

GEETA ASHRAM, MALAYSIA

– Reminisces

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The history of Geeta Ashram Malaysia starts with the blessings of our Great Master His Holiness Swami Hari Har Ji Maharaj and its success today is only the visible manifestation of that divine force.

Though 38 years have passed, I can vividly recollect the day, the hour and the moment and exactly what happened and transpired when my wife and I went on that fateful day to seek the blessings of our beloved Gurudev before leaving for my first assignment overseas as Social Security Advisor to the Government of Malaysia. Little did we know that this meeting will change the very course of our lives.

Gurudev was seated in His lotus pose. His face lit with radiance as ever, beaming with a vivacious smile. He patted me on my back and blessed me profusely and immediately thereafter He turned towards my wife and spoke the fateful words – “Your husband is going on his official mission but you are going on my mission.” The words were spoken with such a tone of authority that my wife was stunned and taken aback. Wonderstruck, she murmured, “Pujaya Gurudev, what can I do for You, pray elucidate.” He said “You shall do the work of God. You shall spread the message of God as enshrined in the Bhagwad Geeta. With tears in her eyes, she said – “But Gurudev, I am most incompetent for the task assigned to me.” To this, He replied, “whatever Lord wills shall be done. The job is challenging and you are required to do your best and do not worry about the rest.”

On arrival in Malaysia, everything was new – new faces, new places. We did not know where to start. People were friendly – Indians, Malays and Chinese. Yet our task did not seem easier. The most important factor was to impress upon the minds of the people the necessity of starting a centre for dissemination of the Universal teachings of Bhagwad Geeta. The teachings of Bhagwad Geeta would enlighten and bestow insight so that bridges of understanding could be built to lay the foundation of a society based on Universal love and brotherhood which would reduce the tension

of the world and bring peace. The light of faith was the Captain of our ship; divine compassion trickled through and one by one, devotees of the Lord joined together to form a stream.

Our first encounter was with Mr. Thuraiappah, a slim, tall and ever smiling Tamil Gentleman of Ceylonese origin who later became a father figure, ever-ready to do anything pertaining to the setting up of the Ashram. He encouraged us in every way. God's instruments are indeed chosen by Him and tasks however difficult are done through them with His Grace. Then, we met our brothers – Ditta, Mayer, Sharda, Parkashlal, Wadhawandji, Makhanlal, Manoharlal and others.

The arrival of Gurudev in Malaysia was the most significant landmark in the history of the Malaysia Geeta Ashram from where started the chain of foreign Geeta Ashrams. On October 25, 1966, the Subang Airport of Kuala Lumpur gave a festive look. Innumerable devotees of the Lord, lovers of Mother Geeta and various organizations joined to give a tumultuous welcome to the great Yogi Saint Swami Hari Har Ji Maharaj, founder President of Geeta Ashram. Our little hearts in the massive crowds throbbed at the first glimpse of Gurudev when He alighted from the plane accompanied by His disciple and Secretary, Bro. Gopi Krishnan Wattal. Those were unforgettable moments. People thronged to take His blessings and offer their salutations.

A public reception awaited Gurudev at the Town Hall on the day of His arrival. The Hall was over-flowing with devotees. It was a rare occasion when so many people had congregated to pay homage to the seer from the ancient land of India and hear His illuminating words on Shree Bhagwad Geeta. The function was presided over by the late Hon'ble Tan Sri V. Manickavasagam. The subject of the talk was "Path to Peace and Happiness." I still remember His opening words and how they virtually hypnotized the audience and one could see tears in many eyes. He started, "Devotees of the Lord and my very own souls." The atmosphere was spiritually charged. Gurudev added "I have not come here to give you a religious sermon. Geeta is not a religious book. It is a Divine Song of the Land and it has a Divine timeless message. What belongs to God, belongs to all, like the rays of the Sun. Bhagwad Geeta says God is all pervading and He is equally present in all beings. God and humanity are inseparable. From time immemorial, seers saw the world as one family – "Vasudev

Kutumbakam”. Why are we making shutters and walls of separation? Darkness cannot remove darkness; at this most critical moment light of the universal teaching of Geeta plays a vital role in the contribution of world peace. The urgent need is that right-thinking people must work together irrespective of their country and castes for this noble and humane cause.”

With Revered Gurudev’s stay, our house at Petaling Jaya became like a temple – a spiritual retreat where devotees came from 6.00a.m. until past midnight. They came from all over Malaysia from all walks of life to have *darshan* and to receive blessings from Him. None returned empty from the overflowing compassionate heart of Gurudev. One example of His concern for others comes to my mind. The night before Gurudev was to leave K.L. all devotees departed from our house by 1.30a.m. happiness and devotion writ large on their blessed faces. Brother Gopi and my wife sat till 2.30a.m. finalizing plans for Gurudev’s departure. Revered Gurudev retired to His room. At 3.00a.m., there was a knock at our compound gate. I went out to see who could there be and was astonished to see some people eager to see Maharaj Ji at that unearthly hour. I requested them to come at 6.00a.m. as He had just retired. But when I came back, Gurudev said, “They must be having some problem.” We realized that He was not merely a spiritual father, Guru and guide. He had the heart of a loving mother.

The one month period of His stay in Kuala Lumpur was a period of spiritual rejuvenation. He delivered a total of 108 talks – at times 5 a day. Early morning talks at 6.00a.m. were like the shower of nectar and devotees flocked like bees. Very many were initiated including Krishnaswamys, Sabapathys, Vohras, Agarwals, besides many more. These names are inclusive of their wives whose support was of immense strength always. Our Geeta *Parivar* (family) grew manifold as He toured other towns like Ipoh, Klang, Butterworth, Taiping and Penang. Brother Shashikant, Nindraji, Chandru Binwani, Usha Sur joined from Penang with their families. Brother Shyam Singh joined from Taiping. Late Justice Sharma from Ipoh and many others were inspired by our beloved Master’s spontaneous interaction and His simple explanation with of the in-depth philosophy of the Bhagwad Geeta.

Towards the end of His visit, Gurudev also went to Singapore where Geeta Ashram was established. After His departure, there was a sudden

vacuum. Weekly Geeta Satsangs were, however, the fountain of strength which sustained us and kept us fully involved and occupied and the sacred work continued. Slowly the *Satsangs* spread outside Kuala Lumpur to Penang and Butterworth. From within that group, speeches in Hindi and English were arranged, followed by devotional *bhajans* and recitation of the 12th chapter of Bhagwad Geeta. The fascinating thing about learning Geeta was the more we were learning, the more there was to learn. All was not a bed of roses; there were problems and sometimes, very difficult and anxious times. The Geeta Ashram Committee met regularly as per Gurudev's directive and collectively found solutions. Elders like brothers Thuraiappah Ji, Thambaiah Ji, and Krishnaswamy Ji gave us the most valuable guidance. It was devotion and faith of devotees and grace of Gurudev which enabled us to face teething problems.

Gurudev, who is the knower of the field and His crop, visited Malaysia again and again notwithstanding physical stress and strain. We all were fortunate to listen directly from His lotus lips the unfathomable glories of the Bhagawad Geeta. We also shared the blissful moments of month long 'SILENCE' at the residence of Dr. Vohra. As his *prasad*, he gave us Dr. Prasad, brother Mahesh, Danesh, Krishnan and many more with their families – our great assets.

Through the kindness and generosity of H.H. the Sultan of Selangor and selfless efforts of late Thuraiappah, the land for Geeta Ashram was obtained in Petaling Jaya. Late Dato Athinahappan was kind enough to help us in legal matters pertaining to the land. The next immediate step was to collect funds towards the price of the land. We adopted in the initial stages an interesting method for collection of funds. Various teams went around in different areas of Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur. They went door to door and returned in the evening to count their collections for the day over a cup of tea. I must record that Geeta Parivaar was a family where each member did his best and did it with enthusiasm. But the great floods in Kuala Lumpur hampered the work which came to a standstill. But, while some incidents were morale boosters, others were demoralizing. On the first day, we went to collect from a university professor who gave us a lecture for half an hour but did not part with a penny. But God's ways are strange. Our next halt was at our grocer's – a Muslim brother who gave us RM100/- and promised to give more when work commenced. There was another Sikh friend who used to empty all

his pockets whenever we went to him and would say with a twinkle in his eye – “Whenever I empty my pockets for this cause, ‘*Wahe Guru*’ fills them up with more the next day.

Miracles do happen and they did happen but at times it is difficult to relate them. Once due to floods in Kuala Lumpur, collection came to a standstill. Late Dato Athinahappan who was kind enough to look after legal matters concerning the land, came and told us that unless the balance amount (about RM7,000/-) was paid with a specified time, the Government will cancel the allotment of the land. This was a bolt from the blue. My wife felt extremely depressed which was unlike her and retired in that depression. Early next morning, she wanted me to get her an air ticket for Penang for collection of funds. I was surprised because two days earlier she had refused Dr. Vohra’s offer to take her in their car for change of climate as she was not well. Now she went and within three days, she was back with the necessary amount which was far more than we expected as Penang was also collecting funds for a temple. This was made possible with the help of brother Shashikant. On enquiry for her sudden decision, I was told Rev. Gurudev came in her dream that night and said, “My dear child why are you worried? You want money. Go to Penang.”

The Foundation Laying Ceremony was a memorable event celebrated with great devotion and fervour. The whole day was spent performing *Gita Yagya* followed by ‘Initiation Ceremony’ and distribution of food. The foundation ceremony was presided over by the late Tan Sri V. Manickavasagam the then Labour Minister and attended by the elite of Kuala Lumpur including diplomats from various countries. Devotees came from all over Malaysia and Singapore. The most important part of the ceremony was the lighting of the *Holi* fire accompanied by Mantras from the Bhagwad Geeta.

My memories light up with mysterious incidents and I would like to relate one of them. It is a common experience for many devotees that our beloved Gurudev, by virtue of His infinite knowledge, foresees events with His divine power, which some may call the ‘third eye’. Immediately before leaving our house for the Foundation Site, Gurudev called for me and asked me “how much money do you think you will need for the construction of the Ashram?” The question was too sudden and I replied, “I think with RM50,000/- we will be able to start the work.” He smiled

mysteriously and wrapping His ochre shawl around Him, left for the site and we followed. A huge *pandal* (stage) had been set up and the prominent colour among the audience was orange. Seated on the dais, Gurudev was a picture of serenity and bliss. Just when He was going to give His blessing and His message from the Geeta, He made a passing reference to all present to help the Geeta Ashram Committee towards their fund-raising. He had hardly uttered those words when to our surprise the people stood up one by one and began to volunteer their donations towards the sacred cause. I haven't in my life seen anything like this. When we returned home, the total amount just exceeded RM50,000/-. I told Maharaji "I was a fool, I should have asked you for RM100,000/-. He looked at me with a smile that spoke volumes.

Publication of Sacred Thought

In 1973, Gurudev came, as always, to give us fresh impetus and direction in our work and this time what He had in mind was the publication of a journal through which the young and old could be inspired with the message of universal love and brotherhood. The journal He wanted should be useful, interesting and with readable material. When some members expressed their doubts in regard to the success on this project because of shortage of funds and workers who could handle this proficiently, Gurudev brushed aside their doubts. He gave clear-cut instructions and said this would be a pride project of Geeta Ashram Malaysia since it would be the forerunner of other such journals in other countries. He said it would be the lighthouse of not only South East Asia but others as well of the world. Prophetic were His words and today we find that Geeta Ashrams have sprung up not only in South East Asia but also in Africa, U.S.A., U.K., and Latin America, etc.

Before I close, I would like to pay our humble homage to our brothers who are no more with us – Thurriappahji, Thambiaji, Dato Athinahappan, Krishnaswamyji, dear Mahesh and Kamla – for their untiring efforts and selfless devotion to Guru, Geeta and Gopal and for all the inspiration they gave us. As humble servants of Geeta Ashram Malaysia, in the initial stages, who could be happier than us to see it flourishing today with the addition of new and younger generations of devotees who are committed in their efforts towards Gurudev's cause and to this Geeta *Parivar*.

Now, I would adopt a personal note. Whatever humble efforts that were made by the two of us - myself and my wife Swarn, the real credit if any, goes to Swarn. Geeta Ashram was her divine mission with a divine blessing from Gurudev. Mine was only a humble contribution of moral support to her. The success was due to the Grace of the Lord, Blessings of Gurudev and co-operation of all brothers and sisters.

Finally, in all humility and with folded hands, my wife and I pray that may this Geeta Ashram Malaysia grow into a banyan Tree and may it be treated with love and respect by all for the spiritual shade it gives today and continue to give to the coming generations and for its faith in 'RUKUN NEGARA' which we adopted as our guideline.

Hari Om Tat Sat