

Swami Tyagishananda: Master Renunciate



By Vinayak Lohani

Swami Tyagishananda was a sterling Sanyasin of the Ramakrishna Order and had a deep influence on many other future monks and spiritual aspirants who came in touch with him. In his life he combined the Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana in a way that was exemplary to other monks and spiritual practitioners. He was founder of the Thrissur Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Math and also spent a long time at the Bangalore Ashrama guiding younger monks and brahmacharins. Many young men joined the Ramakrishna Order inspired by him and under his mentorship.

Early Life

Tyagishanandaji's pre-monastic name was V.K. Krishnan Menon and was born in the aristocratic Vadakke Kuruppam family in 1891. His family was socially very distinguished, and the Cochin Royal family had several nuptial ties with them.

He did his schooling from Thrissur and thereafter completed intermediate in Sanskrit from what is now called Maharaja's College at Ernakulum, which founded in 1875 and affiliated to the Madras University, was one of the oldest colleges in Southern India. He topped the whole University in this examination.

Thereafter he went to the renowned Presidency College Madras for his B.A., and thereafter M.A., in Sanskrit, where he was again the Gold Medalist. The Presidency College Madras, one of two of Presidency Colleges set up by the British (the other being in Kolkata), had a glorious history with a galaxy of distinguished alumni and faculty including the four 'Bharat Ratnas' – Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, C. Rajagopalachari, C.V. Raman, C. Subramanian.

Krishnan's uncle was a judge in Madras High Court and wanted him to read law and become an attorney. He, therefore, also pursued a degree in law in which he was again the topper. He had a brilliant academic career and was a Gold Medalist throughout.

At the feet of Swami Brahmananda



Swami Brahmananda

Upon joining the Presidency College at Madras, Krishnan Menon began to visit the Ramakrishna Math. He was blessed to meet the direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the architect of the Ramakrishna Movement in Madras – Swami Ramakrishnananda. He was attracted to ideals of renunciation and service which were the cornerstones of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Ramakrishnananda passed away in 1911, but Krishnan's visits to the Math continued. The year 1917 was very significant in Krishnan's Life. He was a law student at Madras University and at that time Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Order and the 'spiritual son' of Sri Ramakrishna, had been staying at the Madras Math. Krishnan along with his friend, Gopal, who belonged to the Royal Family of Cochin, went to the Madras Math to see the great Swami, known in the Order as 'Maharaj'. Both of them were attracted by teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and did not want to lose the opportunity to see this illustrious brother-disciple of Vivekananda.

They used to have Saturday free, and so visited the Math in the locality of Mylapore. They were told to wait at the verandah. They waited for an hour when Maharaj accompanied by some other Sadhus came out and entered a motor vehicle parked there. The two young men approached Maharaj and asked him whether they could get an interview with him. Maharaj asked them to come another day. The following Saturday they visited again when upon waiting for some time, they were ushered in before Maharaj and made to sit on a mat placed for them. They sat for some time in silence as Maharaj was engrossed in his usual indrawn mood smoking a hookah. Presently Maharaj asked them what they wanted. They told they had come for spiritual advice. They got a feeling that Maharaj was in a meditative mood and by engaging in a conversation they might be disturbing him. Maharaj asked them to always speak the truth and follow continence. When Gopal asked Maharaj about breathing exercises Maharaj strictly warned them against it and told that through practice of Japam and Dhyanam, the breath would become fine and even suspended which was the aim of breathing exercises. He then asked them to come some day before dawn when he would give them the Mantra. Upon asking which day they should come Maharaj asked a brahmacharin to come with an almanac.

Maharaj was very selective in granting Diksha. It was after eight visits Krishnan was asked by Maharaj to come at midnight. Krishnan stayed at the Math from evening onwards and eagerly waited for Maharaj's instructions. Maharaj came out of his room at 3 AM and straight went into the shrine. He called the candidate at 6 AM. Krishnan, who had spent the whole night without a wink of sleep, was thus blessed to receive his Mantra from Sri Ramakrishna's 'Manas Putra'.

It must be mentioned that Gopal joined the Order in 1920 and came to be known as Siddheswarananda.

Krishna Menon practiced law for some time but quickly realized that he would have to make many compromises in this profession which would cause deviations from the path of spiritual advancement he wanted for himself. There was an incident when he was asked by the Court to defend a person who himself had admitted his guilt to Krishnan. Krishnan still won the case but was so conflicted that he did not accept the honorarium due to him. He decided to give up the legal profession forever.

Vivekodayam

Thrissur was then considered to be the cultural capital of whole of Kerala. In 1917, Prince Appan Tampuran, of the Royal Family of Cochin had started a School named Vivekodayam at Thrissur. The Prince was inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and wanted to run the school on lines of their ideals. Krishnan, after giving up the law as his career, thought that only the teaching profession could suit him. He, therefore, in 1920-21, approached Prince Appan Tampuran, who was only too happy to make him the Headmaster of Vivekodayam School.

During this time Krishnan also faced natural pressure from his family with regard to marriage. There was an incident where his family chose a girl from an aristocratic background as a possible bride. This girl, possessing considerable beauty, visited the Menon household along with her family, and as was made to serve food prepared by her to the prospective groom. Sensing the plans made by his family without his knowledge, Krishnan, to everyone's dismay, left the dining space without touching the food. Much later he had also recounted another experience of that time to a young man aspiring to take up monastic life. There had been a proposal for marriage for his sister into a very good family with the proviso that Krishnan too marry the groom's sister. There was considerable pressure on him as on his consent depended his sister's future too. He steadfastly declined and within a month of this his sister passed away. He narrated this incident to illustrate the futility of acting only under a conception of such obligation which goes against one's principle – had he consented to the proposal it would have been of no use to his sister, not to speak of himself.

Tired of this continuous pressure from his family he decided to go to Madras and join the Math there. But a relative of his mocked his decision saying why he, who read Vivekananda, the prophet of 'Abhayam' (fearlessness), was afraid of his family pressure and go to a distant place and why could he not maintain his stand remaining at Thrissur itself. He saw merit in this thought and decided to shift permanently to the Vivekodayam School premises. There he built for himself a thatched shed in the south-west corner of the compound which he named 'Ramakrishna Dharmashramam'. The walls of the compound were painted saffron and had an appearance of a hermitage.

Krishnan did not dress up in the normal way of other teachers but wore a simple Khaddar dhoti and a closed collar coat during teaching hours. At other times he just wore a short Dhoti tied above the knees in Kerala style. He was tall and had flowing but dishevelled hair and beard and looked majestic in appearance. Only

on days when a Government official like the Inspector of Schools came did he tie a loose turban on his head.

Krishnan's mother used to send home-cooked food for him with items like fruits, nuts etc which he usually distributed among the boys. Though he received the salary of the Headmaster he spent it completely on supporting poor students in the school or for higher education of its alumni. Many such beneficiary alumni became successful as Headmasters, lawyers etc in their future lives.

While the School mostly had day-scholars there were also a few students living at the premises. Along with Krishnan, a few more young teachers – Nambiar Master (later Swami Nihareyananda) and Ezhuthassan Master (later Swami Viswambharananda) – lived at the school itself. They too under his mentorship later joined the Ramakrishna Order. Also, living at the campus was one Subramania Iyer, a Primary School Teacher who was addressed as 'Manager'. He did some teaching along with cooking as well as accounting.

The boys slept in a hall and would be woken up at 5 AM by Nambiar Master who, after two rounds of calls, would sprinkle water on the faces of sleeping boys. Then the boys had to go either for meditation or for some ashram duties. In the morning assembly there used to be verses from scriptures like Bhagwad-Gita, the Upanishads, Soundarya Lahari and Sivananda Lahari. On weekends there used to be long Bhajan sessions including chanting and Sahasranama. Since there was no one proficient in music, the Headmaster himself began to learn the Mridangam under a Master and after gaining some proficiency started playing it during the Bhajans. The students also maintained a garden for vegetables and bananas. Krishnan spent considerable time in the morning working in the garden. After the class hours the boys along with the Headmaster and other teachers played Volleyball.

At some point of Krishnan's tenure as Headmaster he acquired another degree in education. He thought it to be relevant and useful in his role as an educationist and school leader. Since there was a shortage of teachers in such subjects which only a few students had enrolled for, the Headmaster took upon himself to teach them even when they were far-removed from his scholastic background. For example, he used to study textbooks of Botany and prepare lessons and then teach the students. Sanskrit, of course, was given special emphasis in the school and from Grade 5 onwards all had to study that language on a regular basis.

Krishnan Menon was a strict disciplinarian. Once upon finding that a student was addicted to snuff he ordered the entire stock of snuff to be thrown into a pond at the corner of the school. The result was that the smell of snuff spread throughout the campus and lasted several days. A common punishment meted out to the students was doing Namaskar in the shrine for a prolonged time. There used to be a frequent argument between the Manager and the Headmaster where the Manager used to express dissatisfaction with the strict disciplinarian approach of the latter and advocated the approach of 'change of hearts by way of love'. Krishna Menon enjoyed seeing the manager saying this and had a hearty laugh at this.

Krishna Menon was an admirer of Gandhi, and particularly liked many aspects of the Gandhian 'Constructive Program'. He therefore introduced the Spinning and Weaving classes by installing weaving looms in a hall. There were about two dozen wooden charkhas, on which the students and teachers spun the yarn which would then be woven into Khadi cloth. Mahatma Gandhi visited the Vivekodayam School on 14th October 1927 and spent time at the Spinning and Weaving Section. He spun yarn which was fine in quality. It was later enclosed in a glass case and exhibited at the Annual Function of the School each year.

The School used to observe the Annual Day Celebrations in a big way. It was attended by Prince Appan Thampuran along with many senior Sanyasins of the Ramakrishna Order visiting from different centres. It was also open to general public. There were talks on spiritual as well nationalistic themes. The students played a very important role in organizing the programs. There were plays depicting important events from lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and on different mythological themes. Sanskrit plays were also staged. The curtain used to carry a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna.

Among the students of the School during the Krishan's tenure as Headmaster was one boy Shankaran Kutty, who, upon reading 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' at the School Library, renounced home after High School itself and later became the world-renowned monk and President of the Ramakrishna Order - Swami Ranganathananda. Another boy - Balakrishna Menon - studying at the school during Krishnan Menon's Headmastership later became famous as Swami Chinmayananda - the founder of the Chinmaya Mission.



Photograph of Swami Tyagishanandaji installed at Vivekodayam Office

Joining the Order and founding the Ashrama at Vilangan (Thrissur)

In 1924 Kerala was in grip of severe floods which rendered thousands of people devastated and homeless. This flood was said to be the worst in more than a century, and became known as the Flood of '99, as it was the year 1099 as per the 'Kollavarsham' – the Malayalam calendar. The floods lasted for three weeks in the month of July 1924 and submerged various parts of the region including Thrissur. Mahatma Gandhi had issued appeals to the entire country in his journals 'Young India' and 'Navjeevan' to stand beside Kerala during that tragedy. Krishnan Menon too along with his teachers and other volunteers started relief operations. At that time the Ramakrishna Mission too was engaged in relief work. Krishna and his group joined hands with the Mission in this work. It was then he decided to join the Order, though he continued to do his duties at Vivekodayam. Upon receiving the Brahmacharya Diksha he got the name 'Akhandā Chaitanya'. His mother had asked him not to take final vows of Sannyasa as long as she was alive. Krishnan followed her command, though his life was full of austerity in line with the highest ideals of Sannyasa.

Around this time Krishnan Menon had also used money from his salary as Headmaster to purchase land at a village called Vilangan, which was about 8

km from the town, and near a Harijan colony. He built a thatched shed and started providing basic education to children from that settlement who lived like outcastes near this village. He used to bathe them, teach them, feed them, and offer lights and incense to them in a literal illustration of the Swami Vivekananda's ideal of worshipping 'God in Man'.

In 1927 he started first two grades of primary schooling at Vilangan. He then also purchased a building and began several activities at this location even while remaining the Headmaster at the Vivekodayam School. This can be considered as the inaugural year of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram Thrissur. Krishnan used to walk from the Vivekodayam School to the Vilangan premises and teach the children. He then started some other units like Gurukulam (where boys lived), Vidyamandiram School, and a Weaving Society (for khadi). He also started a girls' school called Matrumandiram. The first inmates of this Matrumandiram were also girls from Harijan families. He also distributed 4 acres of land that he had purchased among the Harijan families. This Harijan service was one of the first such services done anywhere in the country, even before Mahatma Gandhi launched many of his Harijan Seva organizations. After joining the Order, he transferred the entire Vilangan property in name of the Ramakrishna Math.

In 1932 he received the vows of Sannyasa from the then President of the Order, Swami Shivananda (known as Mahapurush Maharaj) and received the name Tyagishananda. Mahapurush Maharaj, used to refer to him as a 'fine Tyagi'. After his vows of Sannyasa he gave up his role at Vivekodayam School and began to live fully at the Vilangan ashram.

At Vilangan ashrama too many youngmen joined him who later became Sanyasins. Among them were Swami Padmanabhananda, and the brothers Raman and Balan who later became monks and were known as Swami Nityabodhananda (who later founded the Vedanta Society of Geneva in Switzerland), and Swami Vipapmananda (who later became long-time Head of Calicut ashrama) respectively.

Gandhiji also visited the ashrama at Vilangan in 1934 and stayed overnight. Such was his liking for Tyagishanandaji's work that he used honey made at the Thrissur ashrama to break one of his fasts. Tyagishanandaji also had a life-long admiration for Gandhiji. On hearing the news of assassination of Gandhiji in 1948, the Swami put off all lights at the Bangalore Ashrama that night, where he was then, as a mark of deep respect and mourning.



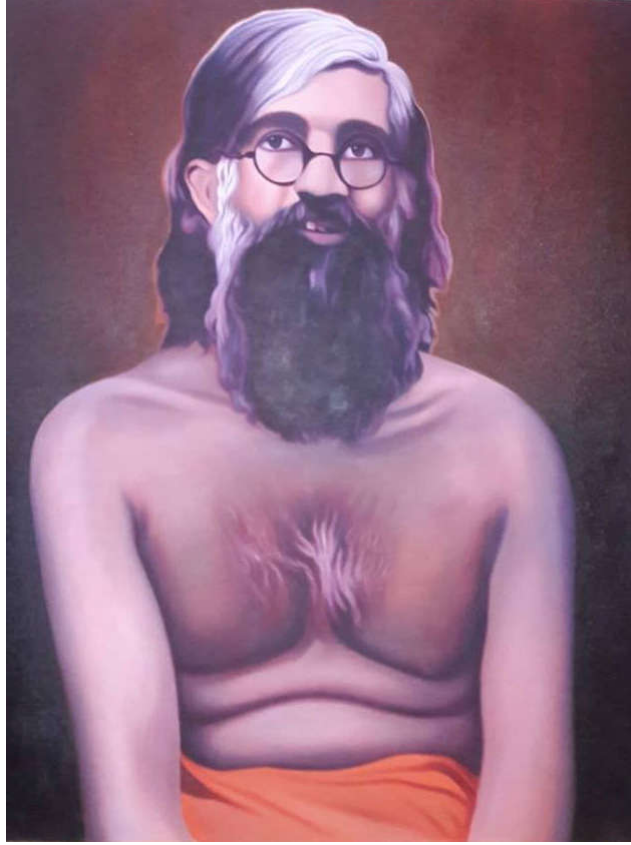
Gandhi Smriti-Where Mahatma Gandhi Stayed at Thrissur Ashrama in 1934

Leaving Thrissur

Tyagishanandaji's health had a rapid decline due to his rigorous practice of austerities, lack of nutritious food, and strenuous labour. Alarmed by this, the authorities of the Order asked him to relocate from Thrissur.

The institutions started by Tyagishannadaji have continued to flower since then. The Vilangana ashrama had many activities for girls in which women volunteers were engaged. These were later carved out as a branch centre, with its own campus, of the Sri Sarada Math – the women's monastic Order of the Ramakrishna tradition. In fact, one of the core groups to join the Sri Sarada Math at the Order's inception itself was of dedicated women volunteers and teachers from the Vilangan ashram. At present, the Sarada Math Ashrama runs a school for about 1500 girls and a Balika Gurukulam (with 140 girls as resident boarders). The boys' institutions remained under the Ramakrishna Math. There is a school for 1800 boys and a Gurukulam for resident boarders.

Noted Malayalam writer, Puthezhathu Raman Menon, who knew Tyagishanandaji throughout his Thrissur years wrote, "No particle in the Vilangan ashram was bereft of the blessed touch of Tyagishannadaji's holy feet. Every particle there had a tale to tell about him." "



Portrait of Swami Tyagishanandaji Installed at Thrissur Ashrama

At Vedanta Study Circle Mysore

Swami Vivekananda considered Jnana and Tapas to be the pillars of any monastic Order. Tyagishnanadaji was a master of both. He spent a year in 1936-37 in Mysore at the Vedanta Study Circle, a fine platform created for sturdy scholarship in scriptures and other areas considered essential for those monastics who were to be especially entrusted with preaching tasks. These studies were taken in light of science and modern thought with the element of universality.

It may be worthwhile to know a bit of the background of the Vedanta Study Circle which came into existence during the time of Swami Siddheswarananda. The ruler of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wadayar IV, was devoted to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition. His father was a foremost admirer and supporter of Swami Vivekananda and had hosted Swamiji during his Parivrajaka (wandering monk) days. He had as his tutor a brilliant scholar, and a past Registrar of the Mysore University, V. Subramanya Iyer. Shri Iyer was not only a master of Vedantic scriptures but also well-steeped in western philosophy. His formidable scholarship had won him a host of admirers including Dr S.

Radhakrishnan. It was thought by both His Highness as well as Swami Siddheswarananda that Shri Iyer could be a very competent and suitable teacher to those monks of the Ramakrishna Order who wished to have a deep and rigorous study of the scriptures. Swami Nikhilananda was the first monk who stayed for a year at the Mysore Ashrama and studied the Vedantic texts, chiefly Mandukya Upnishad with Shri Iyer. It was here that he also started his English translation of the 'Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita' which as 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' has been the spiritual nectar for millions of people since then. The following year Swami Madhavananda stayed at the ashrama and studied with Shri Iyer. Because of the strong positive experience both Swamis had, it was mooted that a Study Circle be formed at the Mysore Ashrama where batches of about half a dozen monks would study together for a year. The scope of study was also widened including Western Philosophy, Sociology, Logic and Scientific Method, and even areas of Science. While Shri Iyer was the key faculty at the Study Circle, many other scholars were also requested to take classes in areas of their specialization. The expenses of the stay of the student-Swamis as well as visiting teacher-scholars was borne by His Highness. It was at the Study Circle that Tyagishanandaji, who was regarded as an authority on scriptures, taught the monks. It is notable that in his time he was one of the few monks of the Order who taught here, and most of the other teachers were outside scholars. He mainly dealt with Katha Upanishad during this time. It was also the beginning of Tyagishanandaji's life-long friendship and relationship of mutual admiration with Shri V.S. Iyer.

The Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bangalore (1938-1951)

After a period of recuperation in Madras, Tyagishanandaji was asked to take charge of the Bangalore Ashrama. The Ramakrishna Math at Bangalore was started in 1904 following a visit by Swami Ramakrishnananda (Shashi Maharaj), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and founder of the Math at Madras. The ashrama was sanctified by the visit and stay of the Holy Mother. Its growth was accelerated by the leadership at different times by illustrious monks like Swami Nirmalananda, Swami Atmananda (Shukla Maharaj), Swami Siddheswarananda (Gopal Maharaj), and – for a brief period of time – Swami Ranganathananda. Tyagishanandaji took this role when Swami Ranganathananda was transferred to the Rangoon centre.

The Swami was very particular in upholding and establishing dignity of labour – not just from a social point of view but as a spiritual practice too. Like Thrissur, in Bangalore ashrama too, he himself led by example. He used to cook, tend cows, work in the garden, clean bathrooms and do other such chores.

There were times when there was hardly any helping hand. There was a period when Tyagishanandaji was alone with Brahmacharin Srinivas (later Swami Damodarananda). Srinivas mostly did outside tasks, and it was the Swami who did cooking, shrine worship, tending the cows etc. Later some more young men joined as brahmacharins. For a very long time there were no paid workers and all the work was done by the inmates with an occasional help from visiting devotees.

At Bangalore Tyagishanandaji's main focus was to intensify the spiritual life of all the inmates. He carefully trained the young brahmacharins who joined the Order either under him. Notable among them were Swami Damodarananda, Swami Shastrananda, Swami Vibudhananda, Swami Kirtidananda, Swami Agehananda, Swami Jneyananda, Swami Punyatmananda, Swami Prabuddhananda, Swami Bhavyananada, Swami Mukhyananda, and Swami Siddhinathananada. He also guided others like Swami Ritatmananda and Swami Prasannananda who had joined a few years earlier but served under him.

When Tyagishanandaji took the charge of the Bangalore Ashrama there was only one main building which had the shrine and the residence. There was no separate building for office or purposes like holding classes or lectures, book sales etc. Tyagishanandaji got a granite building constructed which had rooms for monastics and a lecture hall. This came to be known as the 'Sri Ramakrishna Centenary memorial Building'.

The ashrama hardly had any money. When the milk from the cows was in abundance the inmates got it in plenty; when there was a period of shortage they went without it. There was never a purchase of milk from outside. There were many mango trees. In mango season each meal had some mango preparation.

The Swami was keenly attentive about maintaining the spirit of austerity at the ashrama. Everyone had to do be ready to all tasks. No task was considered small. There was a Goshala where brahmacharins served. The Swami used to inspire them with the story of Satyakama Jabala who was commanded by his Guru to look after cows and make them tenfold in number, an endeavour through which he eventually got Brahmajnana.

The Swami, in 1943, started the Vidyarthi Mandiram (home for college-going students where many poor boys also stayed). It was started in a room next to the cowshed. The following year it moved to a house offered by a devotee Dr

Narayan Rao. These boys stayed at this Students' Home and attended colleges in the city. The Swami paid special attention to the character-moulding of these boys. There used to be weekly class for scriptures for them. Everyone had to attend the daily prayer services in morning and evening conducted in the shrine. On Ekadashi days there used to be special longer prayer sessions including Sri Rama-nama Sankirtana.

Dr Narayan Rao wanted to gift the house to the ashrama with the condition that it should always be used as Vidyarthi Mandiram. But Tyagishanandaji declined the offer saying once a gift is made it should be left to the receiver to determine how to make best use of it. Hence it continued to be owned by Dr Narayan Rao but used as the Students' Home for many years, until it was taken back by the owner for his own use.

It was a familiar scene engraved in the mind of everyone visiting the ashrama to see the Swami, with his long beard and flowing hair peppered with grey in a Rishi-like appearance, sitting in deep meditation at the verandah of the shrine. It was unsolved mystery for everyone as to how he could notice, with his eyes closed, who all attended the prayers and who did not.

Many of the boarders staying at the Vidyarthi Mandiram blessed by Tyagishanandaji's mentorship became very eminent in their later lives. Many became engineers, civil servants and educationists. Notable mention can be made of Padmabhushan Dr H. Narasimhaiah, eminent educationist, Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University, long-time Principal of National College Bangalore, and Head of the National Education Society which ran a chain of schools and colleges across Karnataka.

At this Vidyarthi Mandiram, lived two kinds of students – one who would bear their own costs and the other who were given the boarding either free or subsidized. The shortfall was met by the donation of one Devarao Shivaram. This donor once recommended a boy to be admitted into the Vidyarthi Mandiram. Tyagishanandaji did not find the boy meeting the admission criteria kept for the Hostel and hence he politely declined. The donor became dissatisfied and hinted at discontinuing his support, something very crucial for the smooth running of the Hostel. But Tyagishanandaji stayed firm on his stand. The donor eventually stopped his support, and this did affect the running of Mandiram and the extent to which it could admit non-paying student boarders.

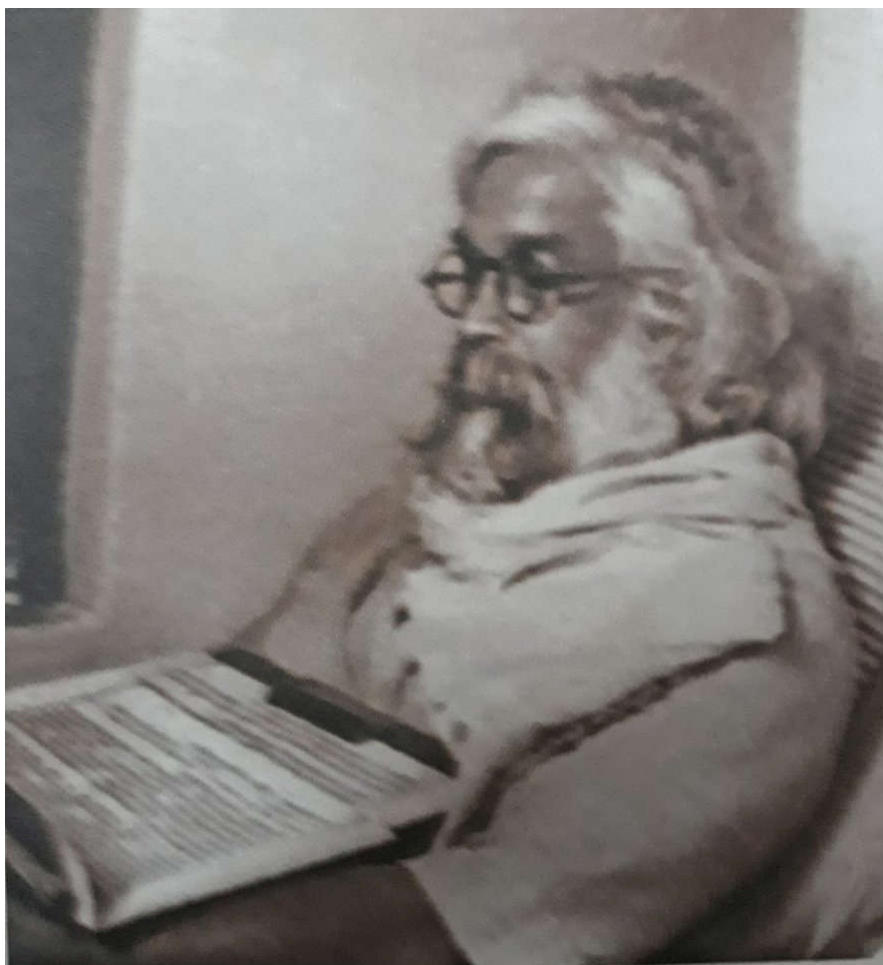
While the Swami did not like purposeless talk, he was always receptive to anyone who approached him. The students and visitors could enter his room

any time they wanted. The Swami, who would usually be immersed in his studies, would place his books aside, and warmly receive them.

Tyagishanandaji only dwelled on positive qualities of a person, and not on his drawbacks. In this regard, he followed Swami Vivekananda's idea that the qualities of a person are the property of the whole world, but his drawbacks his own business. He himself never made any references which could be construed as self-praise. In fact a key distinguishing characteristic in his personality was his total unselfconsciousness with regard to his immense scholarship and austerity. He wore them very lightly on his sleeve.

During Tyagishanandaji's time there used to be a combined annual celebration for the birthdays of the Holy trio. It would be celebrated in grandeur with worship, bhajans, lectures and other programmes. 'Dadridra-Narayan Seva', which was called only 'Narayan Seva', was an essential part of the celebration program. The poor and destitute, numbering in thousands, used to be given a feast and gifts like new clothing and other essential items. Tyagishanandaji would sit first in the row and eat with them; he wanted to be counted exactly one of them – a beggar amongst beggars, and not the host.

From 1949 Tyagishanandaji's health rapidly declined and he was admitted to the Victoria Hospital in Bangalore. After his recuperation, he went to pilgrimage to a few places in South India like Sringeri and Rameswaram. But upon return his condition changed for worse. In May 1951, when the President of the Order, Swami Virajananda attained Mahasamadhi, Tyagishanandaji told his monastic brethren that next was his turn. In the weeks following, he had to be moved to the Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) Hospital for treatment under eminent physician Dr Dunkerley. He was found to have developed tuberculosis of the spine. His body had to be immobilized and cast in a plaster mould. Brahmacharins served him by turns. It was extremely painful but the Swami bore it with his usual valiance. When his friend, T.S. Avinashalingam, who was then the Education Minister of Madras state visited him, the Swami joked that this immobilization could be introduced as a punishment for prisoners. To some brahmacharis and monks his sight reminded one of Bhishma in his last moments, lying on a bed of arrows. After staying for about 5 weeks he passed away on 6th August 1951.



Swami Tyagishanandaji Immersed in His Study at Bangalore Ashrama

His Vast Erudition

While taking classes Tyagishanandaji usually closed his eyes and went on speaking, losing himself in a different world. The Swami either spoke sitting in Indian fashion with a small table kept in front or would keep pacing across the room or verandah while speaking, holding in hand his long stick with a metallic end which he had brought from Badrinath. He would go on speaking for hours together in this fashion. In such situations he would lose all sense of time. He spoke without any notes and had so much content to impart that usually he took up one verse or one idea and provided vast material on it from various angles. He used copious references, not just from Indian scriptures and philosophical traditions, but also Western Thought from ancient Greeks to the Modern Age. For example, he took themes of Satya, Ahimsa, Abhayam etc and could spend many sessions on each idea. He spent two years of Sunday classes just on the concept of 'Yagna' as given in the opening verse of the sixteenth chapter of the Gita.

There are many funny anecdotes about Tyagishanandaji's vast expositions. Once a devotee asked a certain question and Tyagishanandaji replied that this would be made clear when the last chapter of the Gita is reached. The questioner said in amusement, "but swami at this rate it will be only after many lifetimes."

One senior monk who was a young brahmacharin under Tyagishanandaji recalled, "His classes demanded close attention. The teaching was systematic and closely argued. If a sentence was missed, one would miss the whole trend. We had to give some rest to the brain after a class, before taking up any other study. Such was the intellectual strain that we felt."

Tyagishanandaji, with so much erudition at his command, showed hardly any inclination to publish. It was others who persuaded him to write his commentary on Narada Bhakti Sutras, which is his masterly exposition of around 300 pages on the subject. It was published as a series of articles written for Vedanta Kesari in 1940. At that time Swami Nikhilanandaji's English translation, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, of the original Bengali work, Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, of Mahendranath Gupta (M), was not yet published (it was first published in 1942). Tyagishanandaji later said had he had access to the Gospel his work on the Bhakti-Sutras would have been thrice as long.

While taking classes he used to dictate notes, and brahmacharins under him had notes running into thousands of pages. The Swetaswatara Upanishad was published just a year before he passed away. The class notes of Isawasya Upanishad taken by his students were compiled and published later as 'Isawasya Upanishad and the true Import of Dharma'. So also, the valuable book titled 'The Primer of Vedanta', which only deals with introductory terminology, basic philosophical concepts, and dialectical tools needed to study the scriptures. His class notes on the Mandukya Karika were serialized in the 'Vedanta Kesari'. Goaded by brahmacharins during his final days to work on Chandogya Upanishad he began dictating the same. He used to walk with his stick from one end of his room to the other, and with closed eyes dictate to a brahmacharin who would keep typing. Unfortunately, just after he had completed his scholarly introduction to the subject he was admitted in the hospital and that work remained incomplete and unpublished.

The story behind his essay on Srimad Bhagawatam for the multi-volume compilation 'Cultural Heritage of India' published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture is interesting. The editors had requested him for an article about 10 to 12 pages in length. What Tyagishanandaji dictated to the brahmacharins was drafted about a dozen times for abridgment but it still ran into 40 pages. He nevertheless asked them to send it. The editors, as expected,

wrote back requesting considerable abridgment and sought clarification on some points. Clarifications, Tyagishanandaji did provide, but to everyone's amusement, and perhaps editors' exasperation, the writing now became even longer than the previous version. However, the editors, realizing what a treasure it was, published it with minor abridgments, thus making its published length more than three times of what was its proposed allocation.

His spiritual moods

The Swami had made a study of many different monastic traditions, and was firm in his conviction that nothing matched the Ramakrishna Order. He had great devotion for Sri Ramakrishna and knew him to be a Divine Incarnation of this Age. He had vowed to read "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" 108 times in his life. His conviction that Sri Ramakrishna was a full embodiment of divinity is wonderfully expressed in a verse he had composed in Sanskrit as follows:

*Tretayaam Ramaroopaya
Dwaapare Krishnamurtaye
Kala Purnavataaraaya
Ramakrishnaya Te Namaha*

((One who came as Rama in Treta-Yuga, and Krishna in Dwapar-yuga, came in the Kali-yuga as Purna Avatara in form of Ramakrishna.))

Once a number of brahmacharins and Sanyasins had gone to Belur Math and a devotee who used to visit regularly commented on how vacant the ashrama looked. Tyagishanandaji simply said to him, "Why, Guru Maharaj (Sri Ramakrishna) is here. Do you come here to see him or others?" To the same devotee he once said, "My mind is always going towards Guru Maharaj. Sometimes it is on ashrama affairs, but it is always within this ashrama, it never goes outside."

There was a homeopathic doctor who was in awe of Swami Tyagishananda. He once said to the Swami that he meditates on him. The Swami said, "Meditate on Sri Ramakrishna; if you meditate on me you will go to hell."

Once a brahmacharin brought to him some prasad raisins, and Swamiji respectfully received them. The brahmachari warned him that some of the raisins have stems and it would be better if separates them. The Swami stared at him and replied, "What Guru Maharaj can eat, I also can eat." Then he immediately ate all of them.

Once at the Bangalore ashrama he shared with the younger inmates, "Yesterday a stray thought crossed my mind, just a simple stray thought. How nice it would be if I were to have a shawl. Unbelievable as it is, today did bring a shawl. I was frightened. This was an innocent, harmless desire; what if a bad thought had come to my mind, an evil desire? And if that was fulfilled immediately?" Saying this the Swami became very grave and continued, "Then and there I prayed : O Lord fulfil my desires only if they are good and helpful for my spiritual development. Otherwise not."

Once a young devotee, later a monk in the Order, found Tyagishanandaji holding a newspaper and smiling as he stared at a caricature. The image was of a child crying out loud with its arms and legs stretched out. The grandparents, mother, father, brother, sister stood around the baby trying hard to pacify him. The title read: "Who is the owner of this house?!" The young devotee looked at the image and laughed together with Tyagishanandaji. The Swami then put the newspaper aside, took his stick, and, as was his wont, began to walk up and down the corridor. He then narrated a parable of Sri Ramakrishna : A landlord's son and a maid's son who were playing together suddenly started quarrelling. The landlord's son threatened the maid's son- 'I will tell my mother!' The maid's son replied, "I too tell my mother". As Tyagishanandaji recounted the last line, "I too will tell my mother", there came an astonishing transformation in him. He kept on repeating the line multiple times, thumping his stick in rhythm, while walking. Tears began to flow down his cheeks.

To him cultivation of every good quality or practice, whether it was service, meditation, study and scholarship, or austerity had only one purpose - God-Realization. All his actions echoed this teaching of Sri Ramakrishna that God-Realization was the only goal of human life.

There was a forum in Bangalore founded in 1939 by Swami Srivasananda, a disciple of the Holy Mother, for imparting scriptural knowledge to interested people. It was called the 'Vedanta College' and operated out of Malleswaram. The classes were taken by the Founder-Swami, Swami Praneshananda, and Swami Tyagishananda. Swami Srivasanandaji had planned a syllabus in an organized way and each class was supposed to achieve a certain stipulated portion of the syllabus. Tyagishanandaji's way of taking classes was that he could spend many classes on even a single verse of Gita or Upanishads. Once when Srivasanandaji asked him which Upanishad he was teaching then, Tyagishandaji replied, "the Ramakrishna Upanishad." He meant that whatever he was taking was only to illustrate the teachings and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. It was notable that while Tyagishanandaji made frequent references to Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji while taking classes on classical scriptural texts, he

hardly spoke directly on them as subjects for lectures from the platform. He used to say that he did not consider himself adequately fit to speak on them.

Once he was invited to a lecture where he was one among a panel of speakers. When his turn came, he stood up and simply said, "Guru Maharaj is not putting any thought in my mind worth sharing, and so I beg to be pardoned." Saying this he sat down.

In many trying situations or while dealing with difficult people he often used to exclaim, "Iswaro Rakshatu" (May the Lord save us), implying it was beyond his capacity to address the situation, and only the Almighty could help.

The Swami had a picture of Swami Brahmananda in his room. Once during the maintenance of the room things were removed and the picture was not replaced. The brahmacharin who noticed this lapse brought it back regretting the inconvenience caused to him. The Swami merely said, "Do I need the support of an image after all these years."

His meditation could not be disturbed even with people moving around. He used to meditate outside the temple on the verandah near the place where people removed their slippers (this he started after a devotee reported that his sandals were missing; and interestingly he assumed the role of guarding the slippers in his own way with closed eyes).

A brahmacharin used to come to wind the clock in his room every week. Once, seeing the Swami meditate, he did not enter for fear of disturbing him. When he came later, the Swami asked him reason for the delay. When he told the reason, the Swami only said if his meditation were to be disturbed by such small things then all his practice for so many years was futile. His power of concentration was immense.

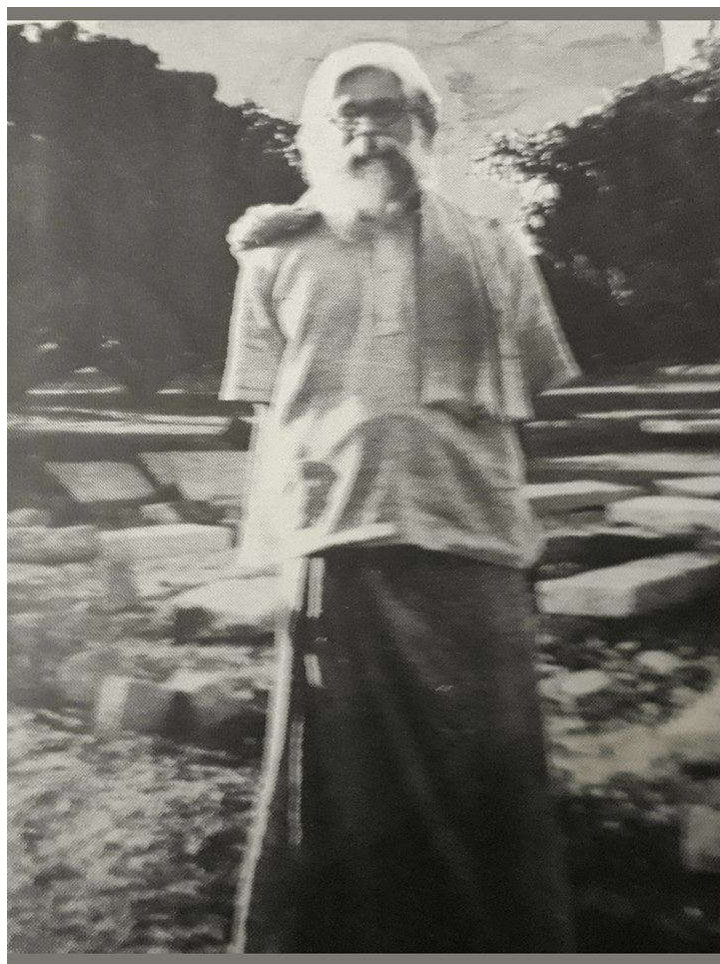
While the Swami could chastise his wards rather strongly when the situation so demanded he could be completely calm even when a junior monk or brahmacharin would point a perceived shortcoming on his part. There was an instance when he was taking class for the students at the Vidyarthi Mandiram and, in a manner not unusual to him, lost all sense of time. The class which was supposed to end at 5 PM went past late evening – 8 PM or so. A brahmacharin overseeing the vesper service shouted at the Swami for a long time and took him on with the charges of irresponsible conduct and carelessness with regard to his duties as President of the Ashrama. Tyagishanandaji calmly listened to it and went away. Perhaps he saw that brahmacharin was right from his

perspective. It was a different matter that while taking the class his mind had soared into great heights, and that forgetfulness was only due to his mind not remaining at the ordinary plane of keeping a watch on time. But his greatness lay in the fact that he never justified this, let alone making anything special of this nature of getting far-removed from day-to-day practicalities. He was, on the contrary, mindful of the lapse on his part.

Once a devotee named Rao, who always saw the Swami engrossed in normal chores like cooking and tending cows, asked in lighter vein, "Swami, what is the difference between a householder and you. We worry about our children and you worry about your cows". The Swami promptly replied: "Rao, there is an important difference. If tomorrow the headquarters asks me to leave to another centre, I just take my loin-cloth and leave." He then made a gesture of wiping his hands sideways, implying finishing with a task for good (and not even taking the dust of that place). "Can a householder walk out of his home in this way", he said. The devotee was stunned by the way Tyagishanandaji said it and it was long-etched in his memory. He later recounted this incident to many, and it passed on as a strong lesson in renunciation. The same was the gesture made by the Swami when young monks and brahmacharins expressed their deep worries over the financial condition of the ashrama. He would merely say, "We are monks; if Guru Maharaj provides for the ashrama it is fine, otherwise we will walk out", wiping his hands sideways.

Even in last days of illness Tyagishanandaji never fell into a low mood or referred to the immense physical suffering he was undergoing. In fact it seemed that even in that situation he was completely a master of himself. During these days when a brahmacharin who was arranging his mosquito net while Tyagishanandaji was resting, softly asked if the Swami was getting disturbed. Tyagishanandaji opened his eyes and said, "The whole world cannot disturb me now".

Austerity as a way of Life



Swami Tyagishanandaji at Bangalore Ashrama

Maharaj was a model combination of the traditional monastic virtues of asceticism and austerity, vast erudition, and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideal of serving 'Divine in Human beings'. Right from his earliest days in Thrissur he used to practice a very austere way of living. Every Ekadashi he used to fast and would break it only on the following day after feeding and serving a poor person. Many a time he used to do 48 hour fasts. The fasts did not bring about any change in normal way of working. Taking classes for 4-5 hours during the fasts or walking for miles together was nothing unusual for him.

Once in Thrissur, when he was walking to the villages he served, it started to pour heavily. A bus driver stopped to offer him a lift. Tyagishanandaji asked him whether he would give him a lift every day. The bus driver was naturally

flabbergasted at this question. Tyagishanandaji declined the offer saying he would not want to change his habit for one day's comfort.

It was a common sight of him walking from one end of verandah to another and expounding some of the most subtle scriptural points. He seldom engaged in purposeless talk. He spurned the questions born out of idle curiosity. When someone asked him ordinary questions of action or conduct in day-to-day life he did not give much response and left it to them to decide unless it had a principle of spiritual life involved. Even in matters spiritual he usually did not offer direct advice unless sought explicitly. Usually he would narrate his own view and experience in the matter and leave it to the questioner to do what he thought was best. His guidance was always very non-intrusive. He wanted everyone to make final decisions themselves. In this regard he liked to quote "Vimrishyaitadasheshena Yathechchasi Tatha Kuru" – Deliberate on this and then decide what you should do (Gita : 18.63)

He once took a poor small Harijan boy under his care in the ashrama. After admitting the child, he himself gave up one meal for a long time – months at a stretch. When asked why he was doing that, he said he did not want to do acts of service only on the ashrama's money but wanted to partake in this service by his own sacrifice. During his Bangalore years, he seldom went out of town, but whenever he had to, he always walked to and from the station which was many miles away.

To what extent he had mastered himself is illustrated from the following incident. As has been mentioned Tyagishanandaji used to keep fasts on Ekadashi that continued till the next day. One morning on Ekadashi he had forgotten it was supposed to be his fasting day, and jovially came to the dining area for breakfast. Idli, which he relished, were served on his plate. As he was happily about to start, someone pointed it to him that it was Ekadashi. The Swami, without a moment's delay and with no sign of emotion on his face, got up and left the place.

Moulding the spiritual aspirants under his mentorship

When any potential aspirants for monastic life made inquiries in that direction, Tyagishanandaji at first always showed hard and unattractive aspects. He did not want anyone to wrongly get attracted to a romantic idea of renunciation and monasticism and thereafter become a misfit in it. Once an aspirant asked him whether he would realize God by joining the Order, Tyagishanandaji, without a moment's delay responded, "no". It could have been because he did not find

the aspirant competent enough. Also, he thought that no guarantee could be given that everyone who takes to a life of renunciation would reach the highest. Finally, perhaps most importantly in his opinion, a true aspirant would never bother about a guarantee – it was enough that one had realized the vanity and hollowness of the world and found meaning in a life of renunciation, hence wanted to take up a life of Sannyasa, regardless of a guarantee of reaching the highest.

But when he found that any aspirant was truly serious about a life of Sannyasa he would try to facilitate the candidate's transition in the best possible way. To students, he usually advised completing their education before taking to monastic life. He used to humorously say that the first hit of Vairagya comes to college studies. He also conveyed that since the Ramakrishna Order ran many institutions like schools, colleges, hospitals etc, educated young men would come handy to the Order.

To such aspirants Tyagishanandaji also suggested to stay for a few weeks at the ashrama to get a feel of what monastic life would be rather than having an abrupt transition. It was only after he found that a candidate would settle in the monastic routine that he asked them to renounce, leave their jobs or homes. But once they had joined, Tyagishanandaji had a protective attitude for them. A senior monk, who had joined under Tyagishanandaji, remembered how the Swami, not much of a letter-writer, wrote five letters to the brahmacharin's father within a week of his joining in order to impress upon the father the correctness of his son's decision and to stabilise the father's own turbulent emotions at that time. Similarly, another senior monk recounted how the Swami, renowned for his austerity, himself prepared delicacies, on the day of his joining, just to temper the feeling of an abrupt transition into an unknown world which the brahmacharin was possibly undergoing.

Tyagishanandaji was very particular that the novices and monks should build strong fundamentals of scriptural scholarship and not just have a superficial reading of the great texts. Towards the end of his life he took up Isavasya Upanishad for his classes, but in about 10 months only 2 verses had been covered. One brahmacharin pointed out the slow pace and asked when this would be finished. The Swami replied, "All right I shall rush through all the Upanishads in 3-4 months and then you can go and boast before others that you have made a study of all the Upanishads. "Look here, I am not interested in that. I am interested in giving you an extensive and authentic foundation, using which you all can study the scriptures yourself."

While dealing with young brahmacharins in his care, the Swami chastised them on their flaws but always had a very high empathy with them. His love was not of demonstrative type, but he always had deep concern for everyone around him. A brahmacharin who had, upon leaving home, promised his mother, that he would visit her after a year, told the Swami towards the end of the year about this. He was possessed by a strong sentiment to keep this sacred promise to his mother. He had expected the Swami would talk about snapping of all pre-monastic ties and would not grant permission. But the Swami calmly listened and sympathetically told the brahmacharin that he should make the home visit part of a pilgrimage by combining the visit to a few holy places in the area and also take another brahmacharin as companion. The brahmacharin was delighted to hear this but had no money to make a larger tour, that too with a companion. As he was pondering over this problem, the same Tyagishanandaji who took one meal to save ashrama's resources, took out a ten rupee note from under his pillow and handed it over to the brahmacharin.

He always emphasized the harmonious development of head and heart, and selfless work. He cautioned spiritual aspirants against merely mouthing Vedantic principles and scholarship without practice, and quoted Sankara, 'Sabda Jalam maharanyam' – words are like a forest-like maze, one easily gets lost in that (Vivekachudamani : 60). Even a little practice was good, and he was fond of illustrating this by quoting 'Swalpamapyasya Dharmasya Trayte Mahatobhayat' (Gita : 2.40). He was fond of saying that the Upanishads help in Shravana (the first step in Vedantic practice), the Brahma-sutras in the second step of Manana, and the Gita in the final step of Nididhyasana (the meditation and actual realization of spiritual truths). He did not like to put Karma and Bhakti as inferior to Jnana. That he too, like Swami Vivekananda, was a votary of an integrated approach in spiritual life combining elements of Jnana, Bhakti, and Karma, is clear from the words from his commentary on the Narada Bhakti Sutras : "Jnanayoga purifies the intellect, Bhaktiyoga the emotions, and Karmayoga the will, and man is free to adopt any one of these paths in preference to the others. But the seeker would do well to attempt a synthesis of all these paths as it would be very helpful to achieve the end more speedily"

He wanted everyone to develop strength to squarely face all situations. When a brahmacharin who was transferred to a centre where he was facing problems and not able to settle down, wrote to him about his problems, the Swami wrote back saying, "You have to now face all your situations yourself."

The conditions of austerity during his years at Thrissur were so stern that the brahmacharins who stayed with him at Vivekodayam or Vilangan ashrama often recounted how difficult it was to live there in accordance with his austere

methods. Warriar Maharaj (Swami Vyomkeshananda) used to narrate how poor the food at Thrissur ashrama was and how he frequently pleaded with the Swami to get better food. But the Swami used to tersely say that this is what one would get here; if one wanted something different one was free to move to a different ashrama of the Order. But none of his proteges left him; for they knew the tremendous benefit they all were deriving by living in the company of a mighty spiritual personality like him.

Once he saw that a young brahmacharin who was given the responsibility of looking after the Vidyarthi Mandiram was engrossed all the time in thinking about that work. Tyagishanandaji transferred him to a role in the office. The brahmacharin was severely taken aback and repeatedly asked if he had committed any fault. Tyagishanandaji did not respond then. After the brahmacharin had settled in his new role the Swami told him that he had become too attached to his role and so it had to be changed. He wanted everyone to approach work with a spirit of detachment. In order to have the brahmacharin practice that attitude he was transferred to a different role.

A very insightful lesson he used to give to all he came in touch was of the two concepts of 'Yoga' and 'Tyaga'. He said that the whole of spiritual life could be divided into some 'Dos' and 'Donts'. The "Do's are positive practices that we should do more and more like purposeful and detached work, study, prayer meditation etc - all that was 'Yoga'. And the actions which we should shun, the renunciation of which makes us more and more established in the Divine was 'Tyaga'. He emphasized that both 'Yoga' and 'Tyaga' go hand in hand. Both also strengthen each other. More a spiritual aspirant is advanced in one, the easier it is to follow and be established in the other too.

When a brahmacharin requested him to autograph on his newly purchased 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' Tyagishanandaji merely wrote: 'Uddhared atmanatmanam' - raise the self by yourself (Gita: 6.5). In that he echoed Vivekananda's idea that one always needed to have faith in oneself and take charge of one's own situation.

His Humorous side

Once a young regular visitor who in his later life became a senior civil servant visited the ashrama and found all doors closed. He went back thinking that the Swami was asleep. When he returned the following day and told the Swami that he had left the previous day thinking he might be sleeping, Tyagishanandaji, replied in fun, "What! Do the Swamis ever sleep? They are

always in Samadhi.” The fun of it was that Tyagishanandaji had said that in such a serious tone that for a long time whenever the person visited, he referred to the monks’ rest as Samadhi.

On one of Gandhiji’s transit via Bangalore, Tyagishanandaji who knew him for long, went to meet him at the Railway compartment where he was staying. An Austrian lady, painter by profession, had come to interview him. The lady was not allowing Gandhiji to speak but kept interrupting and speaking for most of the time. Gandhiji playfully held her nose and told her she had come to listen to him. He pointed out at Tyagishanandaji, saying, “See, how he is listening.” The Swami was amused at this and upon return to the ashrama recounted how exactly Gandhiji had rebuked this lady. The same lady was also charmed by the long-flowing hair and beard, and sage-like appearance of the Swami, and wanted to do his portrait. She said she would come the following day. Tyagishanandaji could not say anything at that instant. When the lady came the next day, she found the person being introduced as Tyagishananda was one with short hair and clean shaved, hardly resembling the person she had seen the day before. To her utter dismay she dropped the idea of portrait and left. As it happened, Tyagishanandaji, not at all interested in acting as a subject for the lady’s artistic pursuit, thought this to be the only way to escape.

On another occasion an elderly Western lady devotee had come to ashrama and was engaged in a very long conversation when the Swami was quite unwell and confined to bed. There were other monks and brahmacharins also sitting there. Many felt that the Swami needed rest but could not indicate this to the lady. The Swami then asked a brahmacharin to bring the ‘urine pot’. Hearing this the guest (along with others) took leave of the Swami. When the brahmacharin brought the pot the Swami told him he did not need it and had merely said this to see the lady off.

Once the Swami was teaching the Upanishads and referring to Rishi Angira. Since there were more than one Rishi by that name, a brahmacharin named Ramaiah asked in exasperation, “Oh, how many Angiras.” The Swami replied, “Why, when there can be so many Ramaiahs – M. Ramaiah, B.T. Ramaiah, K.H. Ramaiah, and you Ramaiah, why can’t there be more than one Angira.”

Once almost all the students of the Vidyarthi Mandiram missed the weekly class citing some urgent and unavoidable business – probably some college assignment. Tyagishanandaji, not someone who liked routine getting disturbed, did not say anything then, but the following week’s class went for twice the duration. The students promptly took their lesson and did not repeat it in future.

Other interesting incidents from his life

Once on the day following Ekadashi the Swami fed a beggar and gifted him new clothes and few other items. The situation took an unexpectedly funny turn. The beggar happily went and was caught by the local police, who knew him to be a beggar, suspecting he had committed a theft. It was only after Tyagishanandaji went to the Police Station and resolved the matter that the poor man was released.

The Swami did not speak much Kannada and had limited understanding of the language. All the conversations and classes he took at the ashrama and outside were in English. Once he was invited to preside at a function held at the Sanskrit College in Bangalore. B.M. Srikantiah, who was an iconic figure in Kannada literature, rose to speak in English thinking that the President of the Meeting would not fully comprehend his talk if given in Kannada. But Tyagishanandaji intervened and humorously remarked that being President of the Meeting he would not allow him to speak in English but only in Kannada as the audience would best understand his lecture in that language. B.M. Srikantiah gave in to the wish of the President. All present there enjoyed the scene.

V Subramanya Iyer, as has been mentioned earlier, was a great scholar and the acharya at the Vedanta Study Circle where many monks of the Order came and studied scriptures and commentaries under him. He found Tyagishanandaji a suitable match for discussions in subtleties in scriptures and these discussions went for hours. Once a devotee, walking back with Shri Iyer from the ashrama, saw the great scholar having tears in his eyes. When asked the reason Shri Iyer said with deep emotion how he wanted to be like Tyagishanandaji who lived his life fully in God, living by the great truths of scriptures each moment, while he only had an intellectual understanding of them.

Once Tyagishanandaji thought to invite a very respected monk of an orthodox Vedantic Order in South India to teach some lessons in selected scriptural themes in which that monk had great authority. For conveying this invitation, he sent a young brahmacharin to their Math. Upon hearing about the invitation, the monk expressed displeasure at Ramakrishna Order ashramas being open to devotees of all castes. He resented that no cognizance of a person's caste was taken there. He lambasted Tyagishanandaji for sitting for meals with one and all and physically serving them without observing caste norms. The young brahmacharin returned very depressed and reported the matter to the Swami, who laughed at this and said it would take a very long time for most of the society, including traditional monastic orders, to take up the liberal ideals preached and practiced by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Tyagishanandaji was very firm about certain principles. At the time of Bengal Famine of 1943, the ashrama inmates and volunteers had collected a certain sum to be sent there for relief-work. However, for some reason there was a delay in sending and during that period came the news of a severe famine in Orissa. The inmates proposed that the sum be sent to Orissa instead of Bengal as it was at that time more needed there. Tyagishanandaji explained to them that diverting the funds to a place other than the one for which it was collected would be wrong and tantamount to cheating as those who had given the donations had done so knowing it shall go to Bengal. He gave an example that if someone gives a shawl to be handed to a particular person, then it has to be given to that person and not anyone else. If the gift is made to oneself then one is at discretion of using it the way one likes. There was a situation when someone gave him a shawl for himself and insisted that only he use it. After that person went away, the Swami quickly called someone and gave the shawl to him. He did not like binding gifts and believed that once you have made a gift you should leave its usage to the person's discretion. This was also illustrated when he declined the conditional gift of the house by Dr Rao to be used only as 'Vidyarthi Mandiram'.

Conclusion

Tyagishanandaji was one of the crowing jewels in the Ramakrishna Order. Even thinking of him and his personality fills one's mind and heart with the power of core spiritual qualities like austerity, purity, and renunciation. He represented the best of ancient prototype of monastic life combined with ideals of broad liberalism, high empathy, and spirit of service to 'God in Man' which Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition has given. He will be an inspiration to all serious spiritual aspirants who are blessed to know about his resplendent spiritual life.