindu Institute of Learning, Man. Jagdish Chandra Sharda, alias Shri Shastri ji. Around him he has gathered a team of ever ready and dedicated directors and workers immersed in the cause of social service that Shri Shastri ji has initiated and carried over for past nearly twenty years, with great success.

Not only his associates, but his students also adore him for his gift of service to the multicultural society of Canada and they all have formed a father-son relationship with him with immense pleasure. His students come from all walks of life, from a house wife to company executives, businessmen, scholars, professionals to very young students. His students and co-workers are Indians, West Indians, Europeans, Americans as well as Canadians and all. All of them are struggling to make Shri Shastri ji's dream come true, and that dream is one day seeing a building of Hindu Institute of Learning on the Canadian soil. To accomplish the building project brick by brick, generous donors from Canada and abroad are pouring their hearts and hard earned money as much as they can.

That day, probably, is not too far away when there will be a building of Hindu Institute of Learning in Toronto and Shri Shastri ji will be cutting the ribbon and happily offering it as a gift to all his well wishers and the Canadian society. That will be the day to write in golden letters in the annals of the

history of propagation of Indian values and culture in the great nation of Canada. From the seed sown in a tiny rented space with few students, Shri Shastri ji and his team have developed it into what one can proudly call an Institute that offers classes in all Indian languages, Gita, Ramayana, yoga, music and Hinduism.

The scholars at the Institute have written valuable papers and quality books to educate the masses world wide. Notable among these publications are the research papers published in international journals by Shri Joseph Skulj and Dr. Snejina Sonina co-relating the roots of European languages to Sanskrit. I have also published some books, namely *Learn Hindi Through English Medium*, *Learn Sanskrit through English Medium*, *Gita as She is in Krishna's Own Words*, *Gita ka Shabdakosh*, *Patanjalayogasutradipika ...etc.* through HIL.

Shri Shastri ji earned this dedication and focused vision during his orientation and training as a swayamsevak and a karyakarta of RSS in his golden years in India and then going on to start BSS or energize the work of HSS where he went. This discipline keeps him working at the goal day and night, during ups and downs tirelessly and forcefully and makes him inspire everyone around him. His contributions are bearing fruits and one day all people around him will enjoy them for centuries to come.

- Dr. Ratnakar Narale
Hindu Institute of Learning

A Note from Publishers

It is probably the first time that some kind of documentation has been attempted to put together the history of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh and allied organizations working for Hindu society outside Bharat. Shastri ji represents the select band of dedicated selfless people of Indian origin who have worked tirelessly for their society as well as the society of their adoption. Memoirs of Man. Shastri ji have proved to be a vehicle to help us bring such inspiring stories to you. We are sure that many of our readers will feel inspired to contribute more information for this kind of documentation. We welcome you all to add to this history further. We shall try to use the information sent by you in some form or the other in coming times. We would also be happy to help people to publish any well researched historical documentation in book form about People of Indian Origin from any corner of the world. Your contributions will be vetted by an experts committee before they are taken up for publication.

Please feel free to write or mail to –

Vishwa Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai at yakmumbai@rediffmail.com or

Vishwa Niketan, Delhi at vishwav@gmail.com

Annexure

Condensed History of Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh
in East Africa

Kenya was the 'karmabhoomi' for the major part of Shastri ji's Sangh work, from where it grew in neighbouring countries of East Africa. We thought it would be a good idea to give a more in-depth picture about BSS work since its inception. Following is a condensed account of inception and growth of Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS) in East Africa prepared by a group of senior karyakartas there.

Condensed History of BSS in East Africa

Kenya, situated on the East Coast of Africa, is one of the three countries forming East Africa, the other two being Tanzania and Uganda. The Indian community in Kenya was fully informed of the happenings in India. Kenya, though far away from Bharat was brought closer to Bharat, being ruled by the same British rulers. Recruitment of skilled and semi-skilled labour from India for the construction of the Railway line from Mombassa to Kampala, the capital of Uganda in 1896 was the beginning of the migration of Indians to Kenya in large numbers. The Indian Association of Mombassa used to be the forerunner in projecting the Indian situation and supporting it. It is a sad fact that the big building owned by the Indian Association on Digo Road, Mombassa (opposite Post Office) came to be divided between Muslims and other Indians after the partition of India. It still remains there as a mute witness to the happenings of those days.

The people who migrated to Kenya from Punjab before 1947 had knowledge of Sangh and its aims. Many of them had been Sangh swayamsevaks and karyakartas in India before they came to Kenya. Thus, Sangh had reached the shores of Kenya even before Sangh shakha was formally started.

The story of Shri Manek Lal Rughani a swayamsevak from Gujarat meeting Shri Jagdish Chandra Sharda (Shastri ji), a swayamsevak from Punjab on the ship S.S.Vasna, while they were sailing from Mumbai to Mombassa during the period from 13th September 1946 to 25th September 1946, and the subsequent developments are recounted by Shastri ji in these memoirs.

Inception of Sangh in Kenya

Sangh was started in Nairobi on 14th January 1947 on the grounds of Sanatan Dharma Sabha, on Duke Street. It was attended by twenty one swayamsevaks. It was later on named Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS) and was registered with the Government of Kenya as a socio-religious and cultural organization of Hindus.

It is from this shakha that Sangh spread to other East African countries like Tanzania and Uganda and later on strengthened in England, Canada and Australia through Kenyan swayamsevaks who migrated to those countries. The core team of volunteers of BSS, apart from Shri Shastri ji and Shri Rughani ji during 1947 consisted of Shri Ramnath Seedhar, Shri Krishna Raval, Shri Ramdas Sunnik, Shri Chamanlal Sharma, Dr.V.V.Patwardhan, Shri Ravindra Pota, Shri Uttambhai Chauhan, Shri Biharilal Dholiwal, Shri Rajpal Puri, Shri Pishorilal Bhalla etc. in Nairobi, and Dr. Jaswant Rai Sharma, Shri Harshad Mehta, Shri Solanki, etc. in Mombassa. These shakhas grew in strength and quality. The first annual general camp was also held for three days in Indian School, Nyeri in December 1947, attended by 117 swayamsevaks. Since then it has become a tradition with BSS to hold the Annual Camp during Christmas holidays for 3 or 4 days. Till date 58 such annual camps have been held.

The technique and protocols of shakhas in Kenya were similar to that of Bharat. In earlier days even the *prarthana* used to be the same “*namaste sadaa vatsaley....*” which was later changed to the present one, “*sarva mangal mangalyam...*”. In the earlier days quite a good number of swayamsevaks and karyakartas used to be from Punjab, though local population was predominantly Gujarati. But, the unwritten rule in shakhas was to use primarily Hindi. Today, even when Gujarati speaking swayamsevaks form nearly 90% of members, Hindi is the language of communication. This commitment to Hindi is visible expression of the Hindu unity all over the world.

The early days had some teething problems, especially in Mombassa where politics in India had greater impact amongst Indians. In 1948, influenced by the vicious propoganda from India, no Hindu institution allowed swayamsevaks to assemble in their premises for their daily activities. At that time a Parsee gentleman, Shri Awari, gave swayamsevaks permission to use the vast Parsee cemetery ground permanently for Sangh purposes, keeping a small portion of it aside to serve as the cemetery of that small community.

Thus, the Parsee cemetery became the main sanghasthan for decades afterwards. The situation, however, changed over time.

Shri Appa Pant was the Indian High Commissioner in Kenya during those days in 1950s. He had a very close relationship with the local African leaders and was the chief architect of building bonds of friendship between the local Indians and the local Africans. That was a major reason why Indians, settled even in interior villages of Kenya were safe during the turbulent period of Kenyan freedom struggle. On suggestion of Shri Appa Pant, the annual Sangh Shibir (camp) of BSS of year 1950 was held at Githunguri, (which is renamed in Sangh circles as *Granthgiri*), the native area of the Kikuyu tribe, which was in the forefront of the freedom struggle. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, then the top leader of the Kenyan freedom struggle and later on the first President of Kenya used to visit the camp site to check the progress in preparations for the camp. He visited the shibir with his 25 freedom fighter associates and enjoyed the *Preeti Bhojan* (community dinner) at the end of the function. He and Shri Appa Pant were the chief speakers at the valedictory function attended by over 300 participants, leading dignitaries and heads of various Hindu organizations. He remembered this happy experience even in 1977, when he was the president of the Republic of Kenya and mentioned it to Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, the then Foreign Minister of India in the Janata Party Government.

Expansion of Sangh in East Africa

Shakhas in different towns were subsequently started. The progress of Sangh shakhas cannot be attributed to a few karyakartas, but for lack of space we cannot mention all or even senior karyakartas. For this, we shall need to publish a detailed report later.

Noteworthy karyakartas in 1948 were, Sarvashri Tarlok Singh Nandhra, Iqbalrai Dutta, Dayabhai Patel, Kuldeep Nehra, Girdharbhai, Dharamshibhai, Devchandbhai, Mohanbhai, Shantibhai, Krishanlal Dhiri, Pyarelal Kundi, Mulkhraj ji, Jayantibhai Chheda, Motiramji in Nairobi and Zaverchand Shah, Manilal ji Shah, Somabhai in Mombassa.

From Nairobi, the shakhas spread to other cities and other neighbouring countries. Some other prominent karyakartas are Shri Uttambhai, Shri Brahmatt Seedhar, Shri Vibhakar ji etc. Some other senior

most karyakartas who should be mentioned as the founding pillars of BSS work in Kenya and other neighbouring countries are Shri Jayantibhai Chheda and Shri Chunibhai Haria. Shri Chunibhai is also responsible to provide for the printing of HRE class texts sold by Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK). Shri Narendra Gosar Shah worked earlier in Kisumu before shifting to Nairobi while moved from Mombassa to Nairobi.

Outside Nairobi, Sangh work was started in Mombassa by Dr. Jaswantrai Sharma in 1947. BSS shakhas also grew in other cities like Thika, Forthall, Nakuru and Eldoret, Kisumu, Kissie. Shri Lal Chand Punj, Shri Dinesh Shah and Shri Jagdish Mitra Sood played key role in these areas.

The Sangh work then expanded to neighbouring Tanzania in Dar-es-Salam, Tanga and Arusha. In Uganda, also BSS karyakartas Shri Praveenbhai Ruparelia and Shri Bachubhai Patel started shakhas in Kampala from where they spread to Jinja, Mabale, Masaka and Mbarara.

Thus, Sangh message had reached and flourished in the three countries of East Africa by 1960. Sampark shakhas were established in Limuru, Ruiru and Voi and Malindi.

Consolidation

Along with the expansion of Sangh shakhas in all the three countries of East Africa, regular *pravaas* (tours) by karyakartas to consolidate the development took place. Shri Shastri ji and Shri Jagdish Mitra Sood as teachers, used to have time on weekends and school holidays. They utilized nearly all this time for Sangh work traveling various towns rather than giving tuitions or enjoying family outings. Their personal behaviour, their sacrificing spirit and their preference to the work for society over and above personal and family matters inspired swayamsevaks to emulate them.

During the initial stage, Man. Bhide ji guided and boosted the Sangh work in East Africa and later on travelled to other countries to establish new contacts. His presence and organizing capabilities were a great source of inspiration for all the swayamsevaks while he was there. He returned to Bharat later on to take up other responsibilities. Nairobi was his headquarter from where he used to travel to other countries.

Setback to Sangh Work in East Africa

Sangh work grew phenomenally in East Africa for first sixteen years. However, 1963 proved to be a watershed year for BSS as all the three East African countries gained independence around this time. The winter camps in 1963 witnessed a huge drop of nearly 80% in attendance as compared to 1962. It showed the troubled state of mind of Hindu population.

After independence of Kenya in 1963, it was the Kenya government's policy to Africanize most of the para-statal institutions, leaving a provision for non-Africans to continue in their jobs for a further period of only 6 months. Under these circumstances most of our people being British passport holders, decided to migrate for U.K. In the meantime the U.K. government brought in a law that an overseas British passport holders would not be allowed to migrate to U.K. beyond 1968. This spurred an exodus of Indians to U.K. from Kenya. The socialist government of Tanzania disallowed ethnic institutions to operate in the country which led to migration of Hindus from that country. In Uganda, new rulers threw out Indians at short notice and they became refugees overnight, having lost all they had earned and amassed over years.

This situation made Kenyan Indians more conscious of possible dangers to their livelihood and families. Many moved out of Africa to UK, Europe, Canada, USA and other countries that had better chances of a secure life and livelihood. The Hindu population in Kenya got reduced from two hundred fifty thousand to less than sixty thousand in subsequent years. This affected the strength and the growth of Sangh in East Africa drastically.

However, the reduced Hindu population in Kenya and lesser number of shakhas and swayamsevaks had very little impact on the intrinsic strength of BSS which has remained the backbone of the Hindu society here.

Milestones in the Life of BSS

In 1951, *Bharatiya Cultural Exhibition* was organized by BSS. Commemorating the occasion a souvenir was brought out which was named *Amar Bharati*. This *Amar Bharati* later became the official organ of BSS disseminating Sangh knowledge among karyakartas. Shri Amritlal Morokar was its first editor. Shri K. E. Purushottam Rao who came to Mombassa in 1974 as an expatriate teacher, started *Amar Bharati* afresh in 1975. An

exhibition, *Ramayana in pictures*, was organized by BSS in 1954 and later in 1959.

Kenya has its own central office. The foundation stone for the new building was laid by Swami Satyamitrans ji Giri on 28th July 1968. It was completed in 1972 and named Deendayal Bhavan to perpetuate the memory of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, who gave us the Bharatiya philosophy of Integral Humanism (*Ekatma Manav Vaad*). He had visited Kenya in November 1963. The premises of Deendayal Bhavan include a playground, a reading room, a reference library, meeting room, audio and video library, shop housing Sangh literature, a fully equipped large kitchen and an office with all technical facilities. A nursery school named Vivekanand Bal Mandir also operates in the premises. The southern wing was later demolished and reconstructed to allow for more community activities. It was opened on 14th January, 2007 during Shri Guruji's Birth Centenary year by Param Poojaniya Sarsanghchhalak, Man. Sudarshan ji.

Sangh played a pivotal role in the formation of Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK) with the blessings of Swami Satyamitrananda Giri in 1972. It is an umbrella body of all Hindu institutions in Kenya. HCK has become the voice of Hindu community and has achieved a lot for Hindus. Efforts of HCK led to the introduction of Hindu Religious Education (HRE) in Kenya as a subject of study and examination both at primary and secondary school levels. HCK helped in framing the syllabus for HRE, getting suitable textbooks written and published on the subject. Smt. Raksha Agarwal, Smt. Vasudha Dharmadhikari, Shri A.E. Purushottam Rao helped HCK in bringing out the text books of HRE and the Teachers' guide. A Swami Vivekanand Chair was established in the University of Nairobi to teach Hindu religious subjects. HCK's petitions resulted in Deepavali being declared an official holiday for all Hindus in Kenya.

Inspired by the success of HCK, Hindu Council of Africa was formed. Its delegates' conference was held in Shri Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Nairobi in August 1998 which was addressed by Man. Ashok Singhal, the then International President of Vishwa Hindu Parishad. It was interrupted by the bomb blast in the US embassy by Islamic terrorists on 7th August 1998. Young volunteers left the conference to rush to the disaster site. They were the first to provide help to the wounded and worked hard to clear the dead bodies. In January 2007, HCK organized an impressive *Virat Hindu Sangam* (Grand

assembly of Hindus) in the Premier club premises, where the Shobha Yatra with 28 floats by different Hindu communities culminated. It was addressed by Man. Sudarshan ji.

In 1975 Emergency was declared in India by Shrimati Indira Gandhi and RSS was one of the organizations banned along with political parties opposing her. It became necessary to bring pressure on the Government of India from overseas for re-establishment of democracy. At the suggestion of Shri Madhavrao Muley, young karyakartas like Shri Kamlesh Sharda founded Friends of India Society International (FISI) with active support of seniors like Dr. K. P. Hardas. Shri Jagdish Mitra Sood resigned his job as teacher in Kenya in December 1975 and proceeded to London to help karyakartas to take FISI forward. The first *International Conference on Restoration of Democracy in India* of FISI was held in Alexandra Palace, Wood Green, London on 24th and 25th April 1976. The delegates for the conference included Shri Brahmaratan Agarwal, Shri Dhiraj Shah from U.K., Dr. Mahesh Mehta from U.S., Dr. Subramaniam Swamy (Jan Sangh M.P. at that time) and Shri Makrand Desai (M.L.A. from Gujarat). A FISI chapter was also started in US during this time. Efforts of FISI in mobilizing support from various countries of the world along with pro-democracy movement in Bharat, with critical support from RSS bore fruit, and emergency was finally lifted in March 1977.

On the occasion of the completion of forty years of BSS, a grand general camp was organized in December 1987 in Jomo Kenyatta College of Agriculture and Technology at Juja. Many brethren who had left Kenya came for this camp and refreshed their pleasant memories of Sangh life in Kenya with their Kenyan brethren. It was graced by Man. Yadavrao Joshi, Sahsarkaryavah of RSS at that time.

The birth centenary of celebrations of Param Poojaniya Doctor ji, the founder of RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), was celebrated in Kenya with enthusiasm in 1989. 50 swayamsevaks participated in a Charity Relay Walk and Jog from Nairobi to Mombassa, a distance of 300 miles over a period of six days from 26th April to 1st May 1989, in aid of Special Olympics for the Mentally handicapped. Man. Rajju Bhaiyya the then Sahasarkaryavah of RSS graced the celebrations and addressed the Nairobi swayamsevaks on 9th April 1989, the Hindu new year day.

BSS had made a resolution to start social service projects (sewa karya) with more focus during these centenary celebrations. Under the auspices of Hindu Council of Kenya, BSS has been organizing free medical camps twice a year since 1990, for the benefit of poor people living in remote rural areas. About 30 to 40 doctors and a large number of volunteers and pharmacists are pressed into service to organize this Free Medical Camp for one day. Medical check-up, medicines and minor operations are provided free to patients. Usually about 3000 patients attend such camps. Many philanthropists come forward to meet the expenses of these camps and all the professionals give free service. The service activities of BSS include free food distribution in famine stricken areas, helping rural schools with library, books, equipment and providing school fees etc. to poor students, Jaipur Foot project, tree planting etc. There are various sewa projects running in Bharat especially in tribal areas of Assam, Vidarbha, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh that are being supported by Kenyan swayamsevaks.

In 1993, BSS celebrated the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's historic address at the Parliament of Religions. An exhibition of pictures presenting various important events in the life of Vivekananda was organized. It was shown in all the towns of Kenya.

BSS celebrated its Swarna Jayanti (Golden Jubilee) on completion of 50 years of its inception in 1997. The occasion was utilized to initiate *Jana Samparka Karyakram* (mass contact programme). A *Shobha Yatra* (grand procession) was organized by the HCK that had 23 floats. The yatra culminated in a Hindu Sangam (assembly of Hindus) in Sanatan Dharma Sabha, which was attended by about 6000 people. Man. Rajju Bhaiyya, the then Sarsanghchhalak of RSS, addressed the gathering.

1998-99 was the Tri-centenary year of the birth of Khalsa. BSS celebrated the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh ji on 26th December 1998, in the annual general camp, which was attended by more than 250 Sikh brothers. A brochure about the life and achievements of Guru Gobind Singh ji was published and distributed by BSS. On 14th March 1999, swayamsevaks joined the procession organized by the Sikh community with a float depicting the martyrdom of Fateh Singh and Joravar Singh, the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh ji. BSS organized a Free Medical Camp in Makindu, where the famous Sikh shrine stands.

Various programmes were held during the year long celebrations of Param Poojaniya Guruji's birth centenary, the second Sarsanghchalak of RSS, from Feb 2006 to Feb 2007. A session of readings from the life story of Guru ji was held every month which was attended by the families of swayamsevaks and sympathizers. *Jana Sampark* (public contact programme) was carried out. *Geet Sandhya* programme by young karyakartas was held. Sevikas of Hindu Sevika Samiti also celebrated the occasion with its own programmes. Shri Sudarshan ji addressed the students and professors of the University of Nairobi.

Having taken inspiration by the working of BSS in Kenya, the Hindu Sevika Samiti for women was established. It conducts regular training camps and annual general camps too. A batch of 26 sevikas went to South Africa to inspire the sevikas there and to attend a week long Shiksha Varg (training camp) in 2003.

Guidance from Sangh Adhikaries

BSS has been fortunate to have in its midst inspiring presence of senior adhikaris of RSS from time to time during the sixty years of its existence. Man. Laxmanrao Bhide was the first Vishwa Vibhag Sanyojak (convenor) and full time pracharak for BSS. Nairobi was his head quarter for many years since he came to Kenya in 1959. Shri Deendayal Upadhyay visited Kenya in 1963. Shri Atal Behari visited Kenya five times starting from 1965. Sarvashri Bhau Rao Deoras, Dattopant Thengadi, Moropant Pingale, Kedarnath Sahani, Uttamrao Patil, Jagannath Rao Joshi, Lala Hansraj Gupta were among the earlier visitors of Kenya. Man. Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiyya) was the first Sarsanghchalak to visit Kenya in 1997 on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebration of Sangh work abroad. Man. H.V.Seshadri, then Sarkaryavah (General Secretary) visited Kenya in 1993. Late Shri Yadavrao Joshi (the then sahasarkaryavah) graced the annual general camp held in Nairobi in 1987, on the occasion of 40 years of Sangh work abroad. Man. K.S. Sudarshan visited Kenya twice. Sarvashri Nanaji Deshmukh, Surya Narayan Rao, Mohan Rao Bhagwat (then Akhil Bharatiya Shareerik Pramukh and presently Sarkaryavah), Ashok ji Singhal and many others have visited and guided BSS work in Kenya.

After Bhide ji, Dr.Shankar Rao Tatwawadi (Vishwa Vibhag Sanyojak), Dr.Yashwant Rao Pathak, Shri Ravi kumar Iyer and Dr. Sadanand

Sapre (Vishwa Vibhag saha sanyojaks) have been visiting Kenya and other African countries regularly. BSS had the benefit of guidance from experienced Sangh pracharaks like Sarvashri Sharad Hebalkar, Ravi Bokil, Ram Vaidya, Ramesh Subramaniam, Samir Kshirsagar and Sajjanbhai Ojha.

Kenya has been having regular annual training camps and annual general camps almost right from its inception without break. It has helped train swayamsevaks from other regions also. Mauritius and South Africa have been in close contact with Kenya.

We need to mention that Man. Chamanlal ji maintained contact with swayamsevaks who migrated to different countries very meticulously. These contacts proved very useful for Man. Bhide ji when he travelled to those countries, and these swayamsevaks got into action nearly as soon as they migrated to any country. Thus, since 1963, Kenya has made valuable contribution to the growth of Sangh work in many countries of the world.