

A LABOUR OF LOVE

THE BIOGRAPHY OF
DR SHISHUPAL RAMBHAROS

Kogi Singh

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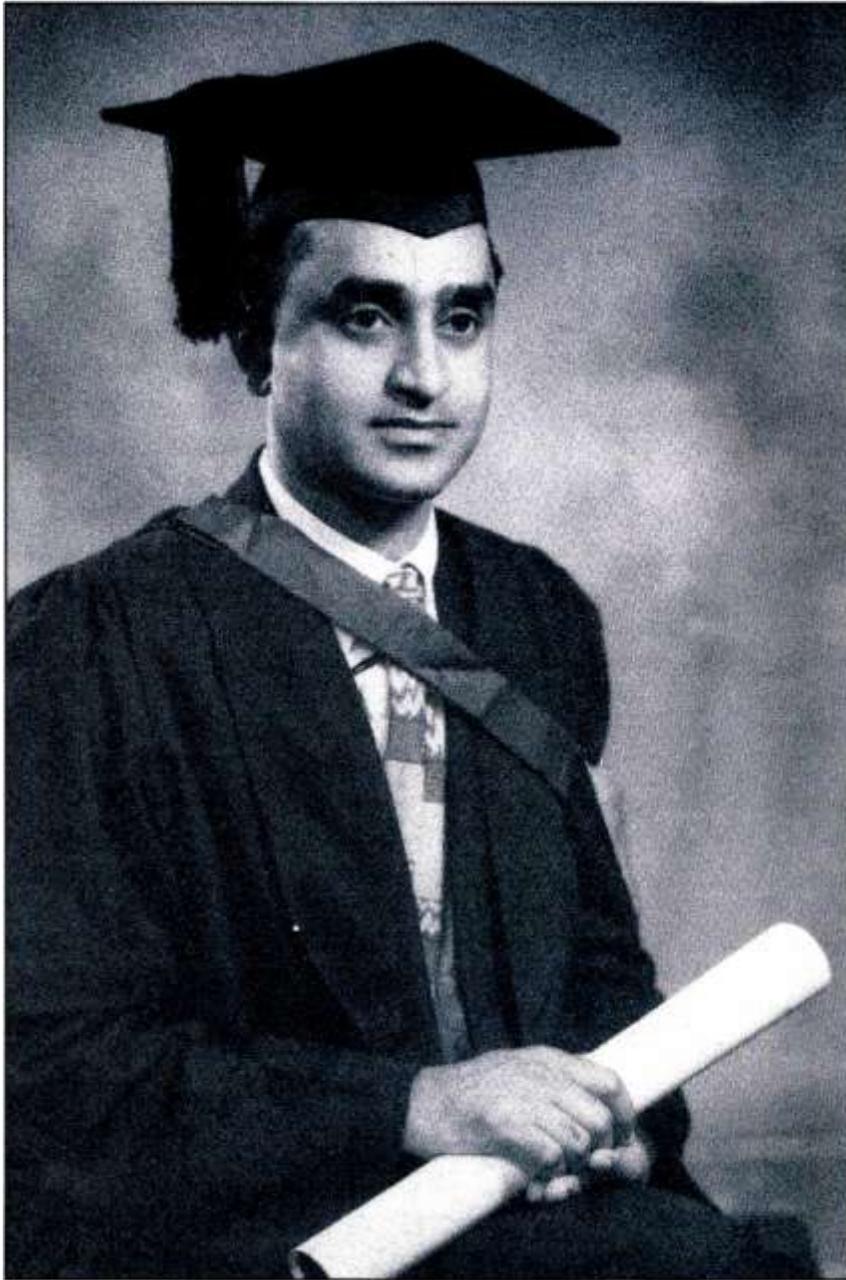
***For my grandchildren Thiren
and Radeshni Naidoo and
Shikara and Divesh Singh***

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*Shishupal Rambharos, B. Comm
University of Natal, 1958*

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by
narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection:*

*Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the
desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening
thought and action - Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let
my country awake.*

*This is my prayer to thee, my lord - strike, strike at the root of
penury in my heart.*

*Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows. Give
me the strength to make my love fruitful in service Give me the
strength never to disown the poor or bend my lowes before
insolent might.*

*Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.
And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with
love.*

Rabindranath Tagore

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all those, named and unnamed, who have contributed to the writing of this book. Their ready agreement to be interviewed, to tolerate long telephone discussions and to write down a memory of the past, has made my task immeasurably lighter.

Special thanks go to:

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my long-suffering family - my husband, children and grandchildren for their incredible patience, understanding and tolerance;

Habi, Sandhiya and Devi, (my husband, daughter and sister, for proof reading so diligently;

the officials, staff and residents of the Aryan Benevolent Home for their kind reception of me at all times;

the officials of the Aiya Yuvuk Sabha for their support.

Lastly, thank you Bhai Rambharos, for accommodating my persistent search for information and for making yourself available whenever necessary.

PREFACE

Every now and again an institution is touched by a personal grace. So powerful is the relation between the person and the institution that the one merges into the other. The person breathes his life into the institution and endears it to his society in a way that an impersonal institution never can. The institution will live on beyond the life of the person and the person will live on in the institution beyond his life. Such is the symbiotic relation Kogi Singh paints between Bhai Rambharos and the Aryan Benevolent Home.

The meeting between the two could not but have been traumatic, especially for the seven year old Rambharos who had just lost his father and was expected, as the only well member of the family, to care for his invalid mother and mentally retarded brother. The Home offered the destitute family a refuge, albeit in a bleak overcrowded room in a wood and iron cottage where the inmates literally lived on the floor, sleeping, eating and doing whatever chores came their way there. But as mean as were the conditions at the Home, they rescued the family from the abject poverty in which the family had floundered.

There is the heart-rending image of the six-year old Shishupal struggling to transport his mortally ill father in a wheelbarrow for medical attention; there is the grace of the tender hearted boy whose sweet nature blocked out the pain and hunger and responded to the kindness of his benefactors. He never complained though he was dumped into an Old Age Home and forced into the inaction of the infirm and invalid. It was hardly the environment to nurture the inquisitive mind of the child Rambharos, bubbling with enthusiasm to understand and create. Yet he overcame the

limitations of that environment and expanded beyond it. Far from harbouring resentment, he converted the tedious demands of his elderly companions into service as prescribed by the Vedas and conquered his deprivations by converting them into fulfilments. Barricaded behind the gates of the Home and bereft of all recreational activities, he created his own, measuring the flow of traffic on Bellair Road by day and devising a game of distinguishing the buses by their sound by night. Excluded from normal society, he inveigled his way into it by running errands for his teacher and immersing himself into the activities of the Arva Samaj and its affiliates.

At seventeen, he was a member of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, at 21 he was its secretary, and while still in his thirties, he became chairperson of the Home itself. The adopted became the adoptee. And to what purpose? To transform and modernise, so that its residents would live in comfort and hope so that it would become a true refuge and cease to be a disposal ground for the dispossessed and the discarded.

Simultaneous with his service to the Home was the flourishing of Bhai Rambharos' academic career. He qualified as a teacher, graduated and was recently conferred with an honorary doctorate by the University of Natal. As distinguished as was his teaching career, the Home always came first and he took early retirement when called to head the fund-raising campaign to expand and develop the Institution.

It is a remarkable story that Kogi Singh unfolds, of an orphan, brought up in an orphanage, a veritable Oliver Twist, only he does not fall into the hands of a Fagan; he is not rescued by a benefactor - he rescues himself; he lifts himself out, and up from a situation tailor-made for bitterness and revenge, and converts it into one of opportunity and hope. He achieves this miracle by loving the Institution and through love, conquering his subconscious dread of it as a child and in adulthood, converting it, in brick and mortar and human values into one of the finest welfare institutions in the country.

Fatima Meer - April 2000

INTRODUCTION

It has taken many months to put together this book, largely because Bhai Rambharos has had a long, varied and rich life that reflects so many different interests. It has been an immense task that has raised many difficult questions. How does one, for example, convey his life without lapsing into hyperbole? How does one separate the man from his work, when the two, combined, make him into what he is? How does one remain objective when enveloped by his warmth and gentleness?

It has not been easy. I have struggled with what to include and what to omit, for to do justice to his achievements would require volumes. I have merely touched upon them. It is impossible to mention all those who have worked closely with him, locally, nationally and internationally, for that would read as an impressive list of those whose lives have been marked by '*caring, serving and sharing*' (a motto of the Aryan Benevolent Home).

I have had to remind myself again and again that this is *his* biography, as it would be very easy indeed to become lost in the labyrinthine passages that lead to his social, cultural, religious and educational achievements, and shift attention to the organisations he serves, rather than to his contributions to their development. This is particularly so with the Aryan Benevolent Home, which has become synonymous with his name. I have explored the earlier days of his life in detail, in the attempt to assess the impact of those who guided him and thereby helped to shape his vision. It is, in my belief, the key to understanding who and what he is.

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Bhai Rambharos turned 80 years old on 27 February 2000. Sadly, there were not many I could turn to for information about his early life. Much of what is contained in Part One comes from his prodigious memory, his writings and the recollections of those few still with us. The Brochures of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, the Aryan Benevolent Home and the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha have been very helpful indeed in providing information about their activities, by which means it has been possible to infer the nature of his contributions. The massive Minute Books of the ABH were a daunting sight indeed, but were crucial to seeing him in the role of President.

The adult phase of his life has been traced through interviews with family, friends, colleagues in education and social service, through local and overseas newspaper articles, magazines and television interviews. The personal diary in which Bhai Rambharos began to record details of his life and work in 1949, has been invaluable.

As we move forward to a developing sense of national pride and anticipate the 'African Renaissance' that must and will materialise, we need to remember the achievements of the past, which are inextricably a part of our history. From them we may be able to draw inspiration, courage and faith in the future. Bhai Rambharos represents the best in all of us. His story must be told, for in him we find the ideal of service, translated into inspired and inspiring action.

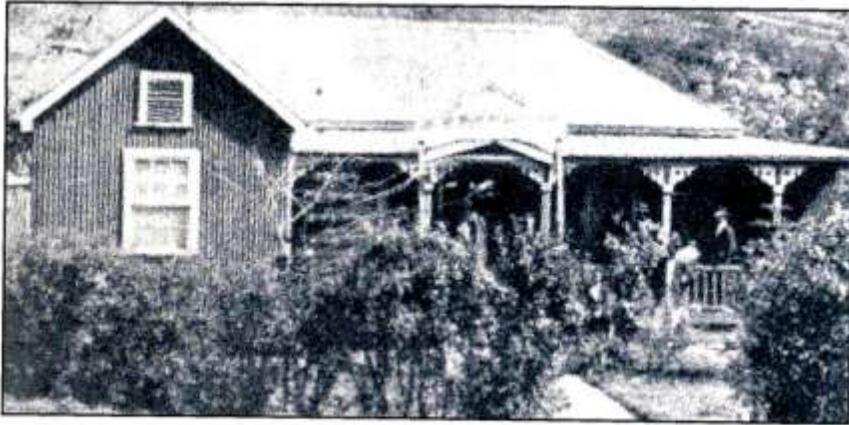
I am indebted to Rajendra Chetty, whose article on Bhai Rambharos, entitled *Labour of Love* and published in the *Sunday Times Extra* on 6 September 1981, gave me the title for this book.

Kogi Singh
Durban
8 April 2000

PART ONE

FROM BIRTH TO YOUNG ADULT

N.



The Original Home (1921)



Mr D.G. Satyadeva



Pandit Nayanah Rajh



Mr S.L. Singh

CHAPTER 1

FROM INDIA TO SOUTH AFRICA

In 1896 three young brothers left Calcutta aboard the *55 Pongola*, their destination, South Africa. The eldest, Ramnarain, was twenty two, Rambharos was twenty and the youngest a mere seventeen. They were the sons of Matadin, a poor farm labourer in the village of Kaithpurwa. Fatehpur District, Benares. They had been attracted by the promises of a recruiting scout employed by agents to find labour for Natal. He guaranteed them a new and invigorating life in distant South Africa, where, he claimed, prospects for employment were plentiful, wages were good and accommodation was provided free of charge. He indicated that after a five year period of indentured service they could, if they wished, enter into a further period of service. For the right to remain in the colony after that, they were required to pay a residential tax of three pounds, which would enable them to hire out their services or open small businesses of their own.

These promises were enticing. There were few opportunities for employment in the village of Kaithpurwa and its sunounds. One had the choice of leaving the village in the forlorn hope of finding work elsewhere or accepting the starvation wages paid by landowners. The brothers' education had been circumscribed by the endless cycle of poverty that made life for the village labourers a constant struggle for survival. In the closed circle of their village, each day was like every other - awakening before sunrise, offering their prayers and going out to work in the paddy fields under a relentless sun, until after its setting in the west. The scout's offer,

together with the chance of freedom from bondage to their Impoverished life, were too attractive to ignore.

Like the more than 62 000 people from all parts of India who had left to seek their fortunes in South Africa since 1860, they bade farewell to the known and familiar, to family and friends, and set out for the land of opportunity. Their few belongings were tied neatly into bundles for the long journey by cattle-drawn cart from Benares to Calcutta, where, together with 72 others, they boarded the 5S *Pongola*.

The plight of Indians in South Africa was, at the time, a question of pressing urgency to the Government of India and a matter for heated debate in government circles. In the relatively obscure Villages of India, however, there was little exposure to high politics and scarcely any understanding of international issues. The three sons of Matadin knew nothing about their countrymen's successive Crises in South Africa, and in Natal in particular - the British colony on the east coast towards which they were steaming steadily. On 22 May 1896, they reached Port Natal, where they were assigned to farms in the Midlands of Natal. In April 1901, after completing the compulsory five-year period of indentured service, the eldest and youngest chose to return to India, taking with them their hard-earned savings. The second of the three brothers, Rambharos, Colonial Number 62248, elected to remain behind to make a life for himself in the new country.

In the absence of records of the movements of 'free' Indians there is no traceable information about Rambharos Matadin for ~ period of nineteen years. Certain assumptions may be made, however, from the recollections of his younger son, Shishupal Rambharos (or 'Bhai' Rambharos, as he is better known), whose life is recorded in this biography. It is assumed that his parents named during the second decade of the twentieth century. His mother, Sankaree, was a much younger woman who came from Camperdown, a small village near Pietermaritzburg, in Natal. Rambharos was forty-one years old when their first child

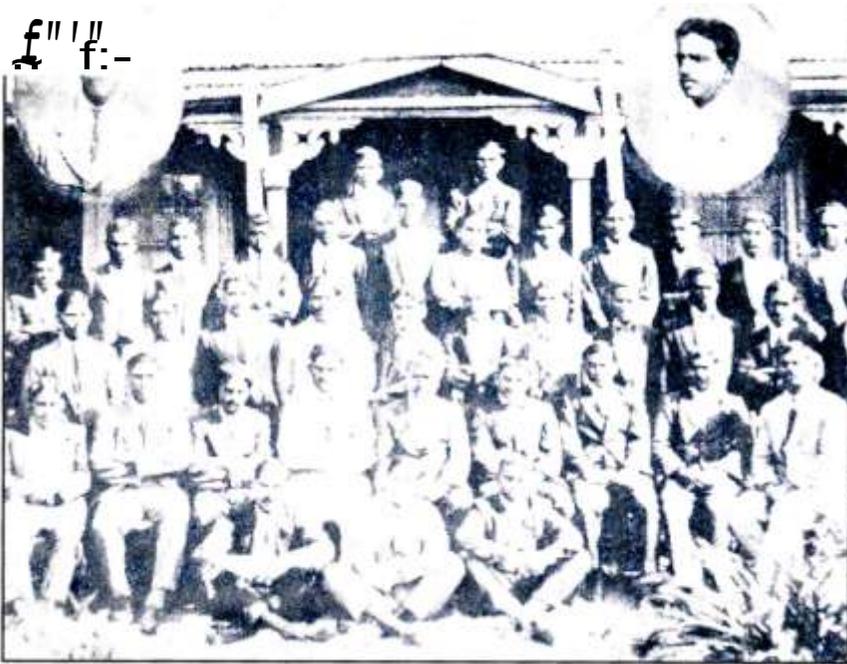
Ramnarain, was born. Their second son, Shishupal, was born two years later on 27 February 1920. There are no details available about his mother's family, except for their place of residence, which is recorded in the certificate of birth issued in Durban on 19 March 1920, in the name of 'Sisupal Rambharos'. Though the document also reveals that he was born at 'Mount Desire', P.O. Nel's Rust, he cannot remember hearing the name ever mentioned in his home, but recalls his father speaking of 'Tappie's Farm' in Nel's Rust, a district of Richmond. On this basis it may be presumed that the one was the official name of the farm and the other was the name by which the employees referred to it.

When Bhai Rambharos was three years old, his father moved from Richmond to new employment in Gillitts, a small village close to Pinetown. It is from this point that his first clear memories of his life emerge and it becomes possible to assess the early influences in his life that helped to shape him into one of the most respected and admired examples of South Africa's first generation Indians.

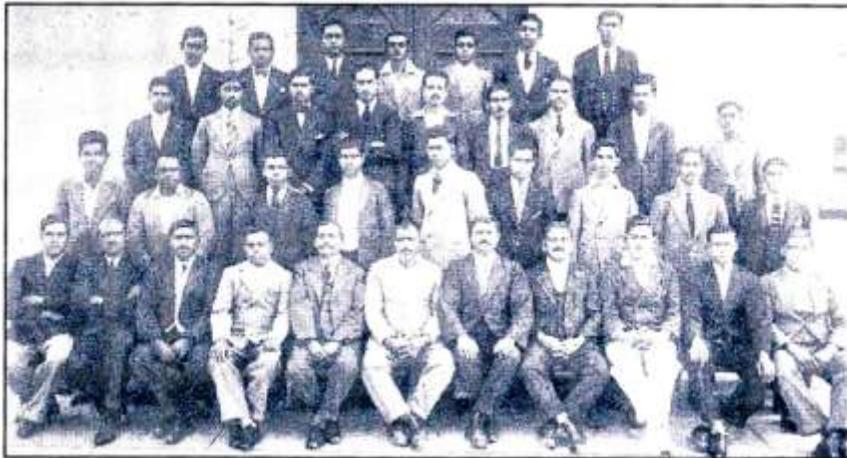
Notes

1. *In 1958, prior to graduating from the University of Natal, he applied for a change of name, and was issued with a new birth certificate, with his name indicated as 'Shishupal Rambharos'. Most documents previous to that date (including school reports and certificates) are issued to 'Sisupal Rambharos,' or 'Sisupaul Rambharos.'*

O.



The Arya Yuvak Sabha outside the Home which opened in 1921



Officials and Members of the Arya Yuvak Sabha, 1928

CHAPTER 2

THE WORLD OF A CHILD

When Sankaree gave birth to their first child in 1918, Rambharos named him 'Ramnarain', in honour of his paternal uncle in India and as a link with his past life in India. The birth of a son to carry on the family name was a cause for pride and they were joined in their celebrations by the little farm community in Richmond. Before many months had passed, however, they realised that the baby's development was abnormally slow. By the time he was fourteen months old, they had to accept that he required constant care and supervision and would continue to do so for the rest of his life.

Consequently, when their second son was born, they chose his name with special care: it honoured Sisupala, the King of Cedi, whose spiritual trials and ultimate attainment of bliss is recorded in Canto Seven of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Translated from Hindi into English, the name means 'take care of the child'. The younger boy was thereby allocated the role of guardian and supporter of his incapacitated brother. However, as his mother had longed for a daughter, and this second son was so beautiful, she insisted on calling him 'beti', much to her husband's amusement. And 'heti' he remained to her, for the rest of her life.

His rapid development must have brought untrammelled joy into his parents' lives. He learnt that he was a quiet baby, peaceful by nature and responsive to their voices. Though small and delicate in appearance like his mother, he had a healthy appetite and shortly after he was a year old he had started taking his first tentative steps. By the time he was eighteen months old he was able to speak short

phrases in Hindi, the language of his home. He developed quickly, showing an alert and receptive mind, all the signs pointing to a normal, healthy child.

In 1923, the family moved from Richmond to Gillitts, where Rambharos worked as supervisor in the flower nursery of a large farm. The accommodation provided was a single room in a two-roomed barracks-type building; it served as both kitchen and living area. The family slept on sacking on the bare ground, with their neatly folded clothes used as pillows; the cooking area was a small fireplace on the floor, to the left of the entrance. The walls nearby were blackened by the smoke, while the acrid smell of damp firewood hung in the air. Pots, mugs, plates and a single oil lamp were stored on a makeshift shelf that leaned against the wall. A pit dug into the ground behind their home served as the toilet. Rambharos had erected poles around it, to which he attached sackcloth to provide a screen. A wall separated the two open spaces in front of the two rooms in the building and theirs was used as the bathroom, with water carried from the stream below their home and heated over the fireplace. One of the indelible impressions Bhai has of this early phase of his life was the sound of his father in the early hours of the morning, as he cleaned his teeth with splinters of a peach branch, gargled and cleared his throat.

There were no windows, only long narrow openings in the wall, through which they felt the heat of summer and the icy winds of winter. The rags that Rambharos stuffed into the ventilation slits could ~10t stop the cold from seeping in during the winter nights. Sometimes he lit a low fire to keep the room warm, but this was a luxury they could ill afford. Instead they huddled together under layers of sacking, in a vain attempt to escape the bone-chilling cold that penetrated the thin walls and rose from the ground.

Their only neighbour was a single man who must have been employed in some other part of the farm. They hardly ever saw him and there was very little communication between them, though Rambharos and he exchanged a few words now and then. After the

communal life of the small workers' barracks in Richmond, Bhai's parents found it hard at first to live in isolation. There was little opportunity to get to know the people of the village across the river as Rambharos worked long hours for five days a week and also on Saturday mornings. His wife's rheumatism and poor eyesight and Ramnarain's incapacity kept the two of them imprisoned within the precincts of their home. Rambharos walked to the village store for replenishments on Saturday afternoons, sometimes taking his younger son with him. As he earned very little, their lives were frugal and their needs simple.

In his new surroundings, young Bhai Rambharos bloomed. There was boundless space to run around in; there was a little stream in which he dabbled his feet and floated leaf boats; there was a large willow tree with low overhanging branches on which he swung precariously. Each day brought some new adventure, some greater exploration of his environment. The only problem he experienced in these idyllic surroundings was with Ramnarain, who was either aggressive or ignored him completely. He learnt the hard way how to avoid his brother and how to defend himself. As they grew older they often engaged in battle, rolling over and over on the ground, scratching and punching. Invariably, the bigger and stronger Ramnarain won and the little boy dragged himself into the house, nursing his wounds but refusing to cry. It was a matter of honour to him not to show defeat. In reprisal, he frequently teased and provoked his brother and then escaped to hide behind his mother's skirt. Once, when Ramnarain refused to give him the axe he was using, he taunted him, saying '*You can't even chop wood!*' and deliberately put his foot on the log to challenge him. Ramnarain raised the axe and brought it down forcefully. Bhai describes the rest:

The next thing I knew was agonising pain. My left foot had a gaping wound and there was blood all over. My mother screamed in horror while Ramnarain, just stood there, staring. There were no

doctors nearby and no means of getting to one in Pinetown. In emergencies people had to manage with whatever they had. I remember distinctly that chicken fat was applied with a long feather. The bone set in position and the healing process began. My left foot still bears the scar.

It was obvious that, for the sake of their mother's sanity and the younger boy's safety, the brothers had to be separated for the better part of the day. Managing two young children who could not play together peacefully was taking its toll on their mother. She found it increasingly difficult to cope as Ramnarain took up most of her time. Much to Bhai's delight, Rambharos decided to take him to the flower nursery each day, once his foot had healed. They set off each morning, the little boy filled with self-importance, his hand tucked into his father's large fist and swinging his lunch-can happily. For him this was a special time, when he had the undivided attention of his father, whose gentle and loving nature made every day a happy one.

At the nursery, he became the centre of attention of the Zulu - speaking workers, most of whom were women. They were as fascinated by him as he was by their beaded clothes and head-dress and the strange clicking sounds of their speech. They were amused by his prattling in a language they did not understand and curious about his absorption with the solitary games that he played. Touching his fine, silky hair and pale skin, they marvelled at the difference to their own. They usually sang as they worked and he sometimes tried to join in, sounding the unfamiliar words in his soft voice and running to hide behind his father when they shouted and clapped their hands in appreciation.

He made himself useful by picking up bulbs that had fallen to the ground and collecting the stray leaves and stems in neat little piles on the ground. He was happy to be there with his father and the workers, reassured by their close presence as he played. As he had never had friends to play with, he learnt to amuse himself. When he grew tired of being confined to the nursery he went to the

fence to watch the livestock in the next field. On one occasion, his curiosity overcame his fear of their size and he climbed through the wire fencing to get a closer look at them, quite unaware of the danger when a large black bull pawed the ground to the left of him.

When it began its charge towards him, its hooves thudding on the dry ground, he screamed, held rigid by terror. The workers erupted in a frenzied attempt to distract the enraged animal, while his father threw his flower clippers at it and leapt across the fence. He was too late. The little boy was gored in the right thigh and carried high on the bull's horns before being tossed to the ground. Rambharos scooped him out of the danger of being trampled upon and threw him to a labourer across the fence, before jumping over it to safety. Thereafter, the child was kept in full view of his father throughout their hours at the nursery and Rambharos decided that his son had to go to school the following year. He himself had received only an elementary education in the village school in Kaithpurwa. As he watched Bhai grow up and show so much promise, he realised he had to equip him for work that was an improvement on his own. The encounter with the bull decided him. As the nearest school for Indians was in Pinetown, about twenty miles away, Rambharos made arrangements for his son to stay with an acquaintance he called '*Sadhu*', who was unknown to the rest of his family. Bhai was told to wait at the school for his father on Fridays, so that he could spend the weekends at home. This meant that Rambharos had to take leave from work and face the inevitable deductions from his wages, but there was little choice.

They left for Pinetown on a Sunday afternoon during the first week in February, which was also the hottest part of the year. On the way, his father tried to explain to Bhai why education was important and why he had to stay in Pinetown, but he was too young to comprehend fully. It was his father's unfamiliar seriousness the way he spoke rather than what he said - that made the child uneasy. What did terrify him was the fact, impressed upon him again and again, that the teachers spoke in English only. It was the rule at

the school, introduced to give the children a chance of survival and success in a colony where English was the language of the ruling people. Rambharos tried to reassure him, to tell him he would learn the language easily, but failed to still the apprehension that gripped him.

That night Bhai stayed with Sadhu's family. As his father left to return to their home, he had begun to cry as though his heart was breaking, great shuddering sobs that appalled those present and brought tears to their eyes. Rambharos turned resolutely away, trying to ignore the pleading in his son's eyes as there was too much at stake. For the rest of that day, the boy was very silent and subdued among the strangers who tried to comfort him. He obediently ate the supper served to him but the tears still fell. He longed to be back at home where he could sit on his father's lap and listen to his parents speak, hear stories about village life in India and ask questions; or he could play with the spoons and dishes stacked on the ramshackle shelves; or snuggle up close to his mother on the sacking, listening to the thudding of her heart as she ran her fingers through his hair and sang him to sleep.

The first day at school was also traumatic. Sadhu had taken him into the school grounds, where Bhai was startled and nervous at seeing so many children, all talking excitedly in a language he did not understand. He was taken to an open door, given the paper on which his father had written down his name and date of birth and told to wait until he was called. Sadhu had then hurried away to the shop where he worked. When a man came out of the room and spoke to him, Bhai's heart began to pound in tenor. He clutched his cloth bag tightly for comfort and mutely held out the piece of paper. The man said something, an exasperated expression on his face, and beckoned him to follow. After he was put into a classroom, everyone seemed to forget about him. He sat there all day, tears streaming down his cheeks. During the short break he sat alone on the steps leading to the grounds, watching the other children at their play. He was thirsty after eating his lunch, but no one had shown

him where to find water and he didn't know how to ask them. All the other children had bottles from which they drank.

When the school day was over, instead of waiting for his father's friend to fetch him, as arranged, he set off for home, painstakingly retracing the long route of the morning. His only thought was to be back where he belonged. It was the first independent decision of his life and he paid for it dearly. He arrived home late in the afternoon, tired, hungry and dusty, to face the unimaginable wrath of his father, who beat him with a peach twig all the way down to the stream, accompanying the process with a tirade of scolding. He had never hit his son before or shown such anger and the entire family cowered under it. What troubled Rambharos most was how to get a message to his friend in Pinetown. It meant further leave-taking from work and loss of wages. He abandoned any further hopes of education for his son that year.

At the beginning of 1927, Rambharos fell seriously ill, as did many of the workers on the farm and surrounding areas, who succumbed to an epidemic that raged through the midlands of Natal. Almost daily there was talk of someone dying. The absence of health services for farm labourers and of hospitals within reach compounded the situation. Most of the labour force could not afford to pay the tariffs charged by doctors in the villages and towns. Fearful of falling prey to the epidemic themselves, employers kept their doors locked and hoped the problem would resolve itself.

As his fever escalated, Rambharos began to lapse into sporadic bouts of convulsions, interspersed by periods of delirium which terrified his wife. Giving Bhai the little money they had saved to pay for his education, she sent him with a farm labourer who had agreed to take her husband to a doctor in Pinetown. Placing Rambharos in a wheelbarrow, they first manoeuvred their way over the muddy banks of the stream below the house and then came to the river that was swollen and dangerous after the week's heavy rainfall. The labourer tied one end of a piece of cloth to the wheel and gave the other end to the boy. He held on to it tightly and

directed their movement, while the man struggled to keep the wheelbarrow balanced on the makeshift bridge of logs.

The doctor in Pinetown realised there was very little he could do for the emaciated man in the wheelbarrow and sent them away with a bottle of fever-reducing medicine. In the early hours of the next morning Rambharos died. Bhai was awakened by the sound of his mother crying. Confused and frightened, he ran to shake his father awake, shouting that he was late for work. All morning, with a kind of desperation, he continued to try, until someone took him outside and gently tried to explain what had happened - but he did not understand. People he did not know came to their home throughout the day. The men sat in little groups on the grass, talking in subdued voices. Inside the room, his mother still sat at her husband's side, with Ramnarain asleep on her lap. That night, someone took him to the neighbour's house. He was so tired that not even the presence of that silent stranger prevented him from falling asleep immediately.

Rambharos was buried near his home the next morning and Bhai performed the rites, as instructed by the Pandit, but did so without understanding the significance of what he was doing. When he saw his father placed into a pit and covered with soil, he realised, only then, that he would never see him again. For weeks after that he was inconsolable, for the loss of his father created a void in his life that no one could fill. His formerly talkative and outgoing nature changed significantly: he withdrew into a cocoon of silence broken only by bouts of crying. His mother could not comfort him or ease the pain for she was locked in her own despair and hardly capable of reaching out to her son.

The family's bereavement was heightened by a sense of helplessness. They had no family to turn to for help while Rambharos's few friends in Pinetown lived in straitened Circumstances themselves and could not take on the added responsibility of caring and providing for another family. Many offers were made to adopt the younger boy, but his mother refused

In this period of grief, the friends of Rambharos pooled the little they could share to ensure that the widow and her sons did not starve. Pandit Ishwar Singh, the priest who had performed the funeral rites, also brought provisions and visited them often, trying to bring them courage through prayer. The owner of the farm was sensitive to their plight and had not asked them to leave but it was clear they had to go as accommodation was reserved for employees only.

Help for the destitute family was found eventually through the efforts of the Pandit who was a member of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (APS), the central body that co-ordinated the functions of the different Vedic organisations in Natal. He approached the Arya Yuvuk Sabha (AYS or Sabha) in Durban, for he knew that it had set up its *Arya Anath Ashram* in 1921 - a Home for the Aged and the Destitute. He was certain that help would be forthcoming, for the A Y S never turned away those in need of support.

Eight weeks after his father's death, Bhai and his family left the farm in Gillins. His mother was carried to the railway station by two farm labourers for she had become weakened and had aged prematurely. After her husband's death she scarcely ate and moved about with great difficulty. It was almost as if she no longer had the will to live. The Journey to Durban was a sombre one. Bhai constantly looked back to search for his home and the place where his father lay: his mother's covered head remained bowed and Ramnarain sat silent, overawed by a stranger who sat beside them. The Pandit had paid for the train tickets and accompanied them to the Home in Cato Manor, to see them safely installed.

A new phase was to begin in the life of Bhai Rambharos - a period in which the influence of his environment and the people who served it contributed to shaping his thoughts, directing his actions and providing the impetus for the way he was to live the rest of his life. His story is one of selfless and passionate commitment to the Aryan Benevolent Home; in his development is reflected the growth and expansion of that place of refuge since

1927, when he first entered it. Of the hundreds of children who have been nurtured by the AYS and the Home, he is unique in that he returned to it, to render service to others. His vision and commitment has steered the home from its humble beginnings to its present respected national and international status. He has given over 70 years of his life in its active service, beginning at the age of ten, or perhaps even earlier - his induction into the AYS was a process that began from the time of his entry into its *Arya Anath Ashram*. Of this time, 39 years have seen him at the helm, as President of the Aryan Benevolent Home Council.

No account of his life is possible, therefore, without concurrent reference to the history of the Home, where he lived from 1927 to 1945, to which he returned in 1985 and where he still resides. The influence of its parent body, the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, must also be examined, in the attempt to find the roots of the spirit that has guided him through the years.

The Arya Yuvuk Sabha

On 19 April 1912, a small group of young men met at a home in Durban to form the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, under the leadership and guidance of a Vedic missionary from India. Swami Shankaranand, a charismatic proponent of the ideals of the Arya Samaj of India, was sent to South Africa to re-affirm the Hindu way of life among indentured and ex-indentured labourers. He was one of the many Indian missionaries sent to countries where Indians had settled, to re-awaken their religious and cultural attachments and to instil an appreciation of the ancient Hindu scriptures, for in their new places of abode they were vulnerable to other forces that could destroy their heritage.

The world-wide Arya Samaj Movement was started in India in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, at a time when social reform and a return to the basic tenets of religious belief were seen to be vital. The Movement revived the spirit of the *Vedas*,³ a collection of ancient sacred scriptures, and committed itself to reforming

Hinduism at grass-roots level. It set in motion a vigorous campaign to de-mystify religious practices and to free Indians from the abomination of the caste system and Untouchability, as well as the practices of child-marriages and *Sati* (the self-immolation of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre). Among its many goals was the establishment of the rights of women and children, the education of girls and a reinforcement of pride in being an Indian and a Hindu.

Swami Shankaranand gave his active support and guidance to the group of young men who had been inspired by his eloquence and his ardent commitment to his work. He helped them set up the Durban-based AYS, which affiliated to the Arya Samaj Movement, adopted its principles⁴ and began its work. Central to its vision were the words of the following Sanskrit prayer, the meaning of which is given alongside:

*Om asatama sath gamaya
Tamasama jyatir gamaya*

*o Lord, lead us from untruth to
truth, Lead us from darkness to
light*

The AYS co-ordinated the activities of the Hindu youth and strove for the upliftment of the Indian community through various means: the provision of education and welfare, the promotion of religion and the preservation of culture. Mr D. Geriou (who later changed his name to D.G. Satyadeva)⁵ was a founding member and its first President. It was his idea, born in 1918, that led to the establishment of the Aryan Benevolent Home in 1921. The story has been told many times in the past and never fails to capture the interest of those who have heard it, as well as those who have not: one evening, as he made his way home from work, he witnessed a policeman's brutality towards a homeless beggar who slept in the public toilets in Victoria Street. After being beaten with a baton the man was driven out into the wintry cold. Horrified by what he saw and haunted by the plight of the homeless, he urged the AYS to establish a 'Home for the Homeless' as a matter of urgent priority.

He argued cogently that such a move was consistent with the principles of the Arya Samaj and cited the seventh and ninth principles in illustration:

Seventh Principle: Our conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness and justice.

Ninth Principle: No one should be content with promoting his own good only; on the contrary, he should look for his good in promoting the good of all.

At the time, there were places of shelter for the homeless and destitute of 'European' origin, but the government made no provision for the needy of other races. Mr Satyadeva's powerfully expressed appeal found strong support from other Sabha members - notably Mr S. L. Singh, a respected community leader and Pandit Nayanah Rajh, a Vedic priest. On that historic day, the Sabha took the decision to address the problem and work towards providing this much-needed service for all destitute persons. Thus the Aryan Benevolent Home was born.

The Aryan Benevolent Home

A fund-raising effort began immediately after the Sabha's decision to establish a Home for the Homeless. Money was raised through drama productions, concerts and musical evenings organised by the cultural arm of the AYS, the Bhajan Mandai (later re-named the Arya Woonathee Natak Mandal).⁶ Members of the Indian community also contributed, according to their means and by the end of two years, forty pounds (R80) had been raised. The Sabha then began its search for a suitable site for a shelter. It was found in Cato Manor - a half acre property on which stood a small but derelict wood and iron building. The price had been set at two hundred and forty pounds (R480). Any delay in payment might mean the loss of the property to another purchaser. Mr B. M. Singh, a wealthy businessman and loyal, generous member of the Sabha

donated the two hundred pounds (R400) still needed. It became possible at last to realise the dream that began in 1918. The sales and purchase documents were signed by Mr Satyadeva, Mr S. L. Singh and another Sabha stalwart, Mr C. R. Singh.

On 2 December 1920, the AYS became the owner of the land and cottage situated at 186 Bellair Road. Its members gladly gave up their evenings and weekends to repair and renovate the building to make it habitable. This was achieved within five months and on 1 May 1921, with the first three homeless men already within its walls, the *Arya Anath Ashram* or Aryan Benevolent Home was officially opened by Pandit Bhawani Dayal, an eminent scholar, journalist and humanitarian who had dedicated his life to spreading the gospel of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and to actively resisting social and political injustice.

The AYS used its limited resources - money contributed by its members - to administer the Home and provide for the inmates. This was supplemented by donations in cash and kind from the Indian community and Indian-owned businesses. The first supervisor of the Home, Mr Tommy Gudar, worked without remuneration - a measure of the generous support given to the Home by the community. Within the next few months, however, the number of homeless and destitute persons seeking shelter rose dramatically and an appeal for funds was made to the Indian Immigration Department, which responded with a grant of fifty pounds (R100) per year. This meant an immediate separation of the Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH) from its parent body, the Arya Yuvuk Sabha. State funding necessitated a separate banking account and administrative structure. The Home complied with this requirement in 1923, when the Aryan Benevolent Home Council was established to administer the Home. The separation was a mere administrative formality, however, as the Home's Council comprised Sabha members and the two organisations worked as one, with the Sabha as the guiding and supporting parent body. It continued to play this vital role for many years. In the course of time, the Home

developed to the extent that it ran autonomously, yet always with Sabha members only on its Council. Pandit Nayanah Rajh was elected the first Chairman, a position he was to hold for twenty-seven years.

The AYS committed itself to an annual subsidy of sixty pounds (R120), which it undertook to raise by way of donations. In 1925, the Home received a grant of one hundred pounds (R200) from the Natal Provincial Government, which increased to two hundred pounds (R400) the following year, when the number of residents escalated. By establishing the Home, the Sabha had provided a service which should have been the responsibility of the government. The Protector of Indian Immigrants, the police and hospitals soon took full advantage and appealed to the Home to admit those they had identified as needy and destitute. As the Sabha never refused calls for help, the building was soon occupied well over its capacity.

Though the Home had been planned as a place of care for the aged and adult destitute persons, on 2 October 1926, the Sabha admitted two children, as there was no existing provision for 'non-European' children in need of care. This raised a problem that was likely to recur and which required immediate action: there were no formal schools for Indians in Cato Manor or its surrounding areas. The AYS did not have the resources to start a school nor was there space at the Home to provide this service or a vehicle to transport the children to the nearest school in the town centre. When he became aware of the urgency of the problem, B. M. Singh once again came to the rescue of the Sabha, putting at its disposal a wood and iron hall situated close to the Home. In 1925, spurred on by the realisation that education was the only means to progress and liberation from bondage, he had started a private school for Indian children in the old building. This school was closed and the AYS Private School opened in February 1926, with one teacher. The hall was not the best of facilities for education, but it was a beginning. It catered for children from the Home and from Cato

Manor and the surrounding areas at a time when the government failed to make proper provision for the education of Indian children. The school operated from these premises until 1928, when the Sabha bought land adjacent to the Home and erected a new wood and iron building. It continued to be known as the AYS Private School until funding was finally obtained from the Natal Education Department, after repeated applications. On 1 August 1928, it was named AYS Government Aided Indian School. The official figures for that year were 72 pupils (of various attainment levels) and 2 teachers. Mr K. M. Gounder was appointed as Principal, a position he retained for 23 years. The derelict hall that had served its purpose so well was subsequently demolished by B. P. Singh.

It was to the Aryan Benevolent Home that Bhai Rambharos, his ailing mother and his brother were taken by Pandit Ishwar Singh when they were left destitute after his father's death in December 1926. It was at the AYS School that he received his formal education until 1936, when he successfully completed Standard Six and was awarded the Primary School Certificate.

Notes

1. *Literally, 'Song of the Lord', the Bhagavad Gita is a Sanskrit poem, set in the epic Mahabharata. It consists of 700 verses divided into 18 chapters, and is in the form of a dialogue between the incarnate God, Krishna and a human hero, Prince Arjuna. It incorporates many doctrines, among them the immortality of the Soul and its identity with the supreme God.*
2. *The original name of the Aryan Benevolent Home.*
3. *The Vedas comprise the most ancient Sanskrit texts, believed to have come to four rishis (sages) as a revelation and preserved through the oral tradition until Srila Vyasadeva set it in writing over five thousand years ago. The Vedas comprise four collections, known as the Rig- Veda, the Sama- Veda, the Yajur- Veda and the Atharva- Veda. Collectively, they are known also as the Samhitas (roughly,*

'collection '), They touch upon allfields of human knowledge and show God as being One, in the form of CreatOl; Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe.

4. For the ten Principles of the Arya Samaj, see Addendum D.
5. In 1921, during the celebrations of the first anniversary of the Aryan Benevolent Home, four officials underwent a 'naming ceremony' during which they took on 'Sat' (Truth) as an affirmation of their commitment: The ceremony was performed by Pandit Ishwardutt Vidyalkar of India.
D. Geriou became D. G. Satydeva F
Gareeb became F Satypal
T Gudar became Satyabhoosan
Beehook became Satyapri
6. The name 'Bhajan Mandal'was considered too restrictive to describe the more complex and varied functions, which included dance, song and drama, Hence the name was changed to Arya Woonathee Natak Mandai.



Left: K.M. Gounder (Principal), S. Rambharos is standing next to hi-
Right: M.R. Devar (Teacher)

CHAPTER 3

THE HOME AND THE SCHOOL

It was early evening when the Rambharos family and Pandit Ishwar Singh arrived at the Home to be welcomed by Mrs Nanoo, the wife of the resident supervisor. Her heart was immediately touched by the younger boy's open and innocent face and she decided at once that he was to stay with her rather than in the room for men. His mother was accommodated in the women's room, together with Ramnarain, for the Pandit explained the older boy's dependency on her. Thus, from his very first day at the Home, seven-year old Bhai Rambharos was physically separated from his mother and brother. The Home, by force of circumstance, became his home and the residents and staff, over time, became his extended family.

That first night at the Home is printed indelibly on his mind. He remembers sleeping very little. Every now and then, sounds of traffic on the road and the barking of dogs startled him into terrified alertness. He missed his mother and the close warmth of her sleeping body near him but more than anything else he longed for his strong and protective father. He lay on the mattress on the floor, tears falling silently, afraid to move for fear of disturbing the sleeping supervisor and his wife. After some hours, when the sounds of the traffic stilled, he fell asleep, only to awaken with an urgent desire to go to the toilet. He knew where it was located, in the yard behind the Home. Creeping to the door, he tried to open it, but could not. There had been no locks on the door of their Gillitts home. The sense of urgency increased and to his horror and shame, he lost

control and stood there, helpless, as the faeces dripped down his legs and onto the floor. Not knowing what else to do, he crouched near the door to complete the process and stayed there until Mrs Nanoo awoke. The breaking light of day revealed the stinking mess on the floor and the storm broke over his head. She obviously regretted her outburst later but from that night he slept in the room used by the men. He was the only child there and mostly left to his own devices.

In their first year at the Home, the only other young person on the premises was Nilkanthee, the daughter of Mr and Mrs Nanoo. About two years older than Ramnarain, she was kept too busy helping her mother to offer the little boy any companionship. She was kind to him, tried to mend his clothes when they tore and tended to other small needs he could not manage. Apart from his brother, she was the first person to call him '*Bhai*', the name by which he has been known since and which encapsulates the singular warmth, love and protectiveness he offers to the world.

To nine year old Ramnarain, the change of location made very little difference as he was still under the protective wing of his mother and his needs were simple. For Bhai, it was the loneliest period of his life. He played alone, as he had done all his life, but the difference was that there was little sense of belonging to a family. Each resident was wrapped in his or her own misery and incapable of helping a seven year old boy whose life had suddenly been turned upside down. Sometimes the loneliness was too great to bear. To keep himself occupied, he sat on the grass in front of the Home and watched the traffic on Bellair Road. It developed into a game that afforded him much pleasure, for he was soon able to shut his eyes and identify each bus by the sound of its engine.

Taking pity on him, Mr Nanoo took him under his wing, giving him little tasks to perform that kept him at his side for most of the day. Pity changed to real affection as he saw the boy's eagerness to help, his desire to please and the pride he showed at each little completed task. The bond they forged helped to bridge the

uncertainty of that first year at the Home. It also gave Bhai a rudimentary understanding of English, for Mr Nanoo painstakingly communicated with him in that language to help him prepare for school the next year. Spurred on by this encouragement and by the growing approval of the older residents for whom he fetched and carried willingly, Bhai kept himself busy throughout the day, taking on tasks that were sometimes really beyond his capacity and strength. To help Jim, the worker employed by the Home, he occasionally swept the yard with a brush broom that was too large for his small hands. Before embarking on the task, he carefully tied a cloth over his nose and mouth to escape inhaling the dust. It was a habit developed in Gillitts, whenever his mother swept the yard, for he was asthmatic. Sometimes, he could be seen staggering under the weight of the chopped wood that he helped to stack into piles near the outside kitchen door. His reward for all this industry was the pleasure of being, part of a team and, in the evenings, watching the talented Mr Nanoo as he worked.

N. Lalbahadur - or Tommy Nanoo, as he was known - was a noted local Indian playwright, musician, composer and actor whose passion for music and drama soon transmitted itself to the little boy. Bhai sat cross-legged on the floor of the basement, watching as the maestro worked on his latest drama or tried out new compositions on a range of musical instruments. When Mr Nanoo encouraged him to learn to play music, he made tentative attempts on the *harmonium* and *tabla*, but soon settled for keeping beat with a metal triangle and rod. He had a good ear for rhythm. He was content to be with Mr Nanoo in the same way that he had been happy to be with his father at the flower nursery in Gillitts. There was a sense of security and stability in the relationship.

Over the next four years, he became fully involved in rehearsals for Mr Nanoo's stage productions, helping to carry stage props from the basement to the front yard and carrying instructions to and fro. He revelled in the sense of self-importance attached to these little tasks. On the night of each public performance he was in the hub of

standard two, this was no longer necessary. Responding to his thirst for knowledge, M. R Devar, G. M. Moodley, RS. Maraj and the Scoutmaster, Mr R Batohi, in particular, went out of their way to provide materials to supplement the knowledge he gained in the classroom. These teachers who embraced him with deep affection provided the impetus for his lifelong love of learning and stimulated his early ambition to become a teacher.

There were scarcely any limits to the subjects that interested him and he read avidly, spending hours over books he borrowed from the small library that the AYS had established at the Home, for use by residents and the community. He remembers with pride the day when a School Inspector from the Natal Education Department visited the school and invited the senior pupils to ask questions. Bhai's interest in astronomy led him to ask complex questions about the planetary system. Taken aback, the Inspector called him to the front of the class to commend him for his interest in subjects outside the curriculum and to encourage the other pupils to follow his example.

The Headmaster took a fatherly interest in the boy's progress, frequently taking him home for the weekends to play with his school friend, Annamalay, who stayed with him during the school term. Bhai recalls these visits as some of the happiest moments in his childhood. Apart from being indulged and fussed over by Mrs Gounder, he was encouraged to learn to type on the Headmaster's ancient typewriter - something he had once told Mr Gounder he wanted to do so that he could help the Sabha in its work. The Headmaster saw his potential and launched a programme to develop it to the full. He encouraged him to join the Scout Movement, allocated responsible supervisory tasks to him and gave him a little typing and other small duties to complete after school hours. All this contributed to Bhai's development in confidence and ability. Yet, despite the positions of prominence he was given by the school and the respectfulness of the younger children towards him, he remained a humble, well-mannered boy with a desire to please that was deeply touching.

His increasing involvement in his studies and his participation in non-academic interests had the effect of keeping him away from his mother for longer periods. In their first year at the Home, he had often lingered in the passageway outside the small room she shared with three others, all elderly and frail. She came out to him instead, and they spent a contented hour together, when he recounted his day at school. Gradually, however, as he began to bloom, she withered. During their first two years at the Home, she had managed to cope with her personal responsibilities, which included washing her family's clothing each Saturday morning and hanging it out to dry with his help. (Clothes had to be washed on the specified day and it was normal to see all the residents crowded round the single tap that served the Home, each with a container - a large tin or dish - in which soap had been softened in water before the clothes were soaked.) By the third year, however, she had become totally crippled by rheumatism, bent double and unable to move about without the aid of a stick or some kindly arm. Her small, slender frame became wracked by pain and her delicate features were prematurely lined. She kept to her bed for most of the time, attended to by one the Home's honorary medical officers.¹ The muscle in her right eyelid had begun to collapse while she was in Gillitts and that eye was now permanently closed, while vision in the other was deteriorating rapidly. Looking back on those days, Bhai believes she must have been diabetic and probably had cataracts in both eyes - but, as he says,

who knew anything about diabetes in those days? With today's advanced knowledge and techniques there would have been a chance of recovery for her - but certainly not in the early 1930s.

When his mother could no longer manage, Bhai did the laundry himself, though it was a task he struggled with at first. Eventually he learnt, from watching others, and mastered the technique of

slapping the wet clothes against a rock. If he sometimes became entangled in his mother's long skirts, he learnt rapidly how to cope. As he grew older, he washed his family's clothes early in the morning before leaving on the weekly Saturday collections round with Sabha members.

Obviously unable to help or guide her younger son, his mother had no recourse but to leave him to fend for himself. She tired easily, so that he was compelled to keep his visits short and there was barely time to do more than tend to her needs and those of Ramnarain. His brother was generally silent and withdrawn, showing no interest in anything beyond his material needs. He met Bhai's efforts to involve him in simple activities with a blank stare. On the rare occasions when he ventured outside, he kept to himself, increasingly wrapped in his own world. When he reached the age of ten, he was moved into the men's room, where he slept next to Bhai, who supervised his bathing and watched over him whenever possible. During the day Mrs Nanoo or the sweeper kept a watchful eye on him and kept him occupied with minor supervised chores around the Home.

By 1933, Bhai had even less time available to spend with his mother. He had become fully involved in the school's Hindi Club, the Boy Scout Movement and in participation in debates, speech contests and play productions. In 1933, for example, Sri Ramashankar Srivastava, the Hindi teacher whom the AYS had brought from India, was so impressed by his skill with written and spoken Hindi, that he arranged for him to speak at a function held at the Gandhi Library in Queen Street, Durban. His latent dramatic ability had already been identified by M. R. Devar, who encouraged and developed it and cast him in every school production thereafter. M. R. Devar, a well-known academic, cultural leader and radio personality was a pupil at the same school, a standard behind Bhai Rambharos. He recalls those school play productions with nostalgia:

My brother; M. R. Devar; was a teacher on the staff. He was a lover of languages, literature and the arts and he wrote many short plays and sketches which he produced. Shishupal acted in most of them - he always showed an interest in drama. When I was in Standard Five we took part in a play based on the Ramayana. I was Lutchman, the younger brother; while Shishupal was cast as Rama, the Prince of the Epic. He was excellent in the role.

These school productions were practical learning exercises that helped to develop our confidence and exposed us to the best in literature and traditional values.

M. R. Devar died, very suddenly, after falling ill at school. It was a tragic loss for the community and a devastating blow to the young boy who had flowered, under his tutorship, to give expression to that other side of his nature - the artistic, extroverted and even flamboyant stage personality.

At the Home, Bhai had become fully involved in the activity groups that Mr Nanoo established to keep the children occupied. The idea had come from Sabha members who believed they needed to channel their energies purposefully to keep out of mischief. It was accepted that Bhai would help to run the activities and supervise the younger children. Among others, there was a gardening club, a boxing club for boys and a sewing club for girls. Members of the Cato Manor community contributed their assistance as well, to make the exercise very successful. Bhai remembers with a great deal of glee the occasion when he was pitted against Ganas, a boy of his own age, in the makeshift boxing ring set up in front of the Home:

We put on the gloves and sparred for a few minutes. Then I lunged forward and landed a blow at his chest. To my utter amazement, it floored him. What an uproar there was, with the children 'screaming in excitement. Then James, a new Coloured boy who was bigger than I was, challenged me. I was flushed with success and ready to take him on, but Mr Nanoo stopped us. He felt there'd been sufficient excitement for one day.

At this stage he also began to undergo the changes associated with adolescence: his voice vacillated between tenor and bass, he seemed to be all gangly arms and legs and was very suddenly growing taller. His face, always sweet and open, now became more defined and strikingly handsome. He became self-conscious about his appearance, particularly about the shirts that were too small and the shorts that were too tight. Teachers at the school and members of the community donated used clothes to the Home, but in the past he had been happy to continue to wear what little he had. Now, for the first time, he began to take a greater interest in himself, finding the clothes that fitted him well and made him feel and look more comfortable. He still moved about on bare feet until - and the day still stands out in his memory - he received his first pair of shoes from Mr B. S. Singh, the Mayville businessman who lived in 'The Castle', a magnificent home with towers and turrets. The shoes were a size too small, but they were his and he was determined to wear them. Day after day, he squeezed his feet into them and took short exploratory walks around the Home, trying not to limp and pretending the blisters away. By dint of perseverance, he wore the leather down, softened it and stretched it, until he could walk proudly to school in them.

In 1934, at the age of fourteen, he volunteered to collect the school's mail. In the process, he gained his first personal experience of the racism that the early Indian immigrants had known only too well. Growing up in the sheltered environments of his family home and the Aryan Benevolent Home, he had little opportunity to interact with whites, or 'Europeans', as they were then known. To ensure that he was at the head of the queue at the Post Office, he left the Home very early and walked the three miles each way. There were two entrances to the Tollgate Post Office, one marked 'Europeans only', the other 'Non-Europeans'. The doors led to a single room where the two groups were separated by a metal rail. On one occasion, as he waited at the counter to be attended to, Bhai curled his fingers round the metal bars that separated the clerks

from the public. The clerk rapped his hands sharply with the edge of a ruler, saying, '*That's not there for you to put your filthy hands on!*' Turning to a colleague, she said, '*These coolies will never learn! They should go back where they came from!*' Knowledge of such racism was not new to him. Fired with enthusiasm by what he heard from Sabha officials, he had read whatever he could find on the experiences of his hero, M. K. Gandhi, in South Africa. On his pillow, he had printed, in pencil, the words of the Mahatma, '*God is Truth, God is Love*', so that they were his last conscious thought at night and first thought on awakening. When the words began to fade, he inscribed them again. He had always listened intently when adults spoke, for through them he gained an understanding of the world beyond the Home. When Council members were in the sitting room after a meeting and chatted over a cup of tea, he was there, seated cross-legged on the floor, his eyes fixed on their faces. His presence in adult company was accepted without question, for though many other children had been housed at the Home over the years, none had remained as long as he had. He was regarded as an integral part of the Home's family and somehow earned the right to be there.

He may not have understood fully the magnitude of the issues that adults discussed, but he managed to gain a general idea of the social and political problems that Indians in South Africa faced. He learnt, for example, of the iniquitous colonisation scheme - the planned re-settlement of Indians in remote areas outside South Africa. Proposed by the government, the scheme was intended to rid the country of its 'Indian problem'. Listening to his seniors talk not only broadened his understanding but also intensified his compassion for those who suffer privation and indignity. S. L. Singh, one of the founders of the Home, was delighted with his enquiring mind and actively encouraged his interest by lending him past copies of the newspaper *Indian Opinion*³ Though the Sabha distanced itself, as far as was possible, from political involvement, many of its members were either actively engaged in or supporters

of the Natal Indian Congress and were more than willing to share their knowledge of events that affected the community. Bhai's expanding horizon raised, even further, his admiration for Mr Satyadeva, Pandit Nayanah Rajh and Mr S. L. Singh, '*the Big Three*' of the Home. He came to understand and appreciate the personal sacrifices they had made for the betterment of the lives of others and each in his individual way became a model for his own life.

Mr Satyadeva was employed in the offices of the Durban City Corporation. He was a deeply religious man whose day began and ended with prayer and a humanitarian who desperately lacked the means to help others financially. He dedicated his life to their service by ministering to their spiritual and social needs, as well as providing tuition in Hindi at his home during the evenings. His outstanding qualities were his simplicity and the compassion he showed for others. When a resident at the Home died, it was a personal loss for him, and he came to pay his respects, travelling by bus from the city centre during his lunch break to do so. Serious by nature, he regarded his work as President of the Sabha as a spiritual calling and steered the AYS towards achieving the goals it had set out with in 1912. To the residents of the Home, he was a pillar of strength in times of anguish. To Bhai he was both spiritual guide and mentor.

Pandit Nayanah Rajh was also employed in the offices of the Durban Corporation, though in a different section. He came from the culturally rich and diverse community of Riverside, where he developed his skills as a linguist. Though he was Telegu-speaking by birth, he was at ease in all the other Indian languages, as well as English and Zulu. He also ran classes in the evenings to ensure the preservation and protection of mother tongue languages, though he offered lessons in both Hindi and Tamil, assisted by his wife. Swami Shankaranand encouraged him to study the Vedic scriptures and ordained him as the first Vedic priest in South Africa. He was a foundation member of the AYS and the Home and of numerous

other religious, linguistic and cultural organisations. His powerful and resonant voice made a vivid impression on his listeners as he chanted Vedic *mantras* or conducted weddings and ceremonies. A well-known figure on the bicycle that was his mode of transport, he travelled long distances in his service as a priest, even cycling from Riverside to the Home for the Sunday *hawan* or to officiate at weddings of residents. His gentle personality drew a positive response from the older folk of the Home who were at ease speaking to him, for he always responded in their mother tongue.

A man quite unlike the other two in his approach to life was the dynamic Mr Singh - or '*Uncle S. L.*', as Bhai called him. Employed as a driver for Macpherson's Minerals in Durban, he made it his duty to visit the Home every Friday while on his rounds. He had an informed mind, excellent communication skills and boundless energy, all of which he utilised in the service of his community. Respected and admired wherever he went, he was an active executive member in an amazing number of social, cultural, welfare, religious and sporting organisations. His piercing eyes and trademark moustache lent him an air of distinction, even as they warned that he was not a man to be taken lightly. There were very few who cared to earn his wrath, for he did not tolerate fools, though he possessed an innate generosity of spirit and a deep capacity to care for others. A deeply religious man with a practical approach to life, S. L. Singh was a founder member of the Home and had served it as both secretary and treasurer. His sound advice was sought on all matters concerning the Home and the school. To Bhai, he was teacher and guide, always ready to counsel, to answer questions and give information. In many respects, he was also a father-figure.

These three men brought their vision and intensity of purpose to bear on the lives of all the residents at the Home. Their influence on Bhai's life was profound, as his stay at the Home and his interaction with them was of the longest duration, beginning when he was a child and continuing for the rest of their lives.

There were many others who, in different ways, also stimulated his social and spiritual development. Among them were those who came regularly on Saturdays, from all parts of Durban, to give the Home a thorough cleaning and to tend to the needs of the residents. Bhai recalls with particular fondness some of those early volunteers who gave their service regularly: Pandit Purthap, upright and somewhat stern; 'Papa' Bispath's genial nature and smiling countenance; Pandit Tulsiram Maharaj's serious attention to detail and Beeth Ramnarain's total concentration as he attended to the boiling of bed linen and blankets, a task he had taken on as his own. Most of all, he remembers the barber, 'Uncle' Bechan, who cycled from Red Hill to cut the hair of young and old, trim beards and neaten moustaches, all as a voluntary service to the Home. Bhai always stood on Mr Bechan's right side, holding the tin of hot water, the brush and the shaving stick, with a towel draped over his shoulder. His own wavy black hair was always trimmed last and with loving care, for they had worked together for many years and the barber became very fond of the boy.

These volunteers periodically boiled the bed linen and blankets in large drums set over an open fire, in the attempt to destroy lice and bed bugs. They washed down walls, floors and windows, deloused the premises and carried the mattresses - some of them soaked and stained with urine - into the sun. They were people from the different social strata of the Indian community who had their own families and homes - but their commitment to the AYS and its call for service to the needy drove them to perform even the most menial tasks with both enthusiasm and dedication. Bhai developed a sense of pride in working alongside such men and women and almost unconsciously imbibed their value system into his own. Out of it came his own commitment to serve the needy, which became a passion that has never abated. These Sabha volunteers helped to shape the course of his life by their example.

When he is asked what the role of the residents was, in all this activity, Bhai responds by saying:

Most of them were too old or frail or too young to undertake these tasks. They tended to their personal needs and those who could, helped with day-to-day cleaning and preparation of meals. The fact that a sweeper had to be employed indicates their level of dependence. Sabha members performed the larger, heavier tasks and those that required specialised skills.

Living at the Home with destitute people of different religious persuasions - Christian, Moslem and Hindu - and tending to their needs, engraved on his young mind the helplessness of the old, the sickly and the needy. With them, he formed a strong bond that closely resembled that of child to parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. He assisted them in small ways: fetching water for them to drink, finding the spectacles they constantly mislaid and keeping them company when they were ill. He showed interest as they recalled their past, and, given a willing listener, they went down memory lane, recalling episodes in their lives at great length. At such times he asked many questions to broaden his own understanding of the vicissitudes of life that were part of the South African Indian experience.

In 1933, when the Home was registered under the *Children's Act* as a Home for Children in Need of Care, the number of children admitted rose sharply. The three provinces in the country where Indians lived turned for help to the only Home available to children who were not White. They soon outnumbered the adults. Because he had been there for so long and understood the rules set by the Sabha, Bhai was asked to induct the children into the Home's way of life. He felt a strong kinship with them and took them under his wing, even though some of them were older than he was. Their confusion and loneliness and their tears were constant reminders of his own position when he first arrived at the Home:

I remember one entire family of youngsters who came to the Home, five siblings whose father had died shortly before. They were from Benoni and were sent to us by the Welfare Department. They were

not accompanied by anyone, just put on the train and sent to Durban. I think the Home made arrangements to pick them up. They were confused and frightened when they arrived and in my role as 'monitor-in-charge' I kept them company, talked to them and helped in any way I could to relieve some of their pain. They stayed with us for a long time before returning to Benoni. I've often wondered how they (and others in their position) adapted to living with their families again.

I've visited them since, in Benoni. They're married and have children and grandchildren, yet I am always welcomed as their older brother 'Bhai'!

The larger numbers necessitated additional fund-raising drives so that the residents could be provided with special treats during the festivals of Eid, Christmas and Deepavali. It became customary to raise funds in the month before Deepavali, for example, by sending the children of the Home, accompanied by members of the Sabha, from door to door in Cato Manor and Mayville, singing religious songs. It required a great deal of supervised practice at the Home - a task that fell automatically to Bhai. He gathered the children together in the afternoons, marched them down to the front garden and set about teaching them the songs they were to sing, very much in the way a choirmaster does. For the children, it was great fun to be out in the evenings and to receive little treats from the householders, along with the monetary donations which were handed to the Sabha members. These festivals were the highlights of the year for the residents. Donors provided fireworks, gifts of clothing and special meals and the residents of Cato Manor sent parcels of sweetmeats. He reminisces about those occasions, a smile lighting up his eyes:

We waited patiently for afternoon tea, when each of us received our share in our outstretched hands. The children got theirs first and there was great excitement as we ran out and sat on the steps, savouring every last morsel. The excitement continued as

darkness fell, for then the lighting of fireworks began. Everyone, irrespective of his or her religious affiliation, joined in the festivities and watched the display.

Such interaction bred religious and cultural tolerance of the highest order, arousing a universal consciousness that transcended the boundaries set by different faiths. It brought us together as a family.

He recalls vividly the excitement that swept through the Home on Guy Fawkes Day. For weeks prior to the 5th of November, the School's Scout Group busied itself building up the guy with every scrap of material they could find, until they had a drooping human-like figure that they carried proudly through the streets, chanting the familiar verse. Very few of the children at the Home knew who Guy Fawkes was. Bhai had found out from his teachers and told the children the story of the plot to set fire to the British Houses of Parliament but impressed on them the symbolic punishment that the firing of the guy represented. He had been horrified when he realised that, for years, he had chanted the bloodthirsty words without thinking. Never one to spoil simple fun, he nevertheless led the scouts on their march and collected the offerings from each house. Some gave fruit, others sweets and still others donated coins towards the purchase of fireworks to set the effigy alight. This was done ceremoniously in front of the Home, with every mobile resident out on the verandah and steps, while Sabha members and the Home's employees kept a watchful eye on the children.

He enjoyed a warm relationship with these employees, who, each in his own way, contributed to his development in other directions. He was instinctively drawn to the Zulu-speaking cleaner who slept alone in the basement of the Home. The need to earn a living had brought Jim to Durban and separated him from his wife and family in Zululand. He had a Zulu name but had been given the name 'Jim' by a previous, white, employer who had not taken the trouble to learn to pronounce it. Bhai often carried his supper down to the

basement and ate it there, in his older friend's company. They worked hard at learning to communicate, the one struggling with Zulu words and phrases and the other becoming hopelessly confused with the intricacies of the English language. On the day Jim left to start work at a local store, Bhai felt the loss keenly, for Jim had been his only real, close friend at the Home. His relationship with the children at the Home was different. Most of them were younger than he and to them he was an older brother, guide and mentor who supervised their homework, tutored them when necessary and was there at all times to console and comfort them. When he studied for tests and examinations, they were his sounding board, listening in perplexed fascination as he expounded, teacher-like, on each subject. With Jim it had been a quiet, undemanding relationship that brought each comfort.

When Mr Nambiar joined the staff as caretaker, everyone was amazed at Bhai's ability to get on with him. An irascible man with an acid tongue, he had a loud, rasping voice and fearsome look that made everyone scatter out of his way. Yet a kind heart lay hidden under that ferocious manner. Just as Mr Nanoo had done, Mr Nambiar took Bhai under his wing and in his gruff manner showed his pleasure in the boy's school achievements and awards, almost as though they were his own. No one connected with the Home knew that he was widely respected as a traditional healer or that people came from far and wide to see him in their affliction. His room stood apart from the main building and his visitors usually arrived at night. Bhai was allowed to watch the proceedings, under oath not to divulge what was going on, as Mr Nambiar was afraid of the Sabha's reaction. His admiration grew as he saw the caretaker's uncanny ability to diagnose problems even before people spoke and by the miraculous healing power of his hands, which he placed on the afflicted person as he prayed. Above all, he was touched by the selfless and free service rendered by the healer and the gratitude of those who came to him. It was a good lesson for him not to judge people by their appearance and manner,

but to look for the quality that lay beneath. Mr Nambiar left the Home after two years and with him went a colourful episode in the boy's life. He missed the caretaker's gruff voice and peremptory attitude more than he thought he would.

The couple that replaced Mr Nambiar were a husband and wife team who were quite unlike their predecessors. Mr and Mrs Lalloo Singh devoted themselves to the upliftment of the less fortunate and brought with them a refreshing breath of change. They introduced a systematic programme of activities for the residents, and particularly for the children, whom they embraced as their own. Tireless in their efforts to lift the spirits of those in their charge, they worked to re-establish the residents' faith in themselves. They put Bhai in charge of the younger children and guided him to ensure that the children's academic and spiritual education flowered under his care. A gentle, soft-spoken couple, they personified love and brought a new dimension to the concept of a 'Home' and what it should strive to achieve. They were a tower of strength to him as his mother grew more and more frail.

His delicately built mother had been unable to keep down her food for many weeks and suffered from excruciating pain. By now severely hampered by rheumatism, almost blind, and bedridden, she had to be helped by Mrs Singh and the women with whom she shared the dormitory. The Home's doctors attended to her but seemed to know that her end was near, for they spoke to Bhai, advised him what to do in emergencies and generally paved the way for the inevitable. He spent as much time as possible with her, sitting at her side, massaging her thin arms and legs, applying a vinegar-soaked handkerchief to her forehead and stroking his fingers through her thinning hair. He looked at that once beautiful face and thought with some pain of how their physical separation, her ill-health and his widening sphere of interest and involvement had eroded the closeness they once shared. Yet to hear her calling him '*heti*' in her soft voice and to see her pride in his achievements always made him feel special. On the day of her death in 1934, the last Tuesday

of July, he was in the dormitory in the early hours of the morning, having tip-toed in so that he would not disturb the other sleeping women. The coldness of her hands and feet the night before had frightened him and he had tried to warm them with a cloth soaked in hot water. That morning, though not fully conscious, she seemed to recognise his voice and put out her hand to touch his face. He was loathe to leave her but believed he had to, as it was the Home's vegetable collection day, when he accompanied Beeth Ramnarain to the city centre at five o'clock in the morning during the school vacations. With baskets in hand they went from stall to stall in the Indian market, collecting donations to supplement the Home's provisions. When he returned to the Home, an agitated Ramnarain came running to him, crying, 'Ma dead! Ma dead!' He put his arm round his brother and together they went straight to the bathroom, where her body had already been placed on the cold floor. It was the custom at the Home, necessitated by their frequent experience of delays in obtaining police sanction to bury the bodies. Though he cannot explain why, he did not look at her face, but knelt at her side and prayed, while Ramnarain walked round and round, sobbing uncontrollably. Leaving his brother in the care of Mr Singh, he walked to the Cato Manor Police Station to report her death, as he had done on numerous occasions when other residents died. He returned to the Home to wait for the police chief to arrive, praying that he would come quickly. In many other cases in the past year, the policeman had arrived two or three days after the death was reported, saying that he had been busy. The corpses had already begun decomposing.

As he waited on the steps of the Home, Bhai made a flower garland to place on her body. When the policeman eventually arrived and her burial was authorised, he watched her being placed on the back of the lorry that Mr Ramsudh, a local transporter, placed at the service of the Home on such occasions. Taking his still agitated brother by the hand he followed on foot to the Cato Manor Cemetery to perform once again the funeral rites over the body of a

dead parent. This time there was no grief, but a sense of calm that paid a fitting farewell to a mother whose life for many years had been filled with unendurable physical pain. Yet her death left a lasting regret that he did not fulfil her last request:

When I saw her on the preceding Friday afternoon, she asked for jelebi, the sticky sweetmeat she loved. I had very little money - just a penny (one cent) that a visitor to the Home gave me. At the sweetmeat shop I was told that a pound of jelebi cost a shilling (ten cents), so instead I bought a little boondhi. I was so stupid, so nai"ve! I could have bought a single jelebi or the broken pieces, but didn't even think of it.

For the first time in his life Bhai became fully cognisant of his and Ramnarain's real circumstances, and of their indebtedness to the AYS and the Home. The sympathy shown to them at the funeral, the genuine concern of Sabha members and the surrounding community, as well as the pitying looks and extra attention he received from the residents drove home to him how fortunate they were. He expresses this eloquently:

Much later in life I realised how the depression caused by the loss of a dear one is offset by the warmth of the hearts of persons who genuinely empathise with you. When your mother dies, you are carried away into the deep sea of sorrow and feel that you are drowning. Then, by the grace of good persons around you, you are rescued. You accept the inevitable and adjust by rising to a higher level of consciousness.

Until his mother's death he had given little thought to the service the AYS and the Home provided, especially in regard to his own life. He had accepted the care and love shown to him and his family as routine; he had felt deeply for those who came to the Home in their desperate plight, yet not once had he seen himself as one of them. Now, overwhelmed by the sensitivity of those who

had given him a chance in life, without ostentation or the need for gratitude, he vowed to make himself worthy of their love. He began by writing down his feelings and hopes, in both prose and poetry and was rarely to be seen without a book in his hand. A portion of one composition, written as a Hindi class exercise when he was in Standard Four, is translated below. It expresses his feelings about being an orphan and shows his growth in sensitivity, a remarkable lack of self-pity and a determined desire for self-improvement:

Life of an Orphan

My father washed his hands off the world when I was seven years old. My mother, too, separated from me for good a few years thereafter. I was bereft of parents and was living in a Home for orphaned children and homeless adults. Compassion for me began increasing. Whoever saw me spoke to me with love and tenderness. People often looked towards me and said, 'Poor boy is an orphan.' At times I heard them and looked at myself from top to bottom to learn what was the difference between me and other children that as soon as people saw me they came to know I am an orphan.

At first I saw no difference, but gradually I realised that my clothes were dirty, my hands and face were not clean, my hair was not combed and my ways were timid. Whatever edible I received I ate and was satisfied.

I grew older according to this pattern, without the guidance of a mother and father. How to eat and how to interact? How to make the body and clothes clean? How to communicate with elders and the young? How to develop lofty thoughts and inner communication? How to read and what to read?

When the life of a child is moulded under such situations, how depressing his life can be. When one is bereft of motherly and fatherly advice in the formative years his life is filled with hardships.

This growth into early maturity - he was only fourteen at the time - led him to ask the Sabha for any work he could do to help the Secretary, Mr Ramklass, who was in full time employment. They were only too happy to accept. They knew of his painstaking practice on the typewriter at the school and of the letters he typed for the Headmaster. Soon he began to spend most afternoons in the office, hammering away at the keys with two fingers, working on letters of appeal, lists of potential donors and minutes of meetings. The office was in the new block of administration rooms and dormitories which had been built by Mr B. Bechoo, owner of a construction company. Like all the other members of the Sabha, he gave his services free of charge. The expansion of the premises was essential to accommodate the growing numbers of people of all religious faiths and from different parts of the country who sought shelter and care. Bhai's involvement in Sabha activities meant greater interaction with the officials and members in a different social and physical environment. They were impressed by his conscientiousness and obvious desire to do more. Inviting him to join the Sabha and attend Council Meetings, they drew him into their more complex business tasks and encouraged him to participate actively. He was allocated a small office (which doubled as a bedroom) so that he could cope with schoolwork and Sabha responsibilities without having to move between the men's dormitory and the office.

Concomitant with this easing into the structures of the Sabha was his desire to learn more about the Vedic scriptures and how to perform the different prayers and ceremonies. The opportunity came when he shared his room with Pandit Goberdhan Panday, the new Hindi teacher from Pietermaritzburg. They spent many hours discussing Hinduism, interpretation of the scriptures, the Vedic *Dharma* and the significance of each stage of the *hawan* and other prayers. He remembers vividly the intensity of his teacher's voice as he spoke of the four essential stages of prayer - *concentration, recitation, comprehension and execution*.

Four years after entering the Home he had been asked to assist Mr Ramashanker (the Hindi teacher at the time) with the *hawan* held each Sunday morning and had memorised many of the prayers that were recited. Each evening he conducted the *sandhya* with the children of the Home and others from Cato Manor who joined them. Neither of these services stilled his longing to know more and to do more. When Pandit Panday, was called away to the bedside of a seriously ill relative and Mr Satyadeva asked him to perform the *hawan*, Bhai was more than willing to do so. When it ended, it was obvious from the praises that poured in from all sides that he had done well. Following this, there were numerous requests from the Cato Manor community for 'the boy Pandit from the Home' to officiate at family prayers. The first was at 'Lion's Den,' the family home of Mr B.M. Singh. A landmark in Cato Manor - a veritable mansion which stood on a hill across the road from the Home - its name derived from the statues of lions on either side of the long sweep of stone steps leading from Bellair Road to the house. Bhai often visited it to play with his friend Munna, the younger son of Mr B. K. Singh. Performing the *hawan* in that home made him feel he was at last repaying some of their kindness to him and to the Home. He did the same for many members of the Sabha during his last three years at the school. He speaks with fondness of these occasions, when he was a boy amongst men:

The hawan was always held in the evenings or weekend afternoons, so that they did not affect our collection drives on Saturday or the Sunday morning prayer. I was young and still had much to learn, but the reception accorded to me was always warm. I don't know who was the more respectful in attitude - myself in the presence of my seniors or the families in the presence of their pandit in his school shorts!

After the prayer I usually sat down to a meal with the men and very often found myself trying to answer their questions or engaged in a discussion of the scriptures. I remember Mr B.D. Lalla saying,

after a hawan at his home, that I should be sent to India to study the scriptures. I saw Uncle S. L. nod and my heart thudded in response!

Prem Sundar, S. L.'s youngest daughter, recalls the willing service he gave for many years, from the time she was a child:

Once a month, Bhai came so willingly, so graciously, to our home to perform the hawan. He also conducted the hawan on Divali morning, as he did in many other homes on that day and all other festival days, often late into the evening. Service to others was his credo from the earliest days. The needs of the self never entered into his consciousness.

In many respects, his devotion to prayer and to service accelerated Bhai's development in other ways. In his last three years at AYS School (Standards Four to Six) he astounded his teachers with his all-round progress. He topped the class and excelled in Hindi, English and Arithmetic in particular and there was a greater confidence and maturity and strong communication skills with people who were much older and wiser than he was. With children he was outgoing, kind and very caring and had the ability to draw them to himself. When a teacher was absent from school, Mr Gounder had no hesitation in asking him to take over the lessons for part of the day. He knew Bhai's ability to teach younger ones from his knowledge of the help the boy gave the children at the Home. He had already seen how all the pupils at the school looked up to him and obeyed him without question.

Bhai's strong sense of responsibility and his leadership potential were given every opportunity to develop further. One of the tasks assigned to him was keeping a tally of outgoing and returned school benches which the school hired out to the community; another was his appointment, for three consecutive years, as bell monitor, one of the most responsible tasks at the school. In his final two years at the school, he was appointed Head Prefect. He addressed the school

assembly on a number of occasions, speaking to the pupils on subjects of general interest as well as on the significance of the Muslim, Christian and Hindu festivals. The Headmaster turned to him for constructive help when a pupil was not behaving well or not performing at the expected level. As a scout, he demonstrated his skill in organising and leading the troop and will go down in the history books as the first recipient of the Mahato Shield for First Aid. In 1936, he was chosen to represent his school at the Scouts' Jamboree in Johannesburg - a vivid memory to this day, as it was his very first journey to a city outside Durban. All in all, it was a period marked by numerous achievements and the teachers predicted a great future for their star pupil.

Mr 1. R. Devar describes Bhai, who held the exalted position of head prefect, from his own perspective as a fellow pupil at the school:

We all admired Rambharos, respected him and obeyed him. Friendly, warm and always smiling, he was a natural leader and our role model. There was that special quality about him that won him everyone's regard. Our teachers all loved him and our headmaster almost doted on him!

Bhai attributes his success to the hard-working and caring AYS School teachers, for whom he is unstinting in his praise. He believes that without their help and support he would never have done as well at his studies. J. R. Devar enthusiastically endorses his view in the following tribute:

We had a wonderful set of teachers, who were largely products of private study or part-time training classes. Their qualifications Indian Teachers' Junior and Senior Certificates - were obtained after a Standard Six education. They were some of the finest human beings it has been my pleasure to know. Humble, very sincere, ver} loving and concerned, they taught diligently. Discipline was strict, but there was warmth, love and happiness all around us.

It was not only in the academic and service fields that Bhai flowered. He was secretary of the school's Hindi Club, which produced plays and organised speech contests and debates. To the music group, he brought the expertise on the metal triangle that had first developed under Mr Nanoo's guidance and then under the tutelage of a talented musician and friend, R. R. Persad. The band they formed comprised, among others, Sewpersad Rambaran, his brother Rampersad (band leader and *harmonium* player) and their sister, Sona. This talented family trio brought to the music group their professionalism and dedication to culture. They practised at the school when lessons for the day were over and soon were performing at all special functions of the Sabha and the Home, as well as at religious ceremonies in private homes. Many years later, the same band played at Bhai's wedding, while Sona sang the celebratory *mangalam*.

In 1936, he had his first *real* experience of what it would be like to be a teacher. The AYS Hindi Patshala conducted Hindi classes in the afternoons for the Cato Manor community. From his first year at the school, Bhai had been an outstanding pupil, as attested to by the report written on his progress by the Patshala's Principal, Mr G. Maharaj, on 26 July 1935. It is quoted *verbatim*:

This certifies that Sisupal R. has been a pupil of this school where, after making first-rate progress in his studies, he successfully passed the fifth standard.

I found him a good, hardworking boy, willing, obedient and reliable. Having been a brilliant and a promising young scholar, he had the occasion to serve in the capacity of an assistant to me several times, and this pupil should be given every encouragement to further his studies.

Because of the large enrolment for the afternoon Hindi class in 1936, Pandit Panday asked him to assist. Undaunted by the fact that many of his 'pupils' were far older than he was, Bhai painstakingly

took them through the intricacies of grammar and composition. In their eyes he was now both '*pandit*' and '*guru*' and they accorded him all the respect due to him in these role functions. The sense of fulfilment that teaching brought him made him even more determined to pursue it as a career.

As the year progressed, however, he became concerned about whether he would be able to continue his studies into high school. As a resident of the Home, he had received a free primary school education - but further studies were a different, costly matter. Again and again, his teachers had predicted his entry into the prestigious Sastri College which selected students according to proven academic ability. As he soon learned, this was not to be. While everyone understood his plight and all wished they could help him, the AYS and the ABH Council realised they could not support or seek financial assistance for one pupil at the expense of the Home and the school. Whatever money they had raised had been used to extend the building. The number of residents had almost doubled and their needs had to come first. The Council assured him that he could stay on at the Home for as long as necessary and promised to help him look for employment. Beyond that there was little they could do for him.

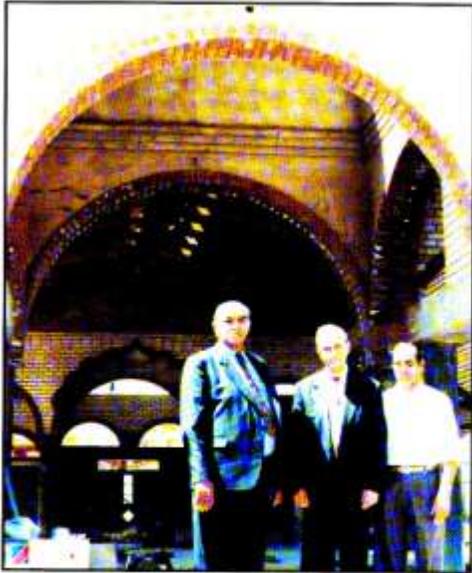
He was bitterly disappointed at first. To have come this far, to have done so well academically and to have to stop short was almost more than he could take. He soon came to accept his lot philosophically, however, for he realised that the Home had given him a start and the rest was up to him. It had to be so. He vowed to himself that he *would* study, that he *would* become a teacher one day. Anjalay Thaver, his close friend and competitor in the classroom was certain, he knew, to pursue their dream to teach and he was glad for her. They had often talked about it. He knew she would succeed for she was determined and purposeful in everything she did. What was hard to bear was her horrified disappointment for him, which was based on her awareness that her family circumstances were going to give her a chance to make



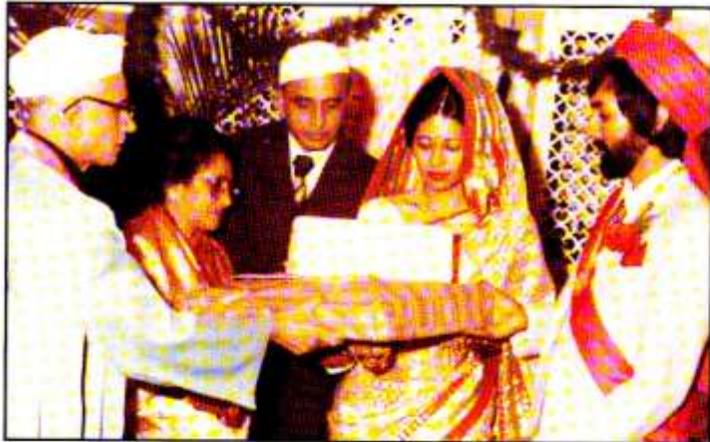
Procession through the town - Ajmer, India 1983



Procession in Delhi 1992



1998: At the Uitenhage Temple Site with Ramesh Lalla and Bhavan Daya of the Hindu Mandai



Reshma's Wedding at the City Hall (1981) Sams and Bhai hand over gifts to their new son-in-law.



S. Rambharos (left) President of the ABH, presents The 74th Anniversary Brochure to the Minister of Social Welfare and Population Development: Prince Gideon Zulu

something of her life, while he had no one to fall back upon. They both knew he would have to look for work after the Primary School Certificate Examinations.

Notes:

- 1. Dr A.K Seedat initiated the voluntary medical service in the early years of the Home, assisted by Dr Lello. The first Honorary Medical Officers were Dr M. G. Naidoo and Dr K. Macken Mistry.*
- 2. Sankrit epic of ancient India that incorporates the ideals of heroism, devotion and loyalty, through its depiction of the life of Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu.*
- 3. First Indian newspaper, started by Mahatma Gandhi on 4 June 1903.*
- 4. The Orange Free State legislated against the presence of Indians, who were not permitted to reside there. Under exceptional circumstances, they could apply for a permit to travel through the province, but had to leave it by nightfall. Any Indian found to be in the province illegally was arrested, imprisoned and 'deported', after paying a heavy fine.*



With friends from the Scout Group



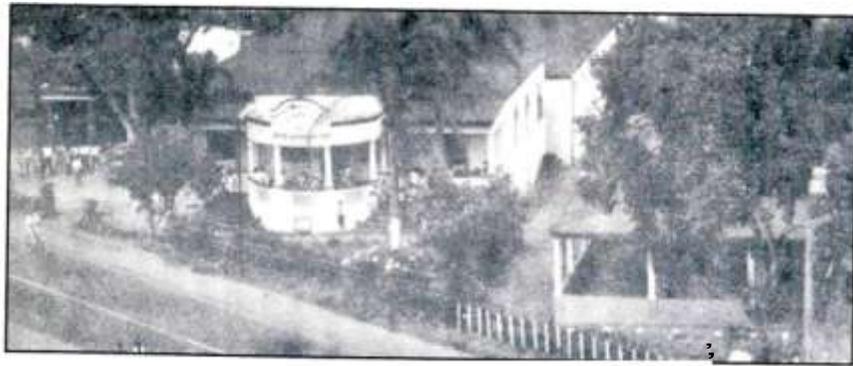
On the verandah of the Home

S.



*Bhai Rambharos with his friends
S. Ragoobeer and (seated) S.
Manohar (M. Somera) of
Umkomaas*

Bhai Rambharos



The refurbished Home (centre) with the AYS School on the right

CHAPTER 4

AT WORK AND AT PLAY

Once the school examinations were over and he had bade a sad farewell to the staff and pupils of the AYS School, Bhai threw himself into work for the Sabha, taking over most of the typing and filing from the Secretary. He wrote letters of appeal for donations to the Home, undertook to send out notices of meetings and frequently took down the minutes of meetings himself. Being busy kept his mind off his anxiety about his future. In the meantime, everyone associated with the Home tried to find employment for him, though it was a difficult task. It was the pre-war period, when uncertainty hung over most of the world and businesses were unwilling to expand or take on additional staff.

The hours he spent in the office gave him additional insight into the sacrifices that members of the Sabha made to serve people like himself. None of them had a car and many of them lived far from the Home, yet they were always there when needed. He had watched them as they left after an evening meeting, making their way in little groups to the bus-stop or setting out to walk the distance to their homes. Some, like Pandit Nayanah Rajh, had to travel first to town and then board a bus to get to their homes. Most of those who were actively involved were married men with families. They earned little, but their membership fees were always paid on time and they dug deep into their pockets to help avert any crisis at the Home. As he typed out lists of donors, amounts collected, areas to be covered in on-going fund-raising drives and transcribed the various suggestions made to increase the viability of the service given, he

thought long and hard, trying to work out practices and procedures that would make the tasks lighter for all concerned. He drew up a chart which he affixed to the wall of the office. On it he pencilled any idea that came to mind to raise funds: sports functions at the school, bazaars, sponsored activities and even a 'penny a month' collection drive in the areas around the Home. Though the ideas took a long time to come, they were the beginning of a lifetime's occupation.

Four months after he left school, at a time when he had begun to despair of finding employment, Bhai was overjoyed to receive an offer of work at Singh's Wood and Coal Yard, which belonged to Mr B. K. Singh, a brother of the philanthropic B. M. Singh. The offer came from the owner's son, Ranjith, who managed the business but was struggling to cope with the volume of work. As his father rarely came to the yard and was unwilling to assist in its day to day affairs, he needed an assistant whom he could trust, to take over the clerical work and also run the office when he was away. His uncle had suggested that Bhai was ideal for the position. Ranjith had readily agreed, for he was aware of his capacity for loyalty and hard work, qualities well known in Cato Manor. Though they moved in vastly different circles, the two young men had met at functions at the Home and when Bhai performed *hawan* at 'Lion: y Den' or went there to visit his friend Munna (Ranjith's younger brother).

Ranjith had a strong sense of humour and a carefree attitude to most things apart from his management of the business. To that he gave his full attention and looked for ways to expand, as his family's entire financial resources were locked in it. He knew that if his father gave his attention to the business, there was a chance of their doing well, but in this he was constantly disappointed. As Bhai's employer, he was friendly in a brotherly way and readily showed his appreciation for work well done. He offered his new employee a salary of three pounds (six rands) a month, which was above average when one considers Bhai's relative youth and

inexperience. That lack of knowledge of the working environment, he says, showed itself on his first day at the yard:

The telephone rang and as Ranjith was out in the yard, I picked it up gingerly. I had never used a telephone before. It was one of those old-fashioned, heavy ones. Because the person at the other end was so far away - in Riverside - I shouted as loudly as I could, thinking he wouldn't hear me otherwise!

And that wasn't all. I pressed the ear-piece so hard against my ear that it turned red and hurt for the rest (of) the week! That's how uninformed and inexperienced I was.

The work he was to do was simple and straightforward - take messages, write down orders and dates of delivery in the correct book, collect and receipt payments and see that the orders went out on time. Ranjith supervised him closely for the first week, but soon realised that his new employee was a quick learner and a good acquisition to the firm. He was able to leave him totally in charge during his absence, knowing that the business was in good hands.

For the first few months, Bhai travelled to the yard at Lord's Siding (near the Durban Railway Station) as a pillion passenger on Ranjith's powerful motorcycle - the one he had often waited for outside the Home so that he could watch it as it roared past. On the first day, as they made their way down the hill towards the city, Ranjith pointed out to him the places they were speeding past by shouting out the names. Riding pillion was a hair-raising experience at first, but he quickly learnt how to compensate for balance and began to enjoy the wind on his face and the heady sense of freedom that only a motorcycle offers. Soon, however, he began to feel the need for physical exercise, as his work at the office was largely sedentary. On occasion, to tone his muscles, he joined the labourers and heaved shovels of coal from the storage mounds onto the trucks, but this was far too sporadic to satisfy him. It could not compensate for the long walks he had enjoyed in the

past or the energetic muscle toning exercises he used to do on a regular basis, immediately after rising. He hit upon the solution one afternoon, and, for the next eight and a half years, he walked from the Home to Lord's Siding, a distance of approximately ten kilometres at that time of old, winding roads. Ranjith thought he was insane, while the bus drivers he knew so well insisted on giving him a lift and would not accept a refusal!

The early start to each day suited him. He had become accustomed to awakening before sunrise to perform his ablutions and prayers before the other residents stirred. He found that walking to work in the fresh morning air was the ideal beginning to each day as his mind was uncluttered and receptive to deeper, philosophical thinking, before he became caught up in the day-today supervision of the yard. More importantly, he now had time to read as he walked and used the opportunity to study the Hindu scriptures and practise the *mantras* he still needed to learn. There had been very little time during the last three years to do this. The daily walk also gave him the opportunity to appreciate the lush natural vegetation that lined his route to the city. On the motorcycle they had sped past, while the need to remain alert at each curve had kept his eyes on the road ahead. Now he came to know others who used the route he took daily and had the chance to greet and be greeted by people outside the houses that he passed. Above all, he was exercising his body - doing what invigorated him most.

In 1937, shortly after he had commenced work at the yard, he was inspired to exercise his body and discipline his mind after listening to two eminent proponents of the *Vedic Dharma*. Professor Yashpal, an outstanding exponent of Yoga, visited Durban in June. He was followed by Pandit Rishiram, a learned scholar of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*' and the *Bhagavad Gita*, who also launched the Gandhi- Tagore Lectureship Trust to promote ongoing interaction between Indians in South Africa and Vedic scholars from India. Both were guests of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, the central, unifying body that co-ordinated the work of all Vedic organisations

in Natal. Bhai was riveted by Professor Yashpal's demonstration of his mastery of Yoga - he was 'buried alive' for two hours at Currie's Fountain, emerging unscathed and unruffled, before thousands of disbelieving spectators. As a direct result of this, Bhai began a daily regimen of yoga exercises and meditation each morning. It has become a way of life with him. He was similarly motivated by listening to Pandit Rishiram's learned discourses on the scriptures. When the Pandit returned to South Africa in 1945, Bhai had the opportunity to interact with him on a more intense, personal level, as an official of the APS. His decision to engage in studying the scriptures was the result, though, given the paucity of local Vedic scholars, he had to wait until Pandit Nardev Vedalankar arrived in South Africa in 1947, to achieve this goal. He has devoted a large part of his life to studying the scriptures, translating them and speaking on them. In many ways it may be said that these two Vedic scholars contributed to his developing spiritual awareness by helping him to gain focus and control over his life. He found an inner strength and peace in those early days that have guided him and nourished him even in moments of greatest despair.

At the yard there was little variation in his work schedule. Once he had completed his tasks, he had much time on his hands. Whenever it was possible, he went out into the yard and sat with the Indian and African labourers during their lunch break. Most of them were illiterate women who communicated with him in Hindi or broken English. At first they were uncomfortable in his presence because he was '*the office*' but soon his simplicity and friendliness won them over. He was genuinely interested in them and their families; what they told him about their lives was both informative and instructive. The Indians were from Railway Barracks and Magazine Barracks, while most of the Africans lived at the Thokoza Hostel in Grey Street. He was fascinated to hear of their close-knit communal life and of the rich cultural traditions that succeeded in spanning linguistic differences.

The workers were interested in his life as well and questioned him about the Home and the work he did for the AYS. They were disbelieving when he told them he wrote the minutes of Sabha meetings in Hindi, and begged him to write down their names and those of family members so that they could take the slips of paper home to show their families. Some of the older women dropped the formality of 'sir' and took to calling him 'Bhai' and showed their fondness for him by bringing him delicacies to eat- such as *vadde*, *appam* and *roti*.

Often the owners of the other coal yards near the station - the Bodasinghs and the Mackanjees, for example - dropped in to see Ranjith. He stood on good terms with all of them and introduced his young clerk to them as his 'Bhai'. When Ranjith was away, they came to chat to him or invited him over to their yard for a cup of tea. He says of them:

There was very good rapport amongst the different owners of the coal yards - no competitiveness or cut-throat tactics. If one of them needed an additional lorry, it was lent by another, at no cost.

I was very much younger than they were, but they treated me as an equal and we had many enlightening discussions. They lent me copies of The Leader,² which helped me understand the political problems of the time and contributed to my growing awareness of the injustices in our country.

Sometimes, the lorry drivers came into the office to chat and the conversation invariably turned to the war. As they knew the Home did not have a radio, they gave him details of the news broadcasts. Conversation revolved around the anticipated food rationing, the higher price of goods and the fuel shortage that might cost them their livelihood. They had ingenious plans to overcome the problems created by the blackout, which they urged him to tryout, although their suggestions were all either illegal or impracticable. Listening to their complaints made him realise how fortunate they were at the Home, where the war demanded few sacrifices. Mr Ramawtar's daily donation to the Home of six loaves of bread

continued uninterrupted; the free supply of food and vegetables from the Indian traders still came in, though, because of the blackout, they had to be collected during the day. Mr Satyadeva, Pandit Nayanah Rajh and Mr Ramklass worked in the city and devoted their lunch breaks to this task. Meat and fish were donated and brought to the Home by Mr B. M. Singh and Mr A. Dalip Singh, long-standing members of the Sabha, who were both residents of Cato Manor. All in all, there was sufficient for their needs, even though mealie rice was substituted for rice and potatoes were scarce. As many of the residents were old and feeble, they were allowed to use lanterns shaded with dark cloth or paper after the curtains were drawn. The only real difficulty was negotiating the distance to the outside pit latrines in the dark.

Though he did not tell the others this, he had been appointed by a Government Department to monitor the blackout in Mayville. He has never found out who submitted his name for this position. It meant walking the streets in the intense dark, with only the moon to sometimes light his way, checking that every light in every building was off. The roads were quiet, as vehicle owners were bound by the blackout rules and no one ventured out onto the roads after dark. The punishment for ignoring the rules was heavy. Sometimes he saw entire families sitting outside their homes, scanning the skies or following the searchlights that probed the darkness for a droning aeroplane that he could hear but not see.

The long walks up and down the roads of Mayville gave him time to think about his future. The yearning to study further was still uppermost in his mind, as was his goal to become a teacher. He began to panic when he realised that almost three years had passed and he had done nothing about it. He turned to S. L. Singh for advice. After he had completed the usual Friday evening *sandhya* with S. L's daughters, he broached the subject. He had turned to him many times previously before for guidance and encouragement and trusted in his judgement and wisdom. S. L. advised him to begin with studies related to his clerical work, in order to re-establish the habit of study.

In January 1940 he registered for a part-time Bookkeeping and Secretarial Course at a Technical Institute which was run at Sastri College in the evenings. Returning to the discipline of studying after so many years was not an easy task and he turned almost instinctively to a known friend of the Home for help. Govin Kassie, a young and industrious Sabha member and its Treasurer since 1938, was always ready to assist with any function held at the Home and to help its residents. Bhai had been drawn to this gentle and unassuming man in 1930 when, as Secretary of the Sabha, he visited the Home regularly. They had forged a close bond. It was Govin who had shaken his head at his two-fingered approach to typing and taught him to handle the keys more adequately. When he asked for help with his studies, Govin readily gave up his weekends to teach him how to write up books and balance accounts and sometimes even slept over at the Home so that they could continue the tuition early in the morning. Bhai attributes his resounding success in the examinations to this selfless and accommodating friend. He soon put his knowledge to good use by assisting the treasurers of the Sabha and the Home.

In 1941, eager to re-commence his academic studies, he enrolled for the Junior Certificate (Standard Eight) course and attended evening classes at Sastri College immediately after work. His teachers, Mr B.D. Lalla (brother-in-law of S. L. Singh) and Mr Jack Naidoo were men of stature in the fields of education and social upliftment of the Indian community. Mr Lalla had an infectious sense of humour that livened up meetings and made him popular with young and old. He was a staunch supporter of the Sabha and the Home. A teacher by profession, he had followed the young boy's progress at school with keen interest and had been struck by the promise that was shown. After Bhai left the AYS School, Mr Lalla often asked after him or came to the Home to see him as he was disturbed by the thought of such ability going to waste. When Bhai joined the small part-time studies group, he was pleased and gave him all the encouragement and assistance he required. When the

examination results were released, Bhai was overjoyed to see that he had obtained three distinctions - in History, Geography and Bookkeeping.

Towards the end of 1940, B. K. Singh's business began to experience financial problems, even though other, similar businesses around his were doing well. There was no shortage of work and Ranjith had tried desperately to avert what seemed to be inevitable closure. However, in April 1941, Singh's Wood and Coal Company was sold to the H. N. Maharaj family and Bhai's services were retained by the new owners. Three of the Maharaj brothers ran the business, taking over specific areas of control - the yard, the office and transport. With no experience in the trade, they depended heavily on their clerk to run the yard. He did so in his usual serene way though it meant more work at the same salary. The company expanded to supply sand and stone as well, for which orders poured in, while the wood and coal trade flourished in the war years.

A good relationship developed between the young clerk and, in particular, Mr D.N. Maharaj, the much older yard manager, primarily because of Bhai's leaning towards Hindi, which he had continued to study diligently. The Maharaj family followed the Sanathan (Puranic) school of thought, while he believed in and lived his life according to the Vedic scriptures. This gave rise to many discussions and friendly debates, some of them based on the merits and demerits of idol worship. It was all done in the best of spirits, with no condemnation from either side for the beliefs and practices of the other. Bhai appreciated his employer's open and goodnatured approach, particularly with one so young as he and was stimulated by the opportunity to explore the different forms and practices in Hinduism.

Yet for some time, he had begun to feel stifled in that non-stimulating working environment and started thinking seriously about looking for other employment. It would not be easy to find work, he knew. European-owned business houses were reluctant to employ 'non-Europeans', Indian businessmen employed mostly

family members, while the war in Europe was making everyone nervous and unwilling to risk the expansion of current enterprises. In his desperation to seek a meaningful life he continued with his studies and kept his mind on the distant prospect of becoming a teacher.

During the same year (1941), at the age of twenty, he was elected Secretary of the Sabha, a position he was to hold for ten years as well as serving on the ABH Council. It was a decade of intense and exhausting activity, when the Sabha embarked on a systematic programme of re-awakening the cultural and religious awareness of Hindus. In addition, interaction with government and civic departments intensified, as plans to extend the Home reached an advanced stage. His workload increased dramatically and the correspondence files grew bulkier. Young, energetic and committed to the Home, he gave his time and effort unstintingly, frequently working through his lunch-break in order to be at scheduled meetings with the Town Planning section of the Durban Corporation. He brushes aside any suggestion that the Home really began to grow when he served it in that key position:

It was a team effort. Our goals were the same, as was our commitment to the principles of the Arya Samaj. We still had the vision of our "Big Three" to guide us: Mr Satyadeva might have given up the position of President of the Sabha but he was very much part of all discussions and decisions; Pandit Nayanah Rajh was President of the ABH and Mr. S. L. Singh was still serving as its Secretary. How could we not make progress?

What he does not say, but can be traced in the minutes of those meetings, was that the Sabha and Council members had become too accustomed to being led. They waited to be told what to do and made very few suggestions of their own, as they trusted implicitly in their leaders. At one meeting Bhai raised the matter and surprised everyone by his impassioned plea that they set aside their passivity at a time when *enlightened* decision-making was

essential. He exhorted them to think about the issues and come up with ideas. In retrospect, he wonders at his temerity in taking to task people who had served the Sabha and the Home long before he became involved. He explains why he did so:

There was so much to be done: a great deal of planning and forward thinking. Funds had to be found, people had to be approached and high level negotiations were on the cards. Those ten years were going to be crucial to the development of the Home and its recognition as a service-provider by those in government.

We needed discussion forums, healthy debates and disagreements, consideration of pros and cons. We needed to be proactive. The Council members were truly dedicated people - selfless in their service, supportive, compassionate, genuine. But times were changing and we needed to adapt. Those were days when strong leadership on its own was not enough; everyone had to think, plan, strategise so that the best could be achieved.

While these developments were taking place, he continued to persevere with his studies. On completion of the Junior Certificate course in December 1941, he enrolled for the National Senior Certificate which he obtained with a distinction in Commercial Arithmetic. How did he cope with studies, work, community involvement, providing religious instruction at the classes run by the Sabha, as well as the Home's extension programme, one wonders. He answers as follows:

I have always tried to live my life according to the ten principles of the Arya Samaj, which place the self as secondary to service. Somehow there was time to do all these things - I cannot explain it because I don't understand either! The message was clear: 'there is work to be done - do it, no matter what the cost to yourself.' In any case, we worked together at the Home and the Sabha sharing the responsibilities.'

The Home had received grants of 450 pounds (R900) from both the Department of Social Welfare and the Immigration Department

for construction of a second block of dormitories. As a result, Bhai's time after work was never his own. He concentrated on raising the funds to supplement the building fund and equip and furnish the new building. In small groups, the band of dedicated Samajists went daily from house to house and business to business for donations, often returning home late at night. During this period, of sheer hard work, Bhai also joined the Cato Manor Arya Samaj Vir Dal

The Cato Manor Arya Samaj Vir Dal

The Cato Manor Arya Samaj Vir Dal was established to bring the youth of the area into meaningful social, cultural and religious participation. It was spearheaded by Sewpersad Ragoobeer (better known as R. R. Persad or John), a vibrant and energetic young man whose great musical talent was widely acknowledged in the community. Refusing to accept Bhai's busy schedule as a barrier, he virtually bullied him into active participation from the very beginning. The focus of the Vir Dal was at first on cultural upliftment, socialising and sport. Once a week, on a Wednesday evening, the group of sixteen met at the Arya Samaj Hall in Bellair Road to exchange news, play musical instruments and sing. Bhai remembers those first meetings vividly:

Ragoobeer made us all sit cross-legged and in neat rows on the floor. With his head tilted slightly to the left he played the first note on the harmonium and said "Sa" in his powerful voice. We all obediently repeated 'Sa'. He went over it repeatedly to ensure we sounded it correctly before moving on to 'Re', 'Ga', 'Ma' and so on, till every note of the musical alphabet had been rehearsed thoroughly. Then he made each of us tryout the notes on the instrument to ensure we had learnt it. After this, he settled himself comfortably, looked up at us and began to work the bellows of the harmonium as he played each note consecutively and listened carefully to how we voiced it. We were good learners - but only because we had an excellent teacher.

Each Saturday afternoon, the group met again at Currie's Fountain Grounds in the city, where relaxed socialising intermingled with vigorous hitting of the ball all over the tennis court and beyond. Bhai was one of the few there who knew how to play: his friendship with the children of the Raghoo family of Mayville had provided the opportunity for many years to play on their court. Other Club members kicked a ball around on the football field. It was both relaxing and great fun after a week at work.

Their activities changed quite dramatically after a few months, when the Vir Dal agreed to help a Bellair Road resident whose daughter's marriage was to take place the following weekend. There were no sons in that home and it was the nephew who suggested they should assist. On the day before the wedding - a day of traditional ceremonies and festivities - the members took charge of all the arrangements at 'uncle's' house: they put up a structure made of wattle poles and bamboo over which they fixed a canvas sail; they arranged the seating for guests; they decorated the marquee with crepe paper and cuttings from trees and shrubs and set about organising the area where meals were to be served. They even took over the kneading of the *puri* dough with great enthusiasm and lovingly tended the open fires over which the food was cooked. After the ceremony was over, they served supper to guests and family before sitting down themselves. 'Uncle' was overwhelmed and thanked them profusely in the presence of his guests. After that, requests came thick and fast for the Vir Dal to assist at other functions, not only in Cato Manor, but also in areas some distance away.

Realising that they could provide an essential service to the community, they concentrated on these cultural and social service aspects and soon extended their activities to provide the musical entertainment as well. During some months, this meant that every weekend was fully occupied - but no one demurred, as they all enjoyed their new-found role. Bhai was happy, for the principles of

the Arya Samaj were being fulfilled. He simply arranged his Sabha and Home duties to fit in with this schedule, though it also meant sitting up into the early hours of the morning to study for the National Senior Certificate.

He recalls with much amusement an incident that occurred while the Vir Dal members were returning from one of their engagements:

It was almost midnight and we were in Standard Road, Mayville. As we walked, we heard a strange, eerie sound behind us, and, alarmed, we stopped. The sound stopped too. We looked back, but could see nothing. We moved forward cautiously, and there it was again! Terrified; one of the group shouted 'It's the devil!' and started running as fast as he could. R. R., sensible chap that he was, made us stop. 'Put your hands in your pockets, 'he said quietly. 'Check if it's something that's fallen from there.' We did. It was a cotton reel that had fallen out of someone's pocket, and was being dragged by the thread that was entangled on his key!

The one who ran away never heard the end of 'the devil that almost got you!'

The Vir Dal's new focus on service to the community was a god-send to the Home, as it took the pressure of organising the weddings of residents off the shoulders of the Council members. From his earliest days at the Home, Bhai recalls the number of girls who were married. Proposals came from far and wide, as the girls were prized as marriage partners brought up to uphold and cherish traditional values. Their weddings meant a great deal of work for the Sabha and Council members, but they were a cause for joy as well. It was always a happy event at the Home, with everyone rallying round and lending a hand to ensure that everything went off well. Most of these weddings took place at the Mayville Theatre or in the city, at the Kathiawad Hall (re-named Gandhi Hall after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in January 1948). When the A. P. S. Temple and Hall were built in Carlisle Street in the 1970s,



At the Avvai Home in Madras, India



In an improvised sauna at a Yajurvedic Clinic in Baroda, India. (1994)



On the day the Children's Home was named after him With him are L to R: Krishen, Reshma, P. Seebran, P. Bishoon and The Indian Consul-General, Lata Reddy



Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, The Prime Minister of India, who honoured The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (SA) with his presence during The Nam Conference September 1998. Mr S, Rambharos garlands The Indian Prime Minister

all weddings of residents took place there. Many weekends were spent preparing the venue, transporting prayer goods, welcoming guests and serving meals. Getting to know the brides' future families was also important, for their marriage did not mean that the Sabha or the Home relinquished interest in their lives. Contact was always maintained to ensure that all was well. **If** there were problems, Sabha members sometimes travelled great distances to give guidance and support and, if necessary, to bring the young women back to the Home until matters were resolved. That support system was a vital aspect of the Sabha's parental role in the lives of all residents.

Bhai himself has kept in touch with many of the girls who left the Home to marry, to return to their families or to take up residence with adoptive parents. He attended their weddings when able to, and sometimes took great delight in appearing on their doorstep unexpectedly, his spirits lifting at their warm welcome and hospitality:

Often we received invitations to the wedding of a former resident and as far as was possible we attended or sent a Sabha member to represent us. To the Sabha, the girls' happiness and the stability in their lives brought a justifiable sense of pride. To me they were family - sisters I grew up with.

When my work took me near the towns where they lived, I visited them and it was always a happy reunion. Their families were usually supportive and eager to meet people associated with the Home. I was never allowed to leave the town without joining them for a meal.

When one looks at his diary entries, it becomes obvious that attending these weddings sometimes placed a heavy burden on Sabha members. Frequently, the bride or her family wanted the Sabha or its supporters to be directly involved, either as family members or as officiating personnel. An extract from the diary for the period 20/5/50 and 21/5/50 illustrates this:

Went to Wessel's Nek with Pandit Nardev, R. R. Persad, Ravi Maharaj, Gordon and others. Left Mayville at 5.15 pm. Reached at 2.45 am on Sunday morning. Helped Pandit in the mandap. Spoke to the couples - girls were from ABH - Parvathy and Phulmathie. Returned home at about 12.30 am.

One occasion that stands out in his memory was in the mid-forties, when three of the girls were married on the same day at the same venue:

There was such a hustle and bustle. All the ladies were rushing around, making sure everything was in order - that the girls' bags were packed and ready, they had handkerchiefs and so on. I remember Mrs S. L. Singh and Mrs Satyadeva lining the brides up in the sitting room of the Home, straightening the pleats on their saris and giving them a last-minute check.

We were anxious to leave, as the Sabha and the Home were the hosts. Pandit Nayanah Rajh had already left for the Hall and we dared not be late, for he kept a strict watch on the time. None of us had cars. The bride and all of us were transported to the venue by buses kindly provided by Mr Seebran, the President of the Cato Manor Arya Samaj, and an ardent supporter of every venture undertaken by the Sabha.

He remembers attending every wedding that involved the Home from the time he was fourteen years old, and the sense of excitement that gripped him as he walked solemnly behind the Sabha members, dressed in the very best clothes he had - a pair of brown shorts and a crisply starched white shirt from which he painstakingly ironed out the creases by the simple method of spitting on the hot iron before pressing it over the shirt. By that time he was already a member of the Sabha and was regarded as an integral part of all its activities. In later years, particularly during his long term as Secretary of the Sabha, he took over many of the arrangements for the weddings from S. L. Singh and was glad to

have the assistance of his friends from the Vir Dal, who formed a solid work-force. The women volunteers - and there were many of them, from all parts of Durban - helped to get the bride fitted out for the wedding: they selected the saris, stitched the blouses and put together all the other accoutrements that no bride ever left without. In its store-room, the Home kept stocks of linen and clothing which the Council bought or received as donations and which were distributed as and when needed. Saris, long skirts and blouses were always in plentiful supply and the volunteers spent many contented hours going through them to choose the brides' outfits.

By the end of 1943, the accelerated fund-raising programme for the Home's building extension plans, regular and crisis meetings with plan drawers and officials as well as issues concerning the administration of the Home, left Bhai exhausted. In September, when the second block of dormitories was officially opened by Mr Heaton Nicholls, the Administrator of Natal, Bhai resolved to take a year's well-deserved break from studies, so that he could recover and plan his future carefully. Needless to say, it was another year of unremitting hard work. It was also the year when he was thrown into confusion by two vastly different choices offered to him.

In the first instance, Mr B.D. Lalla gave active expression to an idea that had been in his mind from the time Bhai was in school. Impressed by his unstinting loyalty and service to the Sabha and by his academic ability, Mr Lalla proposed to find a donor to send him to India to study the Vedic scriptures at a Gurukul, a training college for specialised Vedic studies which had seen set up by the followers of Swami Dayanand. To this day, Bhai remembers the exact words Mr Lalla spoke when they first discussed the possibility and were wondering how to finance it: *'There's a Trust - the M. C. Varman Trust. I'll ask them.'* Negotiations with the Trust began immediately and contact was established with the Arya Samaj of India. Plans were at an advanced stage and Bhai was filled with eager anticipation, when the whole project had to be

abandoned as it transpired that the Trust did not have sufficient funds to send him to India and support him for the duration of his studies. Had the plan succeeded, Bhai Rambharos may well have returned to South Africa as a qualified Vedic priest and his life might have taken a different turn.

In the second matter, he was taken aback by an unexpected proposal of marriage, conveyed to him by the three founders of the Home and Mr R. Ramklass, President of the AYS. At the age of twenty-four, he had not even begun to contemplate marriage. He had attended the weddings of many of his close friends and heard them speak of the fulfilment it brought to their lives. When they asked him when he was going to settle down to the next stage of a good Hindu's life, he had always laughed and said, '*But I am married - to my work, to my Home. Who needs more than that?*' And it was true. Apart from his work as a teacher and his studies, he had concentrated all his energies on fulfilling his role as secretary of the Sabha. He could not envisage a life beyond his social, cultural and religious duties. There was scarcely room for anything else.

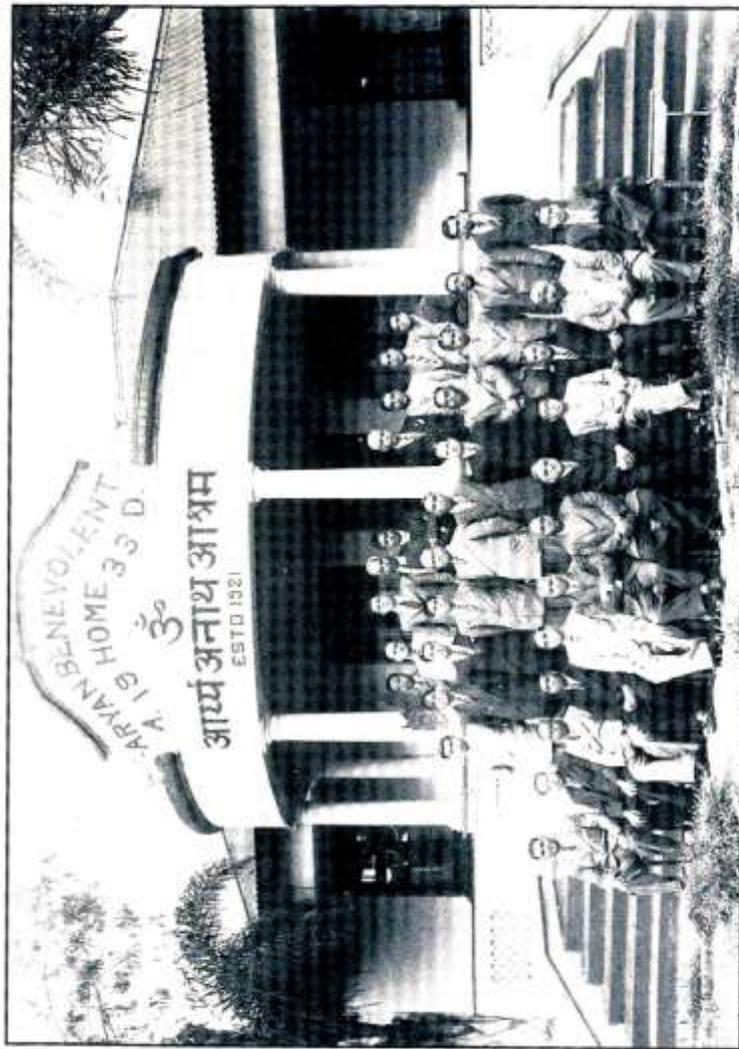
Notes

1. *Portions of the Vedas, the ancient scriptures of Hinduism, written in prose and poetry. The Upanishads deal with early Hindu esoteric and mystical philosophical concepts. The underlying concern is the nature of Brahman (the universal soul); the doctrine expounded is the identity of atman (the innermost soul of each individual) with Brahman.*

2. *A weekly newspaper aimed at the Indian reader; established by Dhanee Bramdaw in 1940. It has been outspoken in its condemnation of injustice and in its support of the Natal Indian Congress. It has served as a political commentator and therefore constitutes a record of the struggle of Indians for a voice in the country.*

PART TWO

RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP



Seated: S. Bechan (Vice-President), A. Dalip Singh (Vice-President), K. Ramsaroop (Trustee), D. Ganourie (Trustee), S. Rambharos (Hon. Secty), R. Ramklass (President), D.G. Satyadeva (Trustee), S.L. Singh (Trustee), B.S. Singh (Patron), G. Sohanan, M. Moontoo (Hon. Auditor), R. Rajkumar (Treasurer)
Middle: R. Sewpersadhi, D. Dewduth Singh, D.N. Singh, D. Ishwardath Singh, B. Govind, G. Ramruthen, B. Purthap, Baboolal Jhupsee, J. Mahabbeer, B. Ramnarayan, B. Rampersadhi.
Back Row: K. Secbran, Deby Singh, G. Sewpersadhi, S. Ramganmath, R. Boshan, A. Naidoo, R.B. Lall, M. Seccharan, S. Balgobin, M. Jugroop

CHAPTER 5

SECRETARY OF THE SABHA

In 1937, when he first began to assist S. L. Singh with his secretarial duties, Bhai found the work absorbing and meaningful and gradually took over many of the tasks. This enabled the over-worked Secretary-cum-Treasurer of the ABH to concentrate on the crucial role of fund-raising as well as his other, multifarious roles in community, religious and sports organisations. S. L. had performed the dual function since 1923, but believed that younger blood should take over. In his young assistant, he saw selfless commitment to the ideals of the Arya Samaj and began to guide and train him for the future, very much as a father would guide his son.

Prem Sundar captures the essence of the close bond that developed between her father and his protege over the years:

My mother, my sisters and I were always aware of the deep love my father had for Shishupal Bhai. It was a reciprocal love. We realised there was a special relationship between them - that of a proud father for his son. (My own brother had died when quite young). My parents' faces lit up when they saw him and he was always a welcome visitor - a member of our family.

He came to our home every Friday evening to teach my sisters Meemo, Sharda and me the sandhya, at my father's request. We knew the words but he taught us the correct pronunciation of the Mantras, with infinite patience. When I and I married he was on the stage to help the priest and I felt that I had my brother there with me.

Throwing himself into the tasks assigned to him, and guided by his mentor, Bhai reported to the Council on conditions at the Home and his practical suggestions for improvement in its administration led to significant change. For the first time in its history, the ABH Council received on-the-spot evaluations from a resident who was also a council member. Admittedly Bhai's position at the Home *was* unique. He was not destitute, he was employed outside the Home and his earnings put him in a position to set up on his own. Yet the thought of his moving from the Home had occurred to no one, least of all to Bhai himself. The Home was his home; to leave it once he was financially secure would have been unthinkable. As it was, he insisted on contributing half of his salary to the Council's funds, much against the wishes of the officials. They felt a quarter (or even less) was sufficient, though not even that was necessary, given the sterling work he was already doing. Pandit Nayanah Rajh advised him to start saving towards his future. Always frugal, Bhai knew he could save half of what he kept for himself. It would pay for his further education and, perhaps, even a trip to India.

Sabha meetings were usually held at the Durban Corporation Waterworks Barracks in Cross Street, Durban - a venue easily available to both Mr Satyadeva and Pandit Nayanah Rajh, as many of the Corporation's employees lived there. It was also centrally located and more convenient for the members, as it was situated close to the bus terminus. Bhai's early induction into service to the Home led him naturally to membership of its parent body, where he assisted the Secretary, A. Dalip Singh, by writing the minutes of meetings. The Sabha had taken the decision that they were to be written in Hindi, in keeping with its commitment to preserve and promote Indian languages. Bhai's facility with the language in both spoken and written form was impressive. In the years to come, it led to many additional tasks, such as translation into English of religious tracts and writings, for various religious and cultural organisations, including the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha and the Hindu Maha Sabha. In his diary he recorded one such request as follows:

30. 1. 50 *Mr/s Sukraj and Satydeva came looking for me and they contacted me at the ABH. They asked me to help them to translate the 13th Chapter of Religious Awakening in South Africa.*
3. 2. 50 *Mr S. Chotai came home to see the progress on the translation of the 13th Chapter.*
4. 2. 50 *Sat and wrote the whole day.*
5. 2. 50 *Handed Mr Chotai the translated matter.*

At the 1941 Annual General Meeting of the Sabha, S. L. proposed his name for the position of secretary and this was endorsed wholeheartedly by the members. Bhai was plunged into the most hectic period in the history of the Home up to that time: negotiations for grants, meetings with city officials and government departments and accelerated fund-raising. With S. L. serving as Secretary of the ABH Council, they worked well together to promote the Home and propagate the Vedic way of life - the one much older and thoroughly versed in the work of the Home and the Sabha, the other full of ideas for improvement and development.

During the Second World War and its attendant economic depression, the number of residents at the Home had increased twofold. The need to expand was an urgent priority, the need for funding obvious. Bhai and 'the Big Three' met frequently to plan their approach to various government departments, including the Department of Social Welfare, which, for many years had been sending children in need of special care to the Home. The rationale they adopted was (to quote S. L.) *'If they need our services, they should know we need their money.'* A series of meetings was set up that year to discuss plans for a new block of dormitories. City officials, plan drawers and other professionals were drawn into active supportive roles by the sheer energy, drive and enthusiasm of the two secretaries. At the meetings, officials were struck by the sincerity of purpose of the older representatives and the vision of the young man in their midst. Many of them - particularly those from the Department of Indian Affairs and the Durban Corporation

- went out of their way to help the Home, smoothing over the inevitable problems of a major construction and its attendant financial burden.

It was also a period of constant interaction with high profile members of the Indian community, who had pledged to raise funds for the project. They met to discuss the method of approach, the kind of questions they were likely to be asked and the literature that should be distributed. Bhai insisted at Sabha meetings that the latter was essential, no matter what the cost. The suggestion had come from Mr A. I. Kajee, a successful businessman, and his senior employee, Mr Maganlal, both progressive thinkers. Mr Kajee had helped to raise funds for the Home in 1931 and Bhai met him to re-ignite his efforts for the Home's latest development project. Though he was too occupied with current political matters to help, Mr Kajee pointed out that it was vital to dispel ignorance about the Home's open policy, by advertising the fact. He knew that the Home catered for all groups and that a number of Muslim, Malay and Christian children and adults had benefited from its programme of care. He believed that education of the community on this aspect was essential and that fears that the Sabha-affiliated Home was nothing more than a means to religious conversion had to be allayed. The community, and especially non-Hindus, needed to know the respect accorded to all religions by the Home. Pamphlets outlining the kind of care and support given to all residents were essential, Mr Kajee said, to dispel ignorance and correct wrong impressions.

That decade was a period of both achievement and escalating problems for the Home. In 1943, amid great jubilation the new dormitories were opened and the congestion in the old wards eased. A factor that had emerged in 1940, but had not been followed up, was brought into discussions again when, in his report on the Home, Bhai pointed out the urgent need to separate the young and the old. Such a plan had been in the air for some time, but had been postponed because of financial constraints. By 1941, children made up two-thirds of the Home's population and their numbers were

increasing. He believed that they needed a chance to grow in a more conducive environment, away from the distressing sight of the feeble, the disabled and the sickly, with whom they shared the dormitories. The aged had their own special needs as well.

After school hours and during weekends the children's noise while they were at play caused tempers to fray and created dissension between residents and staff, with the former accusing the latter of not supervising the young ones adequately. Bhai himself had to ask the Principal of St Aidan's School to allow him the use of a classroom for study purposes twice a week, as concentration was impossible with so many children's voices raised. He tried to ameliorate conditions by forming interest groups music and song, different codes of sport, as well as Friday games days, but these had the reverse effect, for the excitement engendered by participation simply increased the noise and the older residents resumed their battle.

He found himself becoming increasingly upset about the pathetic situation of the children, in particular. Living amongst them, he saw the desperate need for a more normalised upbringing. Children needed more than a roof over their heads and regular meals: they needed discipline that was tempered with love and justice, if they were to grow into responsible young men and women. He was at work during the day and was becoming more and more involved in the administrative procedures of the Sabha during the afternoons and evenings. He did not have the time to take on the massive task. There was need, he told the Sabha, for staggered bedtimes for the children (according to age), supervision of bathing and washing routines as well as a host of other aspects of communal living that required swift attention. The older residents, many of them infirm and frail, wanted some privacy, peace and quiet. He made an impassioned plea for funds to make possible further expansion - in effect, for separate facilities for the young and the aged.

The Sabha had already tapped all the available resources for the new dormitory block and knew it would not have much success

with another fund drive so soon after. Bhai was asked to re-introduce the issue when the war was over and greater financial support might be forthcoming. He had no choice but to agree. However, to improve conditions at the Home, he submitted an urgent proposal to both the Council and the Sabha. With his experience in the highly organised teaching profession as a guide, he suggested that the following measures be adopted as an interim measure:

1. Monthly subscription fees be increased from sixpence (five cents) a month to two shillings and sixpence (twenty five cents), to make up for shortfalls as a result of donations being reduced during the war years. It would also build up a substantial fund for any emergency at the Home;
2. The Sabha should appoint two members as inspectors of the Home, to visit it regularly and report on conditions to the Council. This would result in
 - improvement in the children's conduct under supervision; ¹¹
 - greater application to their tasks by the Home's staff;
 - ¹¹¹ satisfaction among residents that they were being protected; ¹⁴
 - reduction in the workload of the Chairman and the Secretary of the Council.

At a subsequent meeting, Bhai suggested that a duty roster should be drawn up for all staff members at the Home, to put an end to non-performance of tasks and to ensure that all employees took full responsibility for the work for which they were being paid. All these proposals were adopted and effected without delay. Though the measures suggested were minor, they began an on-going process that brought vastly improved administrative control and greater effectiveness in overseeing the day-to-day matters of the Home. More significantly, they initiated a process by which problems of the previous year were analysed and discussed and practical

resolutions found. Efficiency became the target, for it meant a Home that was run more smoothly, with benefits for all.

The continuation of the war had other consequences that alarmed Sabha officials. The number of active members had fallen, as a direct result of the blackout. The weekly evening group prayer (*satsangh*) at the B. M. Patel Hall in Prince Edward Street had to be moved to the Home and was held after the Sunday *hawan*. Many prominent members of the Sabha (among them founder members) were finding it difficult to travel to Cato Manor every Sunday, whereas attendance at the central city venue, near the bus depots, had always been excellent. All those who lived within reasonable distance from the Home attended, though the absence of many familiar faces was felt deeply. The *satsangh* was a vital aspect of the Sabha's religious and cultural activity and the fear was that those who did not attend might never return. Fortunately, after the war ended in 1945, the *satsangh* continued at its old venue with renewed fervour that was brought on by the cessation of war and the hope for continued peace. Many of the old members returned and others joined, spurred on, Bhai believes, by the atrocities of the distant war and a desire to work towards the Arya Samaj ideal of '*Vasudeiva kutumbkam: the world is one macro family.*'

The year 1946 was a milestone in the Home's history. Twenty five years had passed since it opened and thirty four years since the Sabha was formed. The decision to celebrate this dual achievement was made at a meeting held on 11 April 1945. A few months later there was cause enough for a triple celebration, to mark the end of a protracted world war as well. How it was celebrated is recorded with great feeling by B. D. Lalla in the 1972 Brochure published to honour the Diamond Jubilee of the Sabha and the Golden Jubilee of the Home:

Senator S. I. Smith who presided over the Jubilee Function rang the symbolic silver bells of celebration, striking the formal notes of 'well done, congratulations and good wishes for the future!'

And all who gathered and took part in the ringing of the silver bells rang and re-rang the message of pure sunshine, love and joy brought into the sky of the lives of so many who once lived under the shadow of some pain, some sorrow, some suffering and some precious need.

A week before the celebrations, Bhai had learnt from his employers that the Salvation Army property, off Bellair Road and close to the Home, was up for sale. The Sanathan Dharma Sabha (of which the Maharaj brothers were members) had been offered the site but had decided that it was too large and that the Depot Road Temple, the centre of its activities, was sufficient for its needs. D. N. Maharaj suggested to his young employee that it would be ideal for a new Home, as the property was large - seventeen and a half acres, to be precise. Bhai lost no time in conveying this information to the Sabha and urged the members to offer to purchase it. During the Jubilee celebrations, the officials of the Home and Sabha took the plunge. The Salvation Army property stood on a hill with splendid scenic views and could incorporate all the amenities needed to offer a better life for the residents. The first pledge of one hundred and five pounds (R210) came from B. M. Patel, who also undertook to try to raise funds for the project. Negotiations with the Salvation Army commenced immediately and hopes were high.

It became apparent, however, that the transaction was going to take a long time, as funds had to be raised to pay for the property. Conditions at the Home, in the meanwhile, were deteriorating steadily and it was obvious that immediate action had to be taken. Bhai's highly charged appeal at the meeting in 1943 was still vivid in the minds of his listeners, while the reports of the Sabha's two 'inspectors' confirmed that further delay in separating the aged and the children would exacerbate the problems that already existed. There was obviously no choice but to use money intended for the Development Fund, to provide separate accommodation for the two

groups. As a short-term and economical measure, the ABH Council bought a disused army hutment, adapted it and furnished it. The aged were installed in their very own premises, on the adjacent property (which the Sabha had bought in 1943 for future expansion). It was named 'The Home for the Aged' while the old building was re-named 'The Children's Home'. It was possible at last to attempt to give the aged and the children the different kinds of care they needed.

It took two years to raise the money for the Salvation Army property. Ingenious plans were put into motion to swell the Development Fund and to reduce the burden of responsibility on those who had uncomplainingly contributed to the Home over the years. Bhai proposed his youthful idea of a bazaar and it was overwhelmingly applauded as the most adventurous approach up to that date. He was given the approval to proceed. It entailed extensive planning and organisation. He reached out to the community and the business sector, arranged for the collection of goods and monetary donations and supervised the drawing up of the books of accounts to separate the Development Fund from the ordinary fund. Finally, after two months of exhaustive groundwork, he rolled up his sleeves to join the Sabha members in setting up the stalls as attractively as possible in the wood and iron APS Hall in Carlisle Street. The bazaar became one of the Home's most profitable ventures, as the proceeds were beyond expectations and the publicity given to it brought much-needed additional support for the Home. Strangers came to offer their assistance and dug deep into their pockets to swell the coffers.

Some idea of the time and effort this venture called for may be ascertained from the diary entries for 1949, the year Bhai began to record events. They relate to the smaller-scale fund-raising for Deepavali (the Hindu Festival of Lights), a specific annual effort intended to give residents a special treat on that day, with its attendant fireworks display. Bhai spent the entire Michaelmas school holiday on organising the drive. The door-to-door collection began

four days after the last school quarter commenced, during the evenings and weekends. An extract from the diary indicates the measure of commitment this required:

- 15 October Started the Deepavali drive to raise funds for the Home.
Collected in the Mayville area. Deepavali drive - Candella Estates area. Meeting at APS - further plans.
- 16 October
- 20 October
- 21 October Deepavali drive intended. Experienced difficulty obtaining a cheap car. Spent the day at ABH in Mr Persad's* place.
- 23 October Deepavali drive in town and Clare Estate.
- 24 October Met at APS Hall to plan weekend drive
- 27 October Meeting of AYS.
- 28 October Meeting at ABH
- 29 October Deepavali drive in Overport.
- 30 October Deepavali drive in Clairwood.

* R. R. Persad was supervisor of the Home

What is printed above is an extract of a limited-period, special fund-raising venture, interspersed with executive meetings. For the bazaar, much wider areas were covered, ranging from Stanger on the North Coast to Port Shepstone on the South Coast, as well as inland to Pietermaritzburg. Those involved in fund-raising frequently reached home after ten o'clock on weekday evenings and also spent entire weekends away from home. The cost to their personal lives cannot be measured, but such was the prevailing community spirit, that no sacrifice appeared to be too much for those involved or for their families.

On 23 September 1948, the Sabha took transfer of the Salvation Army property after having paid the agreed 7500 pounds (R15000) purchase price as well as an additional 400 pounds (R800) for an adjoining acre that made direct entry to the site possible from Bellair Road. Amid great excitement the deeds were received jointly by

Mr B. Gobind, President of the Sabha, and Pandit Nayanah Rajh, President of the ABH Council. They were finally in a position to meet officials, draw up plans and change the face of the Home. Bhai Rambharos's dream of separating the aged from the children was about to become reality and he threw himself into the negotiations wholeheartedly. Advance planning of the new Home began immediately and many meetings were spent in enthusiastic discussion of the essential aspects to be incorporated in the new structure. In the Golden Jubilee Brochure of the Home (1972), B. D. Lalla captures the excitement at the time:

Seventeen and a half acres of land plus one acre! On the Hill of Salvation! Salvation had to be planned with the care salvation solicited. An exclusively new settlement had to have the appearance of a new look, not only on the surface plaster but in every interior structure - Home for Aged, Children's Home and a School with sixteen classrooms plus the necessary outbuildings and modern facilities.

Together with other officials who were available in the afternoons, Bhai visited Homes for the Aged, run for and by Whites, to gain some idea of what should be included in the plans. What they saw amazed and also dismayed them: ramps for wheelchairs, garden settings, spacious dining halls, lounges with comfortable padded armchairs or sofas, small wards and even individual rooms. Visits to Children's Homes depressed them even more, for the contrast with the dismal provisions at *their* Home was too stark. They wondered, somewhat despairingly, whether they would be able to raise sufficient money to offer similar facilities to their residents. The development of the property was a distant project, however; in the meantime, attention had to be given to a host of other problems that had accumulated.

The Sabha, of which Bhai was a Council member, owned the properties on which the Home and the school stood. A decision was

taken at a meeting in February 1950 to embark on a project to improve the buildings, as they were in a state of sad disrepair. Reports had been coming in for many months about the cramped living conditions at the Children's Home, while the growth in the numbers necessitated urgent expansion of the ablution facilities. Shortly after this meeting, it was reported that the roof in the old wood and iron school building had also begun to collapse. At a special meeting called to discuss the matter, S. L. proposed that development of the 'Salvation Army' property should be done in stages and that the Sabha should take steps immediately to commence building the new school. Others disagreed. Mr Satyadeva and Pandit Nayanah Rajh were adamant that the entire building project should be undertaken only when sufficient money was available. *'Make do with what we have'* was their view. S. L. became heated over the issue and spoke strongly about the danger to the children and staff, as the iron roof in some parts was hanging precariously. He believed that patching up the roof temporarily while the new building was in progress was the correct way to go. The alternative would be to expend the money needed for the new development on more substantial repairs. Bhai supported his stance and said so eloquently, for he had worked at the school and knew how it had been neglected while funds were being raised for other purposes. After a long and heated discussion, S. L. eventually persuaded most of the Sabha members to think as he did and it was agreed that a new school should be built. When he generously offered to collect the funds for the development of the new school, Bhai volunteered to assist him.

For the next four months, the two men worked on an accelerated fund-raising programme. Largely as a result of S. L.'s established reputation and the number of people he knew among the business and sports communities, they were able to raise the money in a remarkably short period of time. They identified the one-third site on the property that had been allocated to the school and worked closely with officials and architects to bring the project to fruition.

Bhai's career in education gave him the knowledge that was necessary to ensure that every essential facility of a modern school was included in the plans. They took special care to ensure that the structure would blend with the proposed future development of the Children's Home and the Home for the Aged. No one knew then that, within the next few months, all this effort and all the expense incurred would be to no avail. **In** the meantime, with the required sum of money almost assured, Bhai turned his attention to two other cultural and educational programmes

Hindi Shiksha Sangh

Despite the demands placed on him at this stage, he somehow found the time to throw himself enthusiastically into full support of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh (HSS), a new cultural organisation which was formed in 1948 by Pandit Nardev Vedalankar. Its purpose was to work towards the preservation of Indian languages through active usage. As a member of the core group that worked under Pandit Nardev's able leadership, Bhai was inspired by the dedication of this highly qualified scholar, who had lived and studied at Gurukul Kangari in India from a tender age. Set up as training centres for Vedic studies, these colleges required a student's removal from all other influences to ensure there was no distraction from study of the Vedic scriptures and the Vedic way of life, according to the principles of the Arya Samaj. (In 1944, when B. D. Lalla began his plans to send Bhai to India to study, he had intended him to study at a similar institution.)

Pandit Nardev was originally brought to South Africa in November 1947 by the Surat Hindu Educational Society as a Gujarati teacher. Shortly after his arrival, he became closely involved in the work of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha and identified the need to re-ignite interest in Indian languages. As a result of his own skill in Gujarati and Hindi, his influence was felt chiefly among those sections of the community. He deplored the fact that English was fast replacing the home language, even in communication between

children and their parents. A westernised way of life, he saw, was detrimental to cultural identity, particularly among Indian youth. In his quiet and controlled way he set in motion a process to begin to re-establish South African Indians' contact with their cultural roots.

Once he had established the HSS, Pandit Nardev drew up a core syllabus for Hindi, wrote the text books that were needed and standardised the examinations written at the Hindi schools throughout Natal. Another significant contribution was the establishment of the Veda Niketan, which published and distributed books, pamphlets and tracts from the Vedic scriptures. The HSS encouraged active participation in debates, speech contests and other cultural activities and encouraged and promoted the learning of Indian languages. Pandit Nardev established close interaction with local Vedic religious and cultural groups, ensuring their commitment to the programmes he introduced. His long and close association with the Sabha (and consequently the Home) brought to bear upon their members the wealth of his knowledge as well as his singular clarity of purpose - to encourage the everyday use of Indian languages as a prerequisite for cultural enrichment. His influence on the young Secretary of the Sabha was strong: Bhai saw him as a spiritual master with a profound understanding of the scriptures and a singular devotion to his calling. His admiration and respect for this guru inspired Bhai's wholehearted support and active involvement at both organisational and participatory levels. To this day he himself is a respected and admired member of the HSS and serves on its executive.

The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha's Inter-Religious Conference

A short while later, in February 1950, Bhai became fully involved in a major undertaking which formed part of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha's Silver Jubilee Celebrations. The first Inter-Religious Conference to be held in the country was a bold initiative to bring different religious faiths together in the attempt to find common ground and foster greater understanding. As a young and energetic

Council member, Bhai was given the task of organising and co-ordinating the massive undertaking and soon found himself steeped in diverse responsibilities: sending out notices, drawing up lists of duties, arranging transport for delegates and overseeing all preparations. The conference, on the topic *Conception of God*, was well represented by delegates of the different denominations and was a resounding success in that it established the universality of all religions. It also gave Bhai the opportunity to meet and listen to a world-renowned Vedic scholar, Pandit Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, General Secretary of the Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (International Aryan League). He spent thirteen evenings listening to this outstanding orator, whose warmth and simplicity enveloped all who came to hear him. Among the subjects he covered were topical issues, which, Bhai realised, the AYS needed to examine in detail, as they pertained to changing social realities in South Africa. He was particularly struck by the relevance of the following topics, which made him re-consider his interpretation of the role of the Arya Samaj:

Synthesis of Religions

Science and Religion

The Principles of the Arya Samaj in a Changing World

He expresses his appreciation of the stimulation and direction he gained in the following words:

I knew l-what my duties and responsibilities were, but I was operating without that essential largeness of vision - that allencompassing philosophical, spiritual and social understanding that brings true inspiration. That I began to appreciate only when I heard Panditji speak, simply, directly and compassionately, drawing the strands together to formulate a coherent universality. Then everything fell into place and I could see my own very small contributions as part of a continuum of human endeavour. I was the richer for it.

He recalls the sense of pride and achievement all the Sabha members felt when Pandit Ganga Prasad showed his approval and appreciation of the service given by the Home over the years. Praise from a respected, internationally acclaimed Arya Samajist was to be cherished and built upon. What struck Bhai most was that the inadequacies of the Home, which dominated ABH Council meetings, were not even mentioned. *'Service to our brethren is service to God,'* Panditji had said after he was taken on a tour of the Home. *'Administer with loving care their social and spiritual needs and re-affirm their faith in themselves. Nothing else counts.'*

The inter-religious conference was a turning point in Bhai's life. He recorded it in his diary on 25 February in the following way:

Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Parsee, Hindu and Theosophist points of view were expressed. It was agreed that all religions have the same fundamental principles.

He maintains that this accord on the similarity of purpose of all religions was basic to the humanist approach of the Sabha from its inception in 1912. At no time in its history or the history of the Home, he says, has there been religious intolerance or indoctrination, though these accusations have been levelled at both organisations, throughout their history. He attempts to dispel such criticism by putting the whole issue into perspective:

When the Arya Yuvuk Sabha was established, it had a clearly defined purpose which was categorised into three areas:

- i to promote religious activities;*
- ii to promote welfare and education; and*
- iii to promote culture.*

From 1912 to 1918 efforts were directed primarily towards the first category, to revive and sustain religion. The satsangh and hawan served this purpose. In addition, category (iii) was to some extent fulfilled by sporadic drama productions based on the Hindu epics, as well as cultural concerts.

In 1918, however, attention was also directed to the welfare of the needy and the Sabha established the Aryan Benevolent Home for this purpose. It catered for people of all religions. No one was ever turned away or asked to convert to Hinduism. Yet the Sabha could not abandon its primary objective and as a result the sandhya and hawan continued, on the Sabha's property, the Aryan Benevolent Home.

By 1926, when the need to establish a school was identified, and the Sabha established the AYS School, it had fulfilled two of its objectives. The school catered for all Indian children, irrespective of their religious affiliation. In keeping with its avowed goals, the Sabha included lessons in Hindi and Tamil in the curriculum, and drama productions were often based on the Hindu epics. The purpose of the latter was to focus on moral issues and heroic endeavours to make morally correct choices.

The promotion of culture was achieved, after 1918, through fund-raising ventures to keep the Home alive, to provide for its residents and educate its children. The Arya Woonathee Natak Mandal came into being for a dual purpose: to raise funds and promote culture while doing so.

In the long span of its 88 years in existence, the Sabha has adapted to changing needs, with the emphasis shifting from one category to another, according to the needs of the times. Sabha members gave their services voluntarily, at enormous cost to their time, energy and financial resources. All this has been done out of the purest motives and in the search for truth and justice.

The 1950s was, for him, a period of continuous spiritual growth.

The first hawan conducted at 'Lion's Den' in 1934 began a life-long process which sometimes left him exhausted and drew him away from home evening after evening. His serenity and charm, his dignity and sincerity, his very goodness, drew people to him. They turned to him for spiritual guidance and support and in times of personal problems and dire need. No family function was complete without his highly appreciated presence. There are countless entries in his diary which reveal the selflessness that has been a

characteristic feature of his life: officiating at religious ceremonies, assisting (and often speaking) at weddings, funerals and prayer meetings; visiting the sick and dying and comforting the bereaved. All this was in addition to his duties as a teacher, his studies and his role in the executive structures of the Sabha and the Home as well as many other organisations, too numerous to mention. Often there was active involvement beyond the call of duty. In the Home's fund-raising concerts and plays, for example, he played many roles - choirmaster, make-up artist, costume manager, production manager and, invariably, coach to the children taking part. In addition, he was master of ceremonies at most of the functions of the ABH, the AYS and the APS. He claims, however, that it was no different from what the 'Big Three', Mr Nanoo and others had done for his family: the tradition of active service had begun even before he was born. He sees all this effort as a calling and therefore essential for promoting the ideals of the Arya Samaj. Such involvement made it possible in the end for the Home to offer even better service to those in its care.

In 1950, the Sabha, the Home and the residents of Cato Manor were thrown into panic by an Act of Parliament that was to have wide-ranging consequences to their comfortable lives and, eight years later, destroy the very fabric of their lives. Coming so soon after the Inter-religious Conference, which established a climate of tolerance and understanding, it shattered them to know that the *Group Areas Act* used the *Holy Bible* to justify the policy of separation.

The Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950)

The Group Areas Act was the inevitable consequence of the National Party's triumph in the 1948 elections, which it won resoundingly through its infamous canvassing cry of '*swart gevaar*' (the black peril). The Act imposed control throughout the length and breadth of South Africa on all inter-racial sales of property and

occupation rights as a preliminary step towards separating the heterogeneous population on strictly racial lines. The concept of separate development was not new, though the term '*Apartheid*' gave it form and substance. It derived from a much earlier principle of white domination which was encountered throughout South African history until the historic 1994 elections, when the African National Congress, a liberation movement, won a landslide victory in South Africa's first democratic elections.

When the Group Areas Bill was first introduced in Parliament in 1949, the Prime Minister, Dr D. F. Malan said, categorically, '*It is the essence of the apartheid policy which is embodied in the Bill.*' During the same debate, Dr T. E. Donges, the Minister of the Interior, declared that he believed the Bill would be '*one of the cornerstones for preserving a White South Africa*'. Once the Bill was passed by Parliament and enacted as Law, the Group Areas Board was established to determine settlement areas for racially segregated groups. South Africa waited anxiously for the Proclamation that would give the Act force.

In Cato Manor there was great fear. Nearby, dominating the landscape, was the 'whites-only' campus of the University of Natal, its pure architectural lines visible to every eye in Cato Manor, its beacon of light from the memorial tower piercing the darkness of night. Close by were the suburbs of BeHair and Glenwood, noted for their natural beauty, and populated mainly by whites. Speculation about the fate of Cato Manor was rife. 'Are we safe?' was the dominant subject of discussion. There was good reason to worry. In 1946, the United Party government had passed the *Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act* (Act 28/1946), commonly referred to as the 'Ghetto Act', which curtailed the free movement of Indians, specified where they could reside and trade and restricted their right to acquire property, except in what was termed 'Uncontrolled Areas'. A palliative gesture at the time was the granting of token representation in Parliament, through government-appointed white representatives. Outraged, the Natal

Indian Congress led a two-year campaign of passive resistance which brought all sectors of the Indian population together as a single voice of protest. They occupied land that had been declared 'Controlled', courted arrest and approximately two thousand were imprisoned. Though it attracted and actively sought and gained international attention, the passive resistance campaign did not change what had become law. The oppression of Indians in South Africa had always been an endless cycle of frustration and grief. Was Cato Manor, with its distinctive 'Indian' culture, to become part of that cycle?

After their four months of intense campaigning for funds for the new school and the exhilaration brought on by their successes, S. L. and Bhai went through a period of utter depression when the *Group Areas Act* was passed, for it effectively put a stop to any development of the 'Salvation Army' property. For perhaps the first time in his life, the older man was unable to reassure and comfort the younger, for through his experience in 'non-white' sports administration, he knew the relentlessness with which government upheld its 'pure white' policies. Bhai describes the reaction of the Sabha when the Act was passed:

We were all in a state of great unease, which was made unbearable by our joyousness in 1948, when we bought the Salvation Army property. We had paid money that we could ill afford to lose - in architects' fees and other expenses - but money could be replaced. Our hopes and dreams could not.

For some time we couldn't talk of anything else - but we soon realised we needed to make ourselves heard, as the Home's position was different. I began writing letters - to the Group Areas Board, to the City Council, even to the Representative of Indians in Parliament, expressing our concern and seeking clarification about the future of the Home. The responses were brief and to the point: 'No information is available at present.'

The implications of the Act were not clear, but the threat posed by the Proclamation that would follow was obvious. Already, in other areas, fears were being expressed that the old *Slums Clearance Act* might be used as a means of persuading people to move. Security of tenure in Cato Manor, the area of the Sabha's focus, was uncertain. The Act effectively put a stop to all further developments, improvements or renovations, except under special permit. Building a new school became impossible. The school roof was attended to without delay and all waited and hoped and prayed and went about their duties as they had always done. Eight years later the threat became a heartbreaking reality. Cato Manor was declared a white residential area. The Home would have to move from its historic location to an area set aside for Indian occupation, though no provision had been made for its re-location.

The frantic search for land on which to build a new complex occupied the next twelve years.

Notes

1. See Addendum A.



A visiting Swami (from India) meets an aged resident while Bhai Rambharos watches



*AYS School Staff: 1946, with three school supervisors of the Natal Education Department.
S. Rambharos is in the second row (standing) on the extreme left.*



Donating life-giving blood at the Kathiawad High School

S.

CHAPTER 6

THE SCHOOLTEACHER

Phase One: The Unqualified Teacher

The desire to become a teacher never abated. Spurred on by his success in completing the Senior Certificate Examination and with his vision fixed firmly on a professional career, Bhai registered for the T4 Teaching Certificate. He had already decided to follow it with study for the higher T3B qualification, which would enable him to teach the senior primary classes.

He threw himself whole heartedly into his studies and into Sabha and Home activities. In March 1946, while playing tennis with Mr Batohi, the AYS teacher and scoutmaster who had helped him throughout his schooldays, he learnt that there would be a vacancy on the staff of the AYS School for six months. Galvanised into action, he rushed over to see Mr Gounder during his lunch break the following Monday and received a welcome that touched him deeply. He felt his heart pound when his old Headmaster told him to report at the school at the beginning of the second school quarter. He placed his notice with his employers and for the rest of the month had to contend with their disappointment and their sense of his betrayal. In the end, having come to understand how much it meant to him, they wished him well in his new career and sent him away with their blessings.

He had worked too hard towards this goal to have second thoughts about the golden opportunity offered to him, even though it was a temporary post as an unqualified teacher, with no assurance of employment at the end of the six-month period. On the first school

day of April 1946 he walked into his old school, dressed in suit and tie, a new briefcase in his hand and a proud smile on his face. The first person to greet him was his old school friend, Anjalay Thaver, who came rushing out to greet him, a wide smile on her face. She had not gone on to Girls' High, but had become a pupil-teacher at the Nagarni Pracharni Sabha School and had joined the AYS staff at the beginning of that year. Mr Batohi and the others he remembered so well crowded round him to welcome him. Their pleasure in receiving him and the familiar smell and feel of the school remain vivid memories to this day. He was comfortable in that familiar environment, among those who had helped him in the past and would, he knew, help him to find his feet in the profession he had chosen.

He was given charge of a Class Two group and as he walked into the room and those expectant young faces turned towards him, it was as though the years had rolled back and he was once more a senior pupil put in charge of the little ones. Delighted to hear them refer to him as 'Sir', he put his heart and soul into giving them the stimulation and guidance he had received as a pupil. All those additional administrative tasks he had performed in his last three years at the school gave him the insights for correct maintenance of records and, with a little help from his old teachers, he managed very well.

The school population had expanded rapidly in the ten years that had passed and the facilities that were originally designed for 250 pupils were stretched beyond the limit. Even the basement was being used as classroom space. He found it strange to see so many children on the grounds during the intervals and to hear so many voices raised in childish play. He says that, true to its ethic, the Sabha was never able to turn anyone away:

*The problem we faced was 'Where will they go if we don't take them in?'
The staff was prepared to go the extra mile to give them a chance. In any case, it became much worse when a platoon school*

opened on the same premises in the 1960s and the two schools ran separately, with overlapping times.

Though his services at the school should have ended when school closed for the Michaelmas holidays, Mr Gounder kept him on as an additional teacher until the end of the academic year. It was not difficult to persuade the Grantee, Mr B. S. Singh, or the Sabha Executive: their pride in his achievements was there for all to see. Those eight months at the AYS School began a teaching career that was to span thirty five years, until he retired from teaching on 28 February 1980, to devote the rest of his life to the Home.

Phase Two: The Qualified Primary School Teacher

By February 1947, Bhai had earned the right to be called 'teacher' though admittedly amongst the most lowly qualified in the profession and eligible only for appointment to teach in the lower classes of the primary school. His sense of relief was enormous. It had been a long, arduous journey beginning in 1941, but the end was in sight. He had already decided that once he obtained the higher T3B qualifications he would continue his studies, to obtain qualifications necessary to teach Bookkeeping in the High School.

He spent the first school quarter of 1947 at The Hindu Tamil Institute in Cross Street, near the Durban Corporation Waterworks Barracks. An English-medium primary school, built by the Young Men's Tamil Vedic Society, it was opened in January 1928 by the Right Honourable V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, the Agent General of the Government of India in South Africa. Bhai remembers the pride with which the Principal showed him the collection of Sastri's speeches¹, in which Mr Sastri's remarks on its opening were recorded. There was, he says, a distinct sense of pride in being associated with a school established by the community to foster a vernacular language. It was an echo of his own past at the AYS School and mirrored his current interest in developing his skill in Hindi.

The school provided a convenient, centrally-located venue for community and cultural activities and many AYS meetings were held at the school when the Barracks venue was not available. It was while he was at this school that Bhai underwent the first practical teaching test of his career and experienced the apprehension that all young teachers undergo.

At the beginning of the second school quarter, he was appointed to the permanent staff of the Depot Road School, where he remained until the end of that year. It was his first appointment as a qualified teacher. In 1948, he was transferred to the Avoca GovernmentAided Primary School, where he remained until the end of 1951. In those five years he completed the T3B course (1948) and the Natal Indian Teachers' Diploma (1949), and had also begun to think of studies for a degree at the University of Natal.

The Teachers' Diploma was a step towards realising his ambition to teach in the high school. For many years - from the time he acquired the Diploma from the Technical Institute in Durban - he had helped the treasurers of the Home and the Sabha to write up the books of accounts. During this decade, he took on the additional role of poorly paid book-keeper to a few small businesses as well, to supplement his income. His acumen in the field was well known and he was often called upon to assist other schools and organisations to write up their books, especially after fund-raising ventures. He did so with a total disregard for his own convenience. Enrolling for a university degree with a commercial bias was the obvious next step for him to take in his professional career.

He admits ruefully that he is not likely to forget the Diploma course as it gave him his very first taste of failure, in the Physical Training Practical Examination:

I was asked to demonstrate arm-swinging exercises to the class, but became confused about the direction in which each arm was to swing - was it forward or backward?



The Waranah Children's Orchestra playing in Durban (arranged by S. Rambharos)



Scroll of Honour from The AYS. Handed to Bhai by J.P. Rambilass and P. Seebran. Looking on is Havisha



Tree planting at the Children's Home

V.



Trying out a new board game bought for the home

When the examiner got up to take over the lesson, I realised I had made the wrong choice. To this day, I can't see why it matters in which direction you swing the arm, provided you are swinging it!

My friends on the staff of the Avoca School - especially Pons (V Ponnann) - certainly didn't make it any easier for me! He laughed uproariously, saying that he didn't know of anyone else who passed everything else and failed P. T! Fortunately, I was better prepared for the re-test.

V. 'Frank' Ponnann and Bhai first met at the Avoca school in 1948 and have enjoyed an enduring friendship, though they rarely have a chance to meet now. While they were colleagues on the same staff they met each morning at the Durban Central Railway Station and travelled together by train to the school, sometimes accompanied by a young temporary teacher, S. S. Singh. Pons had a rich sense of humour and a gift for story-telling that whiled away the time as the steam-driven train puffed its way to the Avoca stop. Bhai's attitude to life had always been serious, shaped as it was by events in his life, his environment and his sense of duty and obligation. When he was with Pons he was not allowed to be serious. 'Come on!' Frank would say. *'Life's too short as it is. You'll shorten it even further if you don't relax a little. Loosen up, my man!'*

It was like a deep drag of fresh air to a man drowning under the heavy weight of responsibilities. He did as told and relaxed with his friends on the staff: card games or football when they were not on duty during the lunch break, tennis with Pons and others after school at the Avoca courts and, on Saturday mornings, at Currie's Fountain. It didn't matter at all that Pons was a far better player at both cards and tennis - the stimulating company, the chit-chat in the staffroom, the friendly ribbing and the social get-togethers were what he needed to offset the demanding pace of social, cultural and religious work during this period.

Infused with a love of learning himself, he set out with enthusiasm to inspire a similar response in his young charges. He

tried out new and challenging methods, for he believed implicitly in the effectiveness of the practical approach to learning. In his classroom, 'Florence Nightingale' was seen, lamp in hand, attending to the wounded 'soldiers' who groaned in anguish as they lay flat on their form benches, 'bandages' tied round their foreheads or limbs. His belief was that, if you enact a scene, it remains fixed in your mind forever. His own dramatic flair lent greater colour to stories in the English Reader and kept his pupils fascinated. He placed great emphasis on communication skills as well, arousing his pupils' interest and providing the incentive for them to discuss issues with their families and friends and to read. *'The more you write, , he told them, 'the easier it will be to write well.'* When he showed them the little notebook he had used as a pupil, in which he had carefully written down words and expressions he thought would help him express his feelings more adequately, he was touched by their interest. One of them, he remembers, covered it for him and wrote his name on the front and then copied the phrases and words into his own notebook and used them diligently. *'That was Gengan,'* he says proudly. *'He later qualified as a teacher.'*

His methods of teaching, he thinks, made many on the staff doubt his ability to control his pupils, for there was always the sound of young voices raised excitedly, intruding on the silent diligence in the other rooms. Of this early period in his professional career he says:

The Headmaster made a point of coming in unexpectedly to supervise my teaching, but when he realised what I was trying to do, he was supportive and encouraging. It was a good, solid beginning for me and pointed the way forward for the rest of my time as a teacher.

Children are naturally curious. They want to know why and when and where. I found that if I threw the onus on them to find the answers, they flowered. That was my approach in both the primary and secondary schools.

In many respects, his teaching methods were well ahead of the time, when learning by rote was the accepted approach and children were unquestioning and obedient. He gives credit for his success as a teacher to the way he himself was taught at the AYS School and to the encouragement he received to expand his knowledge beyond the confines of the curriculum.

The habit of writing, which had developed while at school, continued with renewed vigour at this time, as he set down his thoughts and feelings on subjects that interested or moved him. He has kept most of these - some merely jottings of experiences, others more philosophical in content. They provide insight into his sensitivity, his appreciation of life in all its forms and a veneration for the good he sees in human nature. An example, given below, was written after his retirement in 1980, at a time when the frailty of human existence was very much on his mind.

The Bird's Nest

I stared at the palm leaf, the tip of which had provided space for the bird to build its nest. I had watched the nest for some time during the rainy/windy season and wondered if it would hold. The long leaf, with the nest at its very tip dextrously woven and 'solidly' bound, was tossed up and down and sideways, according to the whims of the wind.

Captivated by its strong resilience to hold its own against the fury of the wild winds, I thought of the bird and its nestlings. Were they still in the nest or had the mother taken away its little ones to another abode because of the impending destruction of its nest, intuitively sensed?

When I came back after a few days, the palm leaf was bereft of its nest, with the tip that had provided anchor looking thin and frayed. I was plunged into a kind of grief - what had happened to those delicate creatures?

Perhaps they were safe in another abode

His contributions to the Avoca school set the pattern of his close involvement with school and community wherever he taught. By some strange twist of fate, this child of the Home served chiefly at government-aided primary or secondary schools from 1946 to 1965, almost as though he was destined to repay a debt of gratitude. The principal of the Avoca school, Mr C. T Singh, was somewhat taken aback by the energy with which his new member of staff contributed to the refurbishing and development programme that had begun the year before. As a State-Aided school, it received a grant-in-aid from the Provincial Government, but this was not sufficient to cover even the normal running costs. The building was old, a wood and iron structure that was desperately in need of repair. The roof leaked, windows needed to be replaced and the toilets were virtually unusable. Bhai's experience in fund-raising, his practical knowledge of how to achieve much with little expenditure, and the contacts he had established in the trade and business sectors of the Indian community were valuable assets to the school. Within the next two years, new pit latrines were erected, the iron roof was mended and sealed and the school looked better than it had done for years. His enthusiasm was infectious, and even the Principal found himself performing tasks that he would ordinarily have assigned to a member of staff, as the diary reveals:

4. /2. /949 *Went with Mr C. T Singh, Mr Haffejee and Mr Ponnann to collect funds to build pit latrines of the Avoca School.*

Impressed by his loyalty to the school and touched by his simplicity and sincerity, the Principal allocated to him other tasks, among them the huge responsibility of cashing the single cheque received from the Natal Education Department to pay the entire staff's salaries. This meant that, on the final school day of each month, Bhai travelled from the school to the city centre by train,

walked to the bank in Smith Street, cashed the cheque and returned to school by the same means of transport, carrying on his person the salaries of the entire staff. He speaks with pride of the occasion when he returned an extra ninety pounds the teller had given him:

Ninety pounds may seem very little today, but it was worth a great deal then: it would have paid the salaries of at least five teachers. / earned about eight pounds (R/6). Three pounds (R/6) bought a month's groceries!

One of the tasks he undertook was to assist with the school's end-of-year concerts. In 1950, he helped with rehearsals, but the following year he wrote and directed two short Hindi plays, *Harischandra*, (a tragedy) and *Nothing is a Secret*, (a comedy), both of which were received well. His early interest in drama, which began when he helped Mr Nanoo with productions for the Arya Woonathee Natak Mandali, and which developed under M. R. Devar's guidance at the AYS School, was aroused again and was to become a ruling passion for the rest of his life.

In June 1951, though he carried many responsibilities on his shoulders at the time, and was surprised by his nomination, he accepted the position of secretary of the Umgeni Branch of the Natal Indian Teachers' Society. It required regular attendance of local and regional meetings, maintenance of records, submission of reports and recommendations to the Society, and delegations on the recurring issues of salaries and working conditions. A year in that capacity proved to be an effective training ground for the kind of representations and negotiations that were to take place for the Home in the next decade.

In January of the following year, he was transferred, at his request, to the MES School, which had been established by the Mayville Educational Society - another community initiative like the AYS School. The daily travel to and from Avoca had eroded the time he needed to concentrate on his studies and on his secretarial work for the ABH Council and, more importantly, he wished to be

near the Home. The last day at Avoca Primary School was a sad day in his life, an emotional parting from friends whose company he valued. He admits, in his diary, 'I could not suppress my tears when parting from Mr V. Ponnann'.

Within two weeks after his arrival at the MES School, he was unanimously elected secretary of the staff, chiefly because of his growing reputation for steady commitment to any position he held, together with his ease of manner and ability to get on with others, irrespective of their station in life. He was back in Mayville, on home territory where his skills were known and appreciated. The position entailed frequent interaction with the school's management to ensure an harmonious working environment. The decision to elect him as the staff's representative was a sound one. He had extensive experience at the Home of conflict situations that needed to be resolved amicably. His quiet and reasonable approach helped to defuse situations at a time when teachers were beginning to ask for a greater say in the running of schools. His amiability did not, however, detract from his ability to achieve results. He has always subscribed to the view that discussion, negotiation and, where necessary, compromise, achieves more than confrontation, which he abhors.

'Ram, Bharath and Lutchman'

It was at the MES School that a close and abiding friendship developed with the Vice Principal, Jogi Naidoo and through him, with M. S. Ismail, Principal of the Ahmedia Primary School. Jogi was Chairman of the Bellair Branch of the Child Welfare Society and it was this shared interest that initially brought the two men together. His outgoing, ebullient personality and his rich sense of humour were (as with Pons) the raft that Bhai needed to avoid sinking into a too-serious attitude to life, which was an ever-present possibility. 'Ismail Bhai', who was older than his two friends, was similar to Jogi in his outlook to life. Blessed with a strong sense of humour, he was also a progressive thinker and embraced a strong

belief in the universality of prayer. Perhaps because his mother had been a Hindu prior to her marriage, he grew up in an environment where he was taught to respect all religions. He chose for the group the names by which they referred to one another: Ram, Bharath and Lutchman, after the brothers in the Hindu epic, *The Ramayana*. He had no reservations about taking his friends to the Grey Street mosque or going with them to temples on festival days, where he partook of the prayer sweetmeats with relish. 'Prayer,' he maintained, 'is communication with God. We all believe in the existence of an Almighty power that guides us. The only difference is that 1 call Him Allah, while you refer to Him by other names.'

It was very much Bhai's own belief,~nurtured at the Home and developed over the years, of respect for all religions and of humanity as one large family.

The University Graduate

When he was ready to study further, Bhai found that there were very few options available to him and had no choice but to enrol for a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Lectures were held at the University of Natal's 'non-European Section' - a glorified term for the dingy and unbearably stuffy prefabricated rooms behind Sastri College. Those who were not born into the privileged White community were permitted to study for their degrees by attending late afternoon and evening lectures, when the staff was freed of its obligations to students at the prestigious Howard College. Not in any way politically active or inclined towards it, Bhai maintains that the conditions at the time were no worse than they had been previously:

The different racial groups were kept apart long before the term 'apartheid' featured in our vocabularies. We attended schools that were referred to as "Native " 'Coloured' and 'Indian'. My first real contact with other 'non-Europeans' (apart from Jim) came at university level, yet even there we tended to keep to our own racial groups, purely from habit and because we were not comfortable

with people of other races. There was no time, in any case, to socialise. Apartheid merely set the seal to what was already a successful policy of separate development. We were no better off under previous governments.

After a year's study, he seized the opportunity when the University offered the Bachelor of Commerce Degree to 'non-Europeans'. It was the course he needed to pursue if he was to teach Bookkeeping. Yet, as he was to discover, university levels of education were vastly different from what he had known. He admits as much in his diary on 26 February 1952:

'Attended first lecture in Economics - much of the lecture sounded Greek to me.'

Steady application and increased hours dedicated to study reaped rewards, however, and he completed the B. Comm. Degree in December 1958. It took him a long time because, as he says, *'There was little time to study.'* He remembers the pride with which he wore academic dress for the first time in his life, at the graduation ceremony, and how overwhelmed he felt as he knelt on the stool in front of the Chancellor of the University, to have the degree conferred on him. That ceremony is remembered for another reason as well:

After the Registrar had draped the hood over my shoulders, I raised my clasped hands in the traditional Indian salutation, as a mark of my appreciation. Someone seated in the 'non-European' part of the hall- we had segregated seating then - started clapping, others joined in and it just went on and on

Though he made a promise to himself on that day that he would continue studying, this was not to be, for the Home claimed him for its own and for the rest of his life he was to struggle to find time for both his family and the Home's growth and expansion.

In December 1959, after acting as Vice-Principal of the MES School for a year, he attained the goal he had set for himself many

years earlier. He happily accepted notice of his transfer to the Kathiawad Government Aided Indian High School (later re-named Gandhi-Desai High School when it relinquished its primary school classes). Though it meant giving up the chance of being promoted within the ranks of the primary school, where he had taught for twelve years, this did not count when set against the realisation of a dream. He remained at the school for two years, teaching pupils who came mainly from a business class background and already had a good grasp of Bookkeeping from their practical experience in the family businesses. Two years later, when he was promoted to the post of Vice-Principal of Merebank Primary School, he found the combination of academic and administrative duties interesting, but without the challenge offered by a secondary school. Though he threw himself into the task of supervising renovations to the old buildings, he secretly hoped to be given a chance to return to his work at secondary school level. When the circular advertising vacancies was sent to schools, he applied for the post of Deputy Principal of a number of primary schools, but included the position of Vice-Principal of Windsor High School as well. He had little expectation of success in the latter, as his experience in the high school was so limited.

In April 1966, to his intense surprise, he was seconded to the Durban Indian Girls' High School in Dartnell Crescent, to teach Accounting. ('Bookkeeping' as a subject had by this time expanded to the more complex dimensions of its new title.) It was to be a ground-breaking exercise in more ways than one.

A Thorn Among the Roses?

Bhai's initial reactions to his secondment and his reception at Girls' High are best related by him:

To be honest, I was flustered. No man had ever taught at that highly acclaimed all-female school before. I ought to have been flattered, but instead I was quite intimidated! How would the girls react? Whom would I talk to in the staff-room, and about what?

Mr Keerath, the Supervisor of Schools, assured me that my secondment was temporary and that with my Sabha back-ground and religious involvement, I would be welcomed! I learnt only recently that when the Education Department could not find an Indian woman teacher to fill the vacancy, Miss H. J. Ross, the Principal, was quite alarmed: she telephoned Miss Leela Mehta (now Mrs Gandhi), to find out if her family would disapprove if a man joined the staff! I presume many others were asked as well.

The day I arrived. I could feel all eyes on me and hear the girls whispering as I passed them. Some of the bolder ones greeted me loudly and then burst into giggles! I was received unsmilingly but courteously by Miss Ross. What surprised me was that she didn't introduce me to the staff until later that day. I walked very self-consciously into the staffroom, hoping to find S. L. 's daughter, Prem Sundar, who taught at the school. I saw more women there than I had ever seen gathered in one place before. They all turned to look curiously at me. It was strange to see Whites and Indians sharing the same staffroom and mingling so easily. Then someone rushed towards me - it was Premo I breathed a sigh of relief...

Teaching at an all-girls school, he says, was at first quite taxing: [the girls were very bright and confident, but had no idea whatsoever of even the most basic Accounting principles. Many of them were from conservative homes which regarded clerical studies and work as the sole domain of men. He had to re-think his approach and find ways to introduce them to the practical aspects of the subject. In an interview conducted by the editors of a special brochure published to honour him on the Arya Yuvak Sabha's 80th anniversary (1993), he makes the following comments about the teaching strategies he had to adopt:

I got them to visit business houses, collect business documents, observe business transactions and how they were recorded. It proved successful. The girls enjoyed this practical application. Even the shop-keepers who assisted them participated enthusiastically.

When he is asked for his general impressions of the school where he holds the distinction of being the first man on the staff, he says:

*Girls' High proved to be the most stimulating school I have ever taught at. Its reputation was richly deserved. The staff was made up of older white teachers, many of whom had been there for a long time, and many young, energetic Indian teachers just out of university and filled with progressive ideas. We got on well. I regret in many ways that I couldn't stay there longer, for just to sit and listen to the conversations flowing around me was interesting and informative. The subjects ranged from topical issues and political discussions arising out of *The Mercury's* articles, theatre productions and films they'd seen, as well as the more mundane subjects. I learnt a great deal about cooking as well. It was certainly different from what I knew.*

His stay at the school was to be shorter than he expected. In May 1966, he greeted the news of his appointment to the post of Vice Principal of Windsor High School in Ladysmith with mixed emotions. When he had applied for promotion, he had done so in the full knowledge that, if his application was successful, he would have to move away from the Home. Though the realisation that the move was imminent made him apprehensive and emotional, he consoled himself with the thought that the distance between Ladysmith and Durban was not daunting. A few hours on the road on a Friday afternoon would bring him back and there were many friends of the Sabha who would happily accommodate him. The offers had already come from all sides.

Yet he knew it was the wrong time to leave. There was so much to be done, particularly in respect of negotiations for land for a new Home. It was a process that had already begun in earnest, under his own leadership. He felt as though he was betraying the institution that had given him a life, that had nurtured him from the age of seven to the present time. It was a difficult time of restless and sleepless nights.

He taught at Windsor High School until December 1969, when he gratefully received notice of his transfer back to Durban. Of Ladysmith, he says:

It was strange to be in a small town, where everyone knew everyone else. The Arya Samaj movement was strong there and the town had an historic relationship with Mahatma Gandhi. The challenge offered by my position at the school was stimulating. It was the first time I worked with high school pupils in both an administrative and academic capacity. The Principal, Mr N. G. Chetty was a strict but just disciplinarian, from whom I learnt how to handle adolescents. The girls in my Bookkeeping class had the same problems I had encountered at Girls' High in Durban, so I adopted the same approach as I had then, and found it was more difficult to do so in a small town. I soon got used to the surprised response from businessmen who said, 'But they're girls! Why do they need to know all this?'

Back in Durban, at the Isipingo High School, he renewed his friendship with his old friend, Jogi Naidoo, the Principal. It was a happy re-union that was to cement their relationship, which continues to this day. Jogi now lives with his wife at Clayton Gardens Retirement Home and still speaks with great enthusiasm of Bhai's sincerity and his dedication to his work as a teacher. He says of him (the 'Ram' of their MES School days):

He put everything into his work, but not for personal gain. I had to nag him to apply for a promotion. He was - and still is - the least materialistic person I have ever known. He preferred to give rather than to receive. If I had to sum him up in a sentence, this is all I would say: some people have greatness thrust upon them but he earned every bit of it.

At the beginning of 1971, again by some strange hand of fate, Bhai was appointed as Principal of a new, as yet unnamed school in

Unit 7, Chatsworth. It was identified only by a number (No. 38) and was to remain thus for the next three years. In May 1972, the AYS School in Bellair Road was demolished after the ceilings of its main wood and iron building caved in. It was a heartbreaking sight for those who had worked so hard to preserve it. The ABH, to which Bhai had returned as President in July 1970, was by then deep into plans for its future Home at the site it had bought in Unit 6, Chatsworth. Anxious to preserve the name of the school, as a record of its noble service from 1926 to 1972, Bhai conducted a survey amongst residents of the area, most of whom were from Cato Manor, people he had grown up amongst, people as anxious as he to preserve their links with the past. The choice of name was simple. The request was transmitted to the Education Department and acceded to. Bhai Rambharos thereby became the first principal of AYS Memorial School, in Montford, Chatsworth.

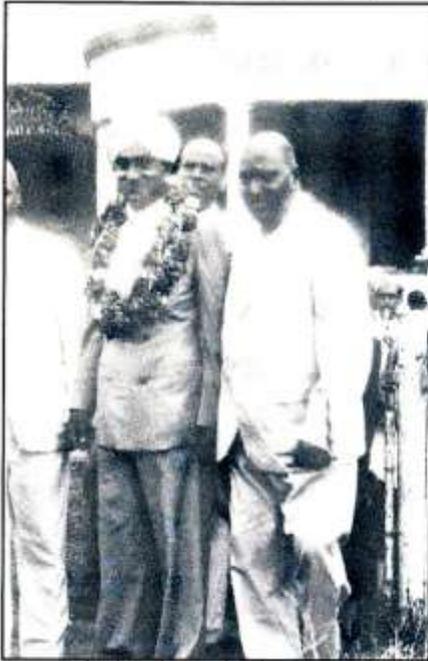
In 1975 he applied for a transfer to Junagarth Primary School in Merebank, which was closer to the city centre than Chatsworth. His wife's health had begun to deteriorate rapidly and he needed to be where he could reach their flat swiftly. He spent the last five years of a distinguished career in education here. It came to an end the day after he turned sixty years of age.

Notes

1. *Sastri Speaks*, ed. by S. R. Naidoo and Dhanee Bramdaw, The Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1931.

The Wedding - 21 January 1945

W.



The handsome bridegroom.
On the right is Mr D.G. Satyadeva



The Bugle Band



CHAPTER 7

MARRIAGE

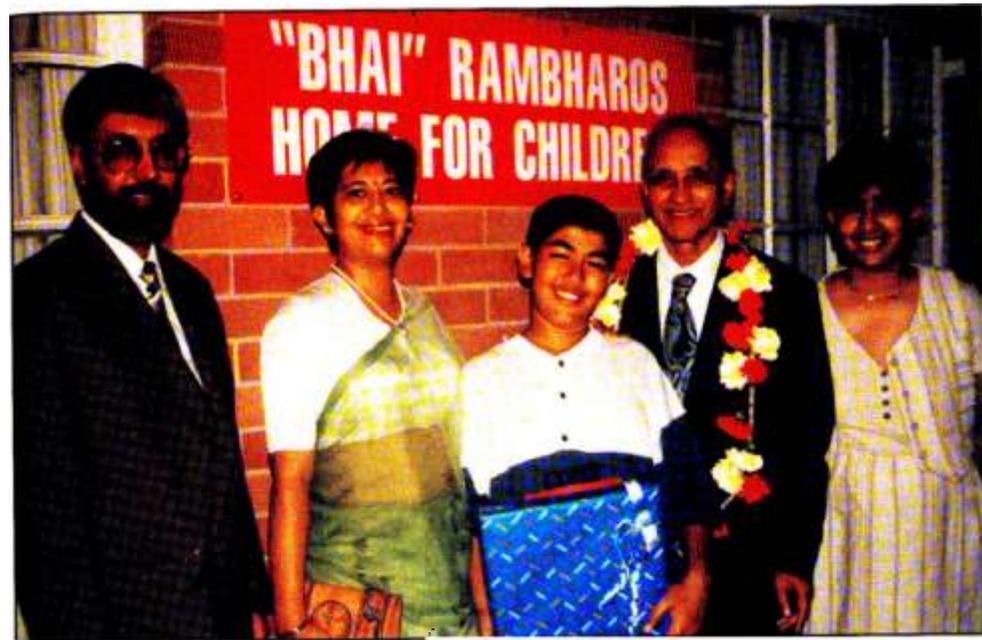
On 21 January 1945, Bhai Rambharos married Saraswati, daughter of Sampathie and Arjoon Dalip Singh, in a simple Vedic wedding conducted by Pandit Nayanah Rajh and attended by hundreds of people. The proposal of marriage had come at a time when he was beginning to develop his own leadership style and refining his skills on the experience he had accumulated under the guidance of Sabha executive members. His sensitive approach to the changing dynamics of the time was to avoid confrontation and disagreements on crucial issues at meetings and to use his highly developed skills of persuasion to get others to think as he did. It is a technique he has used very successfully since then, in a broad spectrum of services, yet it proved to be unsuccessful in his marriage.

The proposal had overjoyed the founders of the Home, who had stood *in loco parentis* throughout Bhai's life. An alliance with a family that served the Sabha, was financially stable and had impeccable credentials, was more than they had hoped for. Though they refrained from telling him openly that he should accept, they pointed out the benefits of having a wife to support and encourage the work he was doing and used their own lives in illustration. Mr Satyadeva, always direct and to the point, told him that, if he knew the scriptures, he would also know that his *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) period was almost over and that it was his duty to enter the *Grihastha ashram* (marriage home).

Bhai's uncertainty and hesitation came, not from a reluctance to marry, but as a result of the hopes he still cherished, to study the scriptures in India. He had obtained the secretarial diploma in the hope of finding better paid employment, to fund his studies himself. But, he had realised with some sadness, this was to remain a dream, for he was still at the wood and coal yard, and still earned only a little more than he had started with. Faced with very little choice, he worked through his indecisiveness by writing a short play entitled *Marriage*, in which the characters struggled with the same dilemma he faced. Four days later, having convinced himself that marriage could only bring greater happiness, he conveyed his acceptance. S. L. Singh clapped him on the shoulder and said, with a broad smile, 'Hm! *Joining the band of the 'Grihasthis' are you? Enjoy your freedom while you have it, my boy!*' The others embraced him, their joy obvious. He was not to know until many years later, that Mr Satyadeva had been on the verge of speaking to him about marrying his niece, when Dalip Singh approached him. Such was the nature of the man that his own disappointment was of little consequence to him, when seen against Bhai's good fortune.

The arranged marriage was a prevailing tradition amongst Indians, with neither bride nor groom having much say in the matter. Consequently, despite his lack of sophistication or readiness for marriage, Bhai surrendered under the kindly meant pressure that was exerted on him. Once he had agreed to marry, he began to believe that marriage would bring a different kind of fulfilment, without affecting his commitment to the Sabha and the Home. Yet, as he was to find out later, the needs of the Home and his own deeply spiritual approach to life were to place him in situations where he struggled with his conscience, torn between his duties to the Home and to his role as husband.

It was not the kind of conflict that was apparent in the lives of others who served the Home, and certainly not, as far as he knew, in Arjoon Dalip Singh's home. He had first met Dalip Singh when the older man was already a senior member of the Sabha and he was



*Delighted at the honour conferred on their fa-her and w'andfather.
L to R: Krishen, Reshma, Pavan, Bhar and Havlsha*



*Against the backdrop of Nanda Sooben's painting.
L to R: S. Satyadeva, M.G. Buthelezi and S. Rambharos*



With a resident of the Dayanand Gardens Home for the Aged



With Residents of the Home for the Handicapped at the Chatsworth complex

just a child. In later years, they worked closely together at Executive Committee level. The younger man grew to admire his conscientiousness and flamboyant artistic ability and to appreciate the stable and warm environment of his home. His relationship with the family had been close from the time he was very young, when he bloomed under the affection shown to him by Mrs Dalip Singh and her somewhat imposing mother-in-law, the *Aaji*, as she was known. As the years passed, he forged a close bond with them. Many afternoons in his childhood had been spent entertaining them with the *bhajans* he had learnt or reciting the *mantras*; in later years he was comfortable in their company and spoke to them about his aspirations and the activities of the Sabha. They encouraged him to follow his interests.

It was a home that blended the conservative thinking of Dalip Singh with the modern outlook of his wife and her family. Bhai came from a far more controlled environment, in which there had been concentration on the spiritual aspects of life, to the almost total exclusion of any form of social life other than service. The seriousness of his demeanour, his central focus on the Sabha and the Home, inhibited the development of a larger vision of life at a time when significant changes were taking place among the younger members of the community. World-wide, there was a movement towards greater assertiveness and social freedom, in reaction to the war; it resulted in a post-war euphoria when an energetic young generation freed itself from overly restrictive control. Under the circumstances, Bhai's marriage to Saras began in a climate of conflicting visions of reality, where his inclination to a more spiritual life contrasted sharply with Saras's search for pleasure. The difference of five years in their ages placed them also in two different categories - she in the fullness of her youth, impatient for change, and he already a responsible man, with an established vision of his purpose in life. He was not, at first, aware of the yawning chasm, for he judged Saras by what he knew - her father's lifelong commitment to the Sabha and her mother's kindness to its

residents. If this was poor judgement, it should be viewed against the tenor of the times, when a westernised lifestyle was only beginning to show itself in the Indian community and was confined only to the wealthy.

Saras was an engaging three year old when he first came to know her. When they were younger, he had played with the two daughters of the home, towards whom his attitude was always that of a protective older brother. As Saras entered her teenage years, however, he saw less of her as he became preoccupied with discussing affairs of the Home with Dalip Singh and she was being prepared for her role as a wife. After arrangements for their wedding began, he wondered, with some trepidation, whether he would be able to make the adjustment from '*Bhai*' to husband.

When he came to know her better, he realised that, beneath the surface reserve, Saras was a very high-spirited girl, with a mischievous sense of fun. Though somewhat short and plump, she was a beautiful young woman, with eyes that were invariably crinkled with laughter, for she, like her mother, found amusement in many things. Both had a marked dramatic flair and enjoyed mimicking others' facial expressions, manner of speech and demeanour. Though he was entertained by it at first, he became concerned that a person of her temperament might not be able to accommodate his more sedate lifestyle. As the wedding date approached, he began to realise how much his preoccupation with the aged and children of the Home was going to encroach on their time together. He spoke to her at length about his work, for it was important to him that she understood the position the Home and the Sabha occupied in his heart and mind. Saras reassured him, pointing out that her father's involvement had shown her family how demanding it was and the level of commitment it required. Her mother and grandmother answered in the same way, when he spoke to them. Since he had already seen the difference in the personalities of Saras's parents, he took heart from the happy environment and the ready laughter he always found when he was in their home.

By a strange coincidence, the lives of both Dalip Singh and Bhai developed in an unusually parallel fashion: both joined the Sabha at a very young age; both served as Secretary and President of the Sabha; both were elected President of the ABH Council; both shared a passion for the stage (where they enjoyed performing roles that were startlingly different from their real lives) and both retired to devote their lives to the Home. While Dalip Singh was stern and unsmiling, Bhai was always cheerful and pleasant, but they had the same serious attitude to their work in the social, religious and cultural fields. Their shared interests meant that, for Saras, at any rate, there was to be scarcely any difference between her life before and after marriage. As later events show, she was of the new, vital younger generation, attuned to the changing social scene and with modernised expectations of the relationships in a marriage.

A few months before the wedding, at Dalip Singh's urging, Bhai had bought a house three doors away, so that Saras could be near her mother, who was troubled by asthma and a heart ailment. It was a convenient arrangement which Saras supported wholeheartedly at the time, but it also imposed on her a dual responsibility and duty, which were to make inroads into the bridging process that is essential in a marriage - understanding each other's needs and gradually building up a system of cordial acceptance of differences, with the necessary compromises.

Then there was the question of where Ramnarain should live. The 'Big Three' insisted he would be more comfortable in the familiar environment of the Home, while Mr Satyadeva said, quite emphatically, that Bhai should not expect his wife to manage his brother, as she did not understand his condition. He knew they were right. Though Saras was able to nurse her mother, taking care of Ramnarain required a special understanding, a deep sensitivity that developed only when one has lived with or worked with a person with special needs. His brother lived in an isolated world, out of touch with reality, a childlike simplicity replacing the earlier aggressiveness. He could not see Saras and Ramnarain living in the same house.

The weeks before the wedding was a period of hectic preparation, as their home had to be furnished and made ready for occupation. It was also a time when Bhai underwent massive bouts of uncertainty. In almost twenty-five years of life, he had never had a one-to-one relationship of any kind and began to fear the compromises that marriage would demand. He wrestled with the recUtTing thought that he might have to make sacrifices that would affect the work to which he had given his heart. The Home and the Sabha were more to him than providers of help in his early days. They were his family, his mentors, his spiritual guide and he feared that to part from them would be like severing an indispensable part of himself.

As matters turned out, the decision to leave Ramnarain at the Home was a wise one, as the young couple were not to move into their own home after all. Saras's mother became very ill a week before the wedding. Dr Ansuyah Singh, Saras's cousin, took Bhai aside and suggested that they move into the empty outhouse on Dalip Singh's property, so that Saras could be readily available to help her mother. Though it came as a shock to him, he found he could not refuse, for Dalip Singh's younger daughter, Krishna, was still at school and her grandmother was not expected to manage on her own. Two days later, most of his personal effects were transferred from the Home and the furniture cramped into the two little rooms behind the main house.

On his wedding day, dressed in a new suit and cream turban, Bhai looked princely, the turban drawing attention to his handsome face and particularly fine eyes. He sat in his little room, contemplating the years that had passed. It was an emotional journey, enriched by vivid memories. He thought of his parents and of all those who had filled his life by their acts of generosity and compassion. He thought with sadness of Ramnarain, who, had things been different, might have been at his side at that moment, helping him to prepare for his wedding. Though he had painstakingly tried to explain to him that he was leaving the Home, he knew Ramnarain

did not comprehend. Nor, he realised with some pain, would he even notice that his younger brother was no longer there.

Then it was time to leave and as he accompanied Pandit Nayanah Rajh through the main building, he gratefully acknowledged the well-wishes of all those who had crowded there to see him. There had been much joy and laughter, amidst the tears, the night before: he was the first man to be married from the Home and it had been his last night there after almost eighteen years. Led by Sewpersad Rambaran's bugle band and accompanied by the *Saybala*, young Dayasagar Ramklass, son of the Sabha's President, they walked the short distance to the bride's home. Behind them came a procession of Sabha members, residents of the Home and friends. The short route was lined by people who came out of their homes to watch and applaud.

The wedding ceremony took place under a large canvas sail propped up by wattle poles and supported by bamboo. It transformed the open yard at Dalip Singh's house, and was decorated tastefully with lights, flowers and plants. When he arrived, there were already hundreds of people there, family and friends of Saras's family, all exquisitely dressed in colourful saris and smart suits. The contrast with the simplicity of the groom's 'family' was obvious. Bhai repeated after Pandit Nayanah Rajh, the timeless words of the *mantra* (translated below) with which bride and groom exchange their vows. He had heard it often before, but on his wedding day it took on a greater significance for him and he was deeply moved by the message it contained - the inseparable union of two beings. Though the years ahead were very difficult, he weathered every storm through his unshakeable belief in the lasting nature of that day's commitment:

*I am what you are. You are what I am. I
am the psalm and you are the verse. I am
the heaven and you are the earth. May we
live together
and be blessed with children.*

Very little registers in his mind about the wedding itself, except that there were people present whom he had never met before, and that Saras wore a pink sari which covered her head and, to his great disappointment, obscured most of her face. Everything else seemed to pass in a haze. When the wedding was over, again accompanied by the officials of the Home and led by the bugle band, the bride and groom walked to the Home so that the residents who had not attended the wedding could see them together. He had promised to do this. They then returned to Dalip Singh's house, where they were to spend the next four years. After a week in the outbuilding, they moved into a room in the main house, as Mrs Dalip Singh's condition had deteriorated.

However much he may now minimise the effect it had on his marriage, the first few months were undoubtedly difficult for him. There was little privacy, little time for the young couple to find each other, to learn to cope with the compromises a new relationship demands. The constant stream of visitors who came to see her mother kept Saras fully occupied. Added to that was the fact that they were not living in their own home, where decisions could be made about their life together. Bhai had been comfortable in Dalip Singh's house as a future son-in-law but it was a different matter to live with one's wife's family. It was, he says, a small sacrifice to make for a woman who had been a mother-figure to him for years and to whom Saras was closely attached. However, the sacrifice on Saras's part was immeasurable, as she had to tend to the needs of her mother, grandmother, younger sister, father and husband. It imprisoned her in a seemingly never-ending process. Given the nature of their marriage in subsequent years, where each followed a different path, it seems very likely that Saras sought to escape the continual calls on her time and energy through an unfettered enjoyment of what life could offer.

The pattern of illness, followed by a period of recovery, was to trouble Mrs Dalip Singh for a year and a half, until her death. Saras nursed her mother through each bout in her usual efficient and

caring manner, but the strain began to show. She found respite from her heavy responsibilities by turning to others whose lives were free from care. It was a period during which she and Bhai spent many afternoons and evenings at the home of friends or at her aunt's house, where she could join her cousin Pyriam, the youngest of C. R. Singh's three daughters and the closest to her in age, temperament and interests. She was happiest when she could disappear into Pyriam's room, where they were soon deep in what Bhai calls '*girl talk*'. He understood her desperation for diversion and accommodated it whenever he could. If he was not available, Saras made her own arrangements.

These visits ushered in a particularly enlightening period in Bhai's life, when he was surrounded by many young and healthy people, when life was carefree and laughter abounded. His own sense of humour found an appreciative audience and he relaxed and let the social whirl encompass him. Frequently, they attended parties, socials or went out for an evening at a club and, because Saras had so much fun at these times, Bhai accompanied her willingly. When others pressed him to have a drink, he says, he handled it as diplomatically as possible:

I didn't want to be seen to be different, so I accepted the drink, pretended to sip it and nursed it for the rest of the evening. If there was a potted plant nearby, it got the benefit of it! It was good, relaxing company and the people I met were so pleasant that I rather enjoyed these evenings out. I never learned to dance, however, and wouldn't have dared to try among all those accomplished people. I was truly amazed at Saras 's ability. But I enjoyed the rhythm and beat of the music and my feet couldn't keep still.

The young man who had been brought up in a sheltered environment was suddenly given entry into the larger sophisticated world outside the Home. It was not, he soon realised, the kind of life he wanted for himself on a regular basis. His knowledge was widened by the people he met and through the discussions that took

place among the highly educated crowd of young people who converged on C. R. Singh's home in Mansfield Road. Many of them were friends or colleagues of the two older daughters, Ansuyah and Radhi, and came from the medical and legal fraternities. Others were passionately involved in the liberation struggle. Bhai came out of these discussions and debates with a better understanding that there were those who were striving for the ultimate restoration of the dignity of all the underprivileged in the country, while his work was based on the more immediate relief of the few. Service, he saw, had more complex dimensions and connotations than his own special orbit indicated. The people he listened to were as intense about suppression of political rights as he was about the Home, the care of the destitute and the plight of children. There was only a difference in priorities. Sometimes, overwhelmed by the intensity and passion that the discussions aroused, he was filled with admiration for their academic, social and political commitment. He found he could speak of nothing else as they made their way home afterwards, though he never veered from his own commitment to serving the Home.

Mrs Dalip Singh's death in July 1947 and Saras's miscarriage a few weeks later seems to mark the point of change in their lives. The baby had been their central focus of hope at a time of grief. For Saras, the concurrent loss of her mother and the child left her desolate and in despair. Her loneliness at this time must have been catastrophic on her hopes and dreams. In the period after Mrs Dalip Singh's death, Bhai was to see a tragic transformation in their life at the home in 202 Bellair Road. The family was rent by constant tension and even more serious conflicts between Saras and her father, which were to continue for many years thereafter. Her need to escape from a restrictive life, which suppressed her outgoing and lively nature, led her to seek the excitement of parties, night-clubs and dancing, in the company of her circle of friends. When Dalip Singh discovered that she had begun drinking alcohol, he was outraged and became abusive towards her. He was sensitive to the

shame it could bring to their household in the relatively tight-knit and conservative community of Cato Manor. Saras became resentful and tearful and refused to talk about the matter, making it difficult for Bhai to heal the breach. When he is asked about his own feelings then, he says:

It was not a problem at the time. A small drink at a party is not a sin. I will stand by that even though I don't drink alcohol. But it was being made into a bigger issue than it was. That was a mistake.

The tension between father and daughter reached a point when Bhai appeared to find welcome relief in being away from home. It is deduced from the volume and range of activities he became involved in during 1948. The Home, at these times, was also a haven of peace. What kept him from moving out of 202 Bellair Road was Krishna's imminent marriage to Surie Purmasir. Saras and Bhai spent almost the entire December/January school vacation delivering wedding invitation cards, which afforded them an escape from the tensions at home and helped to separate her from her new-found pleasures. It gave them a chance to talk, to try to eliminate what was quickly becoming a problem under the stress of the home environment. It was, he knew, also becoming a matter for public discussion.

In January 1949, while they were in Pietermaritzburg, combining a short holiday with delivering wedding invitations, race riots erupted in Durban. They hurried back, only to find that Dalip Singh's house was wide open, his car had gone and no one had any idea where the family was. Bhai joined Surie Purmasir in a systematic search for the rest of that day and the next. On the third day they learnt that they were safe at a relative's home in Merebank and he could only imagine the terror that drove them to flee. Despite this nerve-racking experience, and the despair they went through at the time, the conflicts at home did not end. Four weeks

before Krishna's wedding, a particularly unpleasant scene forced him to make the decision to leave, and they moved into a flat in Warwick Avenue. He recorded it in his diary as follows, a week later:

Rather a sad parting. Farewell reception was a shower of curses. Spent the whole of the first week in great worry, trying to adapt to living in new surroundings.

Despite this, they returned regularly to Bellair Road to continue with preparations for Krishna's wedding. Later, when the wedding was over, Bhai visited Dalip Singh and *Aaji* whenever he was at the Home. When his father-in-law asked him to return to Bellair Road, he refused. It was good for their marriage to be on their own and, for perhaps the first time in her life, Saras felt free of responsibilities. He had begun to hope that they could work together to put an end to her drinking and to forge a stronger bond. He made a strong and determined effort to this end, taking her away from their flat whenever he could. During the Winter school vacation in 1949, for example, they spent much of their time together or with friends:

- 25.6.49 *Attended birthday party of Selvum, Mr Ponnann 's baby son.*
- 26.6.49 *Went for a long walk with Saras. In the evening visited 'Arondel' where Mr Fernandez gave us afine time.
Mr and Mrs S. Manohar our guests.*
- 12.7.49 *Guests of Mr and Mrs S. Manohar.*
- 16.7.49-
- 21.7.49
- 22.7.49
- 23.7.49 *At Mr Bugwandeem of Port Shepstone.
At Mr Sahadeo of Port Shepstone. Visited Margate and St Michael's on Sea with Mr Hardeo.*

To others, their relationship must have presented a conundrum. Saras was always loving and caring, looking after his every need

and bringing ready laughter to his lips, yet she played no part in his work for the AYS or the Home, at a time when he was a leading figure in both organisations. He became very aware of the fact that no one ever mentioned her marked absence or lack of involvement. It was embarrassing, but he bore it with dignity, resolving to protect her from criticism or open discussion. Only those closest to him - BB.L. Singh, Jogi and Surie among them - knew how he felt.

In some inexplicable way, Saras and he were happy together, at least for the first few years of their marriage, despite the vast difference in their personalities and interests. He developed a more relaxed attitude to life, found enjoyment outside his work for the Sabha and grew substantially. Their flat in Aroon Court was centrally situated and became a favourite stop-over for family and friends who were drawn there by Saras's open-house policy and excellent skills as a hostess. Though it placed a strain on his work and studies, he simply excused himself and adjourned to another venue, whenever he had to. Diary entries are quite revealing in this respect. One is quoted below:

4. 9. 49: Spent the day at Albert Park. Mr Ramduth and I studied together. At about 30' clock when we were sitting on a bench which was for 'Europeans Only', the European caretaker reproached us for occupying the seat. We told him that we had occupied it after a long search in vainfor a seatfor 'Non Europeans'. We left the seat as we had found it.

He found it difficult to visit his father-in-law without Saras at his side and set out to bring them together gradually and also tried to apportion his time to both the Home and his wife, to take her visiting or on drives. What was important at the time was to keep her occupied and happy:

25.12.49 Christmas. Lunch at Uncle C.R. S. Visited Mr and Mrs Ashwin Choudree¹ and Dolly Purmasir in the afternoon.

- 26.12.49 *Spent the day at home.*
 27.12.4 *Went for a drive - Saras, her father; her granny and
 1.*

Unfortunately, this period of harmony was not to last, with disastrous consequences for their marriage. From 1950 onwards, there were excessive demands upon Bhai's time and little opportunity for him to relax. It began, in 1950, with the extended Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the APS and the series of lectures, discourses and social activities that followed it; it was the year when S. L. and Bhai went out to raise funds to build a new school; it was the year the Sabha continued with its massive fund-raising drive, in anticipation of its development of the 'Salvation Army' property. It was also the year when the *Group Areas Act* was promulgated. Combined, they dominated his time after school hours and during weekends and must have intensified Saras's sense of isolation. It may explain the established routine of at least one glass of brandy, before Bhai arrived home. Though her drinking was not a serious problem at this stage, it became steadily worse as the years passed and led, in the 1980s to a serious deterioration in her mental and physical condition. Bhai was caught in a situation he could not control. He was secretary of the AYS, a position he had held for the previous nine years; in 1951 he was elected president of the AYS and secretary of the ABH Council. It was a time of crisis for everything that he had held dear since his entry into the Home in 1927.

At this time, he needed Saras's support as well, but received only tacit acceptance of his busy schedule and none of the readiness to help that came from the wives of other Sabha members. In the first two years of their marriage, while her mother was ill, he had understood her inability to help; after that, it had surprised him, as she had grown up in a household where religion, culture and service to the community were of paramount importance.

Her reactions to his brother also troubled him greatly. He knew she was uncomfortable in Ramnarain's presence and embarrassed by his behaviour, but it was not like Saras to turn her back upon others, as she had a happy, caring disposition. He rationalised that it was the inevitable consequence of her own settled home environment and the family's comfortable circumstances: she did not know the pathetic plight of some of those who lived at the Home - the physically and the mentally challenged, the very frail and the very old. When she visited the Home on special occasions, such as *Ramnaumee* or *Shivarathree*, she did not see those who could not rise from their beds or feed themselves or tend to their sanitary needs. Though their concerns were radically different, he had hoped to engage her interest in the children, whose ruptured lives needed the warm and loving attention she was capable of. However, he learnt to accept without complaint her reluctance to become involved in anything that concerned the Home, for he respected her right to choose. The Home represented a life directly opposite to what she yearned for. There was a message there for him, but not one he could contemplate accepting. If he gave up the Home and threw himself into the social world, he knew he could never be happy. There were too many who needed help and support.

The return to 202 Bellair Road

During 1951, it was with mixed feelings that they moved back to Dalip Singh's house, as the legal tenant required their flat for himself and they could not find another that was affordable. After a personal tussle with her own feelings in the matter, Saras approached her father, who received them back with pleasure and some relief. He had shown, in many ways, his regret at his bitter parting from his daughter and saw in their return a chance to make amends. In 1950, he had sold his business and retired from work, thereafter devoting his time and energy to the Sabha and the Home and spending the greater part of the day at the latter. When he was elected President of the AYS in 1952, Bhai was then Secretary of

*Reshma, Bhai and Saras**Birthday Party: L to R: Saras, Bhai, B.D. Lalla, and Deva Naidoo*

the ABH Council and it became a standing joke among members that joint Executive Committee meetings of the Sabha and the Home might as well take place round the dining room table at 202 Bellair Road! Yet it is clear that this absorption with the Home and its needs, by both her father and her husband impelled Saras to find diversion again. The tensions between father and daughter resumed, on a higher scale. At one point, Saras left home and stayed at her Aunt's house, refusing to return. Others had to be called in to help this time, as Dalip Singh had become violent. Mr and Mrs S. L. Singh and Mr and Mrs C. R. Singh tried to calm him down and reason with him, but he was adamant that Saras's behaviour, especially her drinking, was unacceptable. Surie, with whom Bhai enjoyed the close relationship of a brother, suggested that a solution to the problems might lie in Saras having a baby to look after, to lavish attention upon and find the direction that seemed to be lacking in her life. When Reshma was born, Bhai prayed it would be the answer.

Her birth is recorded in a simple entry in his diary: '*20.1.53 Reshma made her first appearance on earth at 12.54 pm.*' The baby's needs, her helplessness and dependence helped to bring them together, in the fulfilment of parenthood that had been denied to them for eight years. He recalls his happiness and a sense of being overwhelmed by the baby's dominating presence:

It felt strange at first to have this tiny bundle, all cosily wrapped up and generally fast asleep, taking up all our time and energy. The bathroom was filled with tiny vests and booties, lacy baby dresses and napkins. The kitchen became the sterilising centre, with teats and curved feeding bottles bobbing gently in hot water. That special baby smell - a mixture of regurgitated milk, baby powder and gripe water - pervaded our room.

Yet again, as has happened so often in his life, when the dark clouds seem to be tinged with a promising brightness, tragedy struck: three months after Reshma's birth, Dalip Singh suffered a massive



Reshma's 7th birthday party. Her mother is behind her.



Father and daughter outside their flat in Goodhope Centre, Queen Street

CC.

Marriage

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stroke which left him paralysed and with reduced mental capabilities. The responsibilities of nursing devolved, again, on Saras and were far more demanding than they had been during her mother's illness, as her father was totally dependent on her. Added to this were the responsibilities of motherhood. It ushered in a period in which the strain became almost too much for her to bear. When her grandmother died suddenly in 1954, after a short illness, and her father died less than a year later, it almost pushed her off the edge. In an attempt to provide the companionship and assistance she needed and to compensate for his own absence from home, Bhai 'adopted' thirteen year old Ellamah 'Amoy' Moonsamy in 1954. She was the eldest child of a large, poverty-stricken family who lived in the Verulam barracks. With the help of Radhi and J. N. Singh, whose domestic worker was from the barracks, Bhai agreed to employ Amoy when he saw how Saras struggled to cope. She had begun to suffer prolonged bouts of bronchitis and became very drowsy under the combined power of brandy and medication, causing him concern that Reshma would be unattended while her mother slept and he was away from home.

When he first saw Amy, as she is now known, he realised for the first time that she was no more than a child and, with Saras's approval, welcomed her instead as a member of their family. They brought her up as their elder daughter and Reshma's '*big sister*'. Though he contributed to her family's earnings each month, neither Bhai nor Saras ever regarded her as the servant she was intended to be.

Amy lives in Clayfield, Phoenix, the proud mother of three and doting grandmother of five. Having lived with Bhai Rambharos and his family for eleven years, she is in an excellent position to describe her life during that period.

From my first day at the house in Bellair Road, I was treated like their own child. She was a wonderful person, always laughing and happy. She talked all the time. During my first year there, she even

gave me a bath! For the first time in my life, I had a room for myself and beautiful clothes. They gave me a wonderful life. My parents came to visit me and they were always welcomed. Uncle made sure I spent time with my family as well and took me there for holidays, so that I could be with my brothers and sisters. Reshma was just under two years old when I first went to live with them, and though I was so much older, we grew up together as sisters who played and fought and made up, all the time! Uncle worried about the fact that I had never been to school, so he bought me a chalkboard and chalk and taught me at home. When we moved to Dhupson House in 1956, he sent me to classes to learn to read and write. Later, he sent me to the Technical College to learn dress-making. I hated it, but he said I had to go, because I might need to earn a living some day. Those were wonderful days with my adopted family.

We always had a lot of visitors and whenever Uncle was free, he took us out for drives, to visit family and so on. He was a very busy person, often at meetings at the Home, and came in very late in the evenings. Reshma and I used to sit on Aunty's bed and play and talk, until she fell asleep. Then we went to bed. But I always cooked things he liked to eat - karela, bindi, jackfruit, mea lie meal roti and so on. I loved cooking for him and he always praised me for it.

In 1956, because Uncle had made a promise to take me on holiday, we all went by car on a Union tour. It was my first holiday away from Durban and I remember being very excited. When I left them to get married in 1965, we were all very sad. Later, after my second child was born, I started work near their flat and joined Aunty for lunch every Friday. Then we just talked and talked. She was such a lovely, lively person to be with. When she became ill I used to visit her at the ABH, but after a while, she didn't recognise me. I've kept in touch with Uncle all these years, though we don't have a chance to meet very often. He is a very good man with a good heart, full of fun and jokes, even now. They were both lovely people, but they were so different from each other. To me, what's important is that they showed me love during the years I lived with them.

Dalip Singh had left the house to Saras and they continued to live there until June 1956. Facing what seemed inevitable, according to informed sources, they sold the house to the Group Areas Board and moved into Dhupson House in Prince Edward Street. Though the move had its advantages, in that they were centrally located, it also heralded a period of soul-searching on Bhai's part, for he was aware of the consequences of leaving Saras with only the children for company. He says, by way of explanation:

I was at work during the day and had only the late afternoons and evenings in which to complete my work at the Home. It was a difficult time in the Home's history and there were many older people's lives and many children's futures at stake.

During their two-year stay at Dhupson House, concern about Saras's health increased. She was often tired and suffered recurring headaches and frequent prolonged bouts of coughing. Her breathing was sometimes laboured, with a hint of a wheeze. Afraid that she might have contracted the dreaded tuberculosis, he took her for a chest X-ray at King George V Hospital. They were all relieved when the results showed their fears were unfounded. "Fresh air and sunshine is what she needs, and a drier climate," Ansuyah told him. To give Saras time to rest, he sometimes took Reshma with him to meetings, while Amy stayed behind to keep her company. Reshma remembers these occasions vividly:

It was like an adventure to go with my father to those meetings. I was quite upset if he couldn't take me and sometimes threw a tantrum!. Often there were two meetings, one after the other and we returned home late at night, though that had to stop when I started school. Each occasion was like a special outing. In his hand my father always had a packet with something for me to eat and drink. After being cooped up in the flat all day, when my mother was not well, it was like being freed from a cage.

He depended on his neighbours, Neela and Frank Moodley, to check on his family regularly while he was away during the evenings. Reshma had found a ready playmate in their son, am, who was about two years younger, and a close friendship had developed between the two families, with Neela keeping a watchful eye on Reshma, while Amy tended to Saras.

In 1957, with the money obtained from the sale of the house in Bellair Road and the money he had saved from the sale of his own property in 1950, Bhai bought land in Hibiscus Place, Asherville and obtained a loan from the Durban City Corporation to build a house, to get away from the fumes that travelled up to their flat from the heavy city traffic below and to take Saras away from easy access to alcohol. Soon after the building commenced, he was ordered to stop, as the purchase of the land, the granting of the building loan and the passing of the plans had been in contravention of the conditions of the *Group Areas Act*, which prohibited sale of land or property prior to the issuing of the Proclamation, except to the Group Areas Board. He appealed successfully against the ruling, on the grounds that the construction had already begun, with the approval of the Housing Department. The building was allowed to continue after a special permit was issued.

They found it strange at first to live in an area where homes were built on small plots of land, where the roads were all tarred and everything looked new. Asherville, in Bhai's view, lacked character. There was a distinct absence of a community spirit, though this was understandable, as the area was in its early stages of development and its residents had come from different parts of the city. Reshma settled into her new surroundings after the initial difficulties of adjustment and separation from her friends at the flat, while Saras and Amy threw themselves into decorating and furnishing. They were happier as a family than they had ever been before. For both the girls, these days in Asherville are happy memories of a father and 'uncle' who did the most outrageous things

to make them laugh, took them for long walks and treated them to ice-creams, chocolates and cakes. Even helping him in the garden became an absorbing and exciting adventure. His own love of life seemed to turn every moment spent with him into joyousness.

A few months later, the Group Areas Proclamation was gazetted and his life was once again dominated by the Home's struggle to survive. Though the consequences on his family life were tragic, for the next fifteen years he had to give his undivided attention to steering the Home out of troubled times. It was compounded by the deaths, in quick succession, of the Mr Satyadeva, Pandit Nayanah Rajh and Mr S. L. Singh, the 'Big Three', whose dedication to the Home was a tradition he was determined to maintain. Anything less than his best would have been a betrayal of trust: on his deathbed, in 1961, Mr Satyadeva had made him promise that he would always remain true to the Home.

In the ensuing years, he made many attempts, often at great sacrifice to what he believed in, to help Saras by taking her away from her friends, who had begun to join her in their home for longer sessions of drinking. He took his family on extended holidays, both locally and overseas and moved to Ladysmith in 1966, partly for this reason as well. Yet again, a perverse fate intervened, so that he remained in Ladysmith, while Saras and Reshma returned to Durban after six months, to an acceleration of her problem. She was not happy away from the more stimulating environment of Durban. During weekend visits and school holidays, they had stayed with Dharamdevi and Son Singh in Clare Estate, and it was to their home that they returned in December 1966. Bhai had applied for a transfer, which was supported strongly by N. G. Chetty, Principal of Windsor High School, who understood his predicament in regard to his family and the Home. The transfer was not granted, but an application for long leave was. Taking it as an opportunity to gain a perspective on his life, he rented a flat in Overport, enrolled Reshma at the Durban Indian Girls' High School and went overseas for an extended period, when he tried to come to terms with his life.

On his return, he had no choice but to live in Ladysmith, with only visits during weekends and school holidays with his family. During this time, says Dharamdevi, Saras's drinking became very much heavier and she was often in an insensible state. The tensions that developed between mother and daughter, she believes, were a direct result. Son Singh refers to himself as a rehabilitated alcoholic, who owes the stability of his marriage to the direct intervention of Bhai, who counselled him and his wife and gave support and strength to his family. He took Saras to Alcoholics Anonymous for help, though he is adamant that she was a heavy drinker and not an alcoholic. She was mutinous and headstrong about going, but they were able to persuade her to go. In the middle of the second meeting, according to Son, she got up and stormed out and refused to return.

By the time Bhai returned to Durban, in December 1969, she was drinking very heavily. Son believes that, though Bhai was shattered to see her daily condition, it strengthened him in other ways and brought father and daughter very close. When they moved into a flat in Queen Street, Saras's headlong plunge into disaster intensified, as their flat was in the same building as a night club, with easy access to the alcohol it served.

It is in this climate that Reshma grew into her teenage years, when she was most vulnerable and should have been able to turn to her mother for guidance. It was her father who became her solid pillar of strength. Whatever problems she may have experienced as a child growing up in her home environment, Reshma speaks of her mother with fondness, describing how lively she always was, the warm welcome she extended to her school friends and their fondness for Saras that kept them coming to the flat, even after Reshma had married and left.

Reshma's wedding day in January 1981 was a colourful 'sit-down wedding' in the City Hall, which she had wanted and her father agreed to despite his own wish for a simpler function at the APS Hall. There were many fears about how Saras would conduct

herself. She managed, however, and coped also when Reshma gave birth to Havisha at the end of September that year. Saras lavished her love on her granddaughter, whom she looked after while Reshma was at work. By 1982, when Bhai received his first Civic Award, her condition was alarming, Dharamdevi accompanied them to the City Hall, to ensure that she was supervised. She sat quietly throughout the proceedings.

Early in 1984, however, she was admitted to King George V Hospital, treated and discharged. It is recorded in his diary as follows:

Saras hospitalised. Received specialised treatment. Discharged. Diagnosis - she had brain damage. Her memory began fading and she became headstrong and difficult to control. Got help from Dharam and Sabitha to take turns to be with her. Also employed people, on and off, on a daily basis, as the need arose.

By the time their grandson Pavan, was born in 1985, her condition had deteriorated to the point of incapacity. Bhai had to be mother and father, caring for Reshma during the night in both the pre-and post-natal periods and for the baby, who had been delivered by caesarean section. 'Saras tried to help,' he says, 'but it was difficult for her.'

Often, she wandered away from their flat, in a dazed condition. He made arrangements with friends and family to care for her while he was at the Home. It became imperative to have someone with her throughout the day. Those who either left their own homes to be at her side, on a rotational basis, or accommodated her for the day at their homes, did it out of their love and respect for him: Mrs S. Theeruth, Pandita Dharamdevi Singh, Sharda Goordeen, Neela and Frank Moodley. Saras's sister, Krishna, and her cousin, Purthap Singh, tended to her needs devotedly as well. There were many, many others whose selfless sacrifice of time and care for his wife was a fitting tribute to Bhai's own unfaltering devotion to the care

of the frail and needy. Among them was S. L. Sewgolam who often helped to transport her to and from the homes of those who were to care for her.

In January 1986, for her own protection, Saras was admitted to King George V Hospital. Three months later, Matron Pursad of Dayanand Gardens Hospital Section, in the new ABH premises in Chatsworth, asked Bhai to admit her to the Home's psychiatric ward, where the staff would take care of her. She had discussed the matter with the Director, Mr K. Sitaram and other staff members and all had agreed that this was best, to prevent Bhai's frenetic rushing from his flat in Queen Street to Chatsworth, then to the hospital in Asherville, back to Chatsworth and to the hospital again, before returning each evening to his flat. He was grateful for the offer and, in April, Saras was admitted to the psychiatric ward. He recorded this in his diary as follows:

Saras brought to Dayanand Gardens. Received personal attention of the matron and sisters. Without any problem, she was integrated into the system here. I also became more relaxed. The flat of the Assistant Matron was given to me and I felt closer to Saras. Thus the pattern of my life changed considerably. Most of my time was spent at the ABH.

There is a great deal of painful irony in the fact that Saras was cared for in her last years by the nurses at the Aryan Benevolent Home, the institution she had avoided all her married life.

Saras died, at the Home, on 21 August 1987. Their marriage had lasted for almost forty three years. In his diary, Bhai recorded his appreciation of the support he received from those around him:

Mr Sitaram and his family stood by my side. Other staff members all helped in whatever way possible. Krishen, Reshma, her mother-in-law, Mr and Mrs Thajoo and many other persons came.

At the funeral, the following day, all Bhai's friends and colleagues were there to support the family: Pandita Nanackchand led the

bhajans, followed by the Stri Samaj; Pandit Nardev Vedalankar and Pandit Ramduth recited *mantras*; Dasrath Bundhoo spoke, and a guard of honour was formed by the ABH nursing staff. Her funeral was a solemn and dignified process, in true Vedic tradition.

In retrospect, it is not difficult to see that the totally different world visions of Bhai and Saras prevented the man who brought joy to the lives of others from enjoying the security and comfort of a stable and contented married life. Perhaps, one surmises, Dalip Singh's active and ongoing participation in AYS activities, her mother's regular interaction with the residents and her own participation in the services held there had, in some way, stifled or disillusioned Saras. Having to leave school after standard four to help her mother must have only exacerbated matters. Always in the background was the example of a vastly different kind of life, epitomised by her mother's sister's home in Mansfield Road, where there were no established or governed patterns of life. Her uncle was a long-standing member of the Sabha, but seemed able to combine his religious and social involvement with his family's thoroughly modern outlook to life, which came primarily from his wife's wealthier and more relaxed home environment. Why Mrs Dalip Singh was not able to effect a similar approach to life is unknown, though it is possibly linked to her husband's upbringing and his dominant nature.

C.R. Singh's daughters were encouraged to study, both locally and overseas, and suffered few restrictions on their movement. They led very sophisticated lives in which academic achievement blended with active socialising, in their home and with friends and colleagues who were also highly educated and articulate. The contrast between their lives and Saras's was striking and helps to explain her anxiousness to emulate them and to be part of their social world. Her problem lay in not being able to cope with it adequately. The extent to which Bhai's involvement with the Home and the AYS contributed to this is debatable, for the contrasting lifestyles had been there before he married into the family. It

troubled him, nevertheless, for he was sensitive to the gulf between his simple, almost spartan life and the glamour and excitement she craved.

Not a single person who was interviewed during the research done for this biography, has talked about Saras giving help to others less fortunate than herself. Her attention, by all accounts, revolved around her role as a daughter, wife and mother and her own interests. Yet most do not appear to have noticed that her reluctance to engage in the affairs of the Home, which were so dear to her husband's heart, obviously stemmed from a reaction to the burden of responsibilities thrust on her at a young age and at a time when a new door to life's experiences was just about to open.

In many respects, she will remain an enigma, a sad depiction of a vivacious woman who succumbed to a weakness, propelled by restlessness into a kind of life that was a direct contradiction to her husband's. Mr H. Sewnath, who was on the administrative staff of the Children's Home and later its Principal, remembers her as 'a traditional wife' - quiet, self-effacing and dignified. Others recall her fun-loving nature that sought excitement and entertainment. Prem Sundar remembers the social functions where all the young girls, including herself, rushed to take the seat next to Saras because, she says,

she was such fun to be with, always laughing, always with a story to tell, digging her elbows into our sides and keeping us in stitches. Sometimes the older folk stared askance at us and Saras had us doubled up again as she stared innocently ahead!

Bhai agrees with this depiction of his wife and attempts to bring some perspective into the subject:

Saras had an irrepressible sense of fun, but she was always sensitive to the demands of the moment: serious at Sabha/Home functions, in her role as the wife of an official; vitally alive and exuberant when she was with friends and younger people; at ease

in the company of older members of the family and our friends. Being with people was what she enjoyed.

The last statement is significant. When a 'vitaly alive and exuberant woman', begins to feel imprisoned, she looks for an escape. Saras found it and despite many frustrated attempts to give it up - because of her sensitivity to his position, her own sense of shame and her realisation that it was not going to make matters any better - she seemed unable to stop herself. There was so much potential in the relationship, so much each could have learned from the other - he from her outgoing nature and enjoyment of life, and she from his example of care and devotion for others.

Today, as an eighty year old man, Bhai is still busy, still fully involved in the Home and all its activities. Reshma, Krishen and his two grandchildren are also very precious to him and his pride in them is obvious. When their new home was built, a special area was developed for his use, and he regrets that he has not spent enough time there. From the time that Havisha and Pavan were born, they have occupied a special place in his heart and, when they were younger, spent most of their holidays with him in his flat at the Home. When their parents were on holiday overseas, he says, 'my flat at the ABH rang with the sound of their voices'. Havisha is now almost a young woman, just out of school. She is a vital, exuberant girl, very much lost in admiration of her grandfather, whom she describes as her 'childhood playmate' and her friend. Pavan, a little quieter, is described by his small and slightly built grandfather as 'a giant of a boy', whom he enjoys flustering by speaking to him occasionally in Hindi. He laughs as he describes Pavan's reaction when he does this - a single, despairing, 'Nana!'

With his son-in-law, Krishen, who lost his father when he was very young, Bhai enjoys the warm relationship of a father to his son. Reshma continues to dominate his consciousness and, according to the staff at ABH, 'she has just to call for him and he leaves everything else aside and goes. '

His avowed intention, if he has the time - and that has been a problem all his life - is to spend his last years enjoying his family.

Notes

1. *Dr Ansuyah Singh married Ashwin Choudree.*
2. *Bitter gourd, okra.*



Welcome to Mauritius: Garlanded: L & R - S. Rambharos and S. Chotai, leaders of the S.A. contingent

CHAPTER 8

***AN INSPIRED LEADER 1951
-1966***

In 1951, while still Secretary of the Sabha, Bhai addressed the question of membership. Up to that time, in terms of its constitution, women had been excluded, though not by conscious design but rather as a result of the South African Indian community's perception of their role in the family. It was customary for women to be seen merely as wives and mothers, without rights of their own and submissive to their husbands' authority. (The laws of the land supported this view: 'European' women had to wait until 1930 to gain the franchise, while in the rest of the world the suffragette movement had been gaining momentum since it began in 1865.) From its inception in 1912, the Sabha had been assisted devotedly by the wives of its members and other equally industrious women from the community, yet they never attended meetings or had a say in its activities. Finding this strange, Bhai asked Mrs S. L. Singh why she did not attend their meetings. "*Because your constitution does not allow it,*" was her direct response. Ashamed at the oversight, he reproached himself for not having noticed the omission when he had studied the constitution, long after he had become a member in 1930. At the next meeting of the Sabha he proposed immediate revision of the constitution - a progressive step that would also bring the Sabha in line with increasing calls for the recognition of women's rights. He describes how his proposal was received:

They took it very calmly indeed: women were already fully involved. We could never have managed without them. The change

development. He was determined that they would realise their dream of establishing a new Home and a school that was better equipped and modern, no matter where they had to move in terms of the expected Group Areas Proclamation. From his discussions with friends in the business world, he knew that there would be an unprecedented escalation of property prices as people in areas affected by the proclamation scrambled to find alternatives. Many of the businessmen whose books he wrote up had already started accumulating money for the purpose and kept it hidden at home.

He frequently reminded members of the Sabha not to think in terms of renovation or building on property they owned, but to look at future development as a far more costly venture. It was at this time that a separate Development Fund was established and he began to work closely with Mr M. Moonoo, who had been the Sabha's Treasurer in 1937 and subsequently became its auditor. Strong support for the financial ventures came from Pandit Nayanah Rajh, President of the ABH Council and S. A. Naidoo, as well as from the treasurers, Ben Ramouthar (1951 - 1954) and Harry Gokool (1955 - 1958). It was a relatively young team that got down to planning and implementing projects immediately.

DaIip Singh's collapse at a meeting where he presided as Chairman was, in Bhai's opinion, the first signal that times were changing and that the comfortable circumstances of the past were over. Necessitated by labour problems at the Home, the meeting went on for three days and was to set the pattern for the future, where staffing issues, the upsurge of behavioural problems amongst the children and the widening scope of the Home's services precipitated major crises:

During this period, the Sabha receded and the ASH Council took over the Home. It was a gradual change that was inevitable. What the Sabha had begun as a community initiative with a single purpose had developed into a multi-dimensional service that encompassed the 'needy' on a far wider scale - children referred by

Helping a sister organisation: handing over 500 blankets for an old age home, to its representative



One of the perks of being President: with the winner of the Graceful Gran Competition



With officials, members and guests of the Matri Mandir Kanya Gurukul, India, about to join in the Hawan, as a prelude to laying the foundation stone of their new building (January 1994)



Being welcomed by Dr Prajya Devi, colleagues & pupils of Acharya Panini Karya Mahavidalaya, Varanasi, India (1994)

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An Inspired Leader - 1951 - 1966

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social workers, magistrates and government departments; infants in need of specialised care facilities; the physically handicapped and the seriously mentally challenged.

During the 1950s there were many problems at the Home that the Council had great difficulty with, some of which could not be resolved internally. Apart from the expected disagreements among the residents, owing to their cramped living space and the irritability that sometimes develops with age and illness, there were serious disputes between residents and staff. On many occasions staff members were accused of theft, either of the residents' possessions or from the Home's supplies. Many meetings took place to resolve these disputes amicably. It was during one such meeting that Dalip Singh suffered the stroke from which he never recovered fully.

An even more disturbing case that took up much of Bhai's time was the abduction of a young girl from the Home. During an internal investigation, the caretaker at the time finally admitted to taking the girl away and having sexual intercourse with her. As she was under the age of consent, the matter had to be reported to the police. The older Sabha members were at first reluctant to do so, because of the negative publicity the case would bring to the Home. As Secretary of the Home's Council and the person responsible for documenting the details of their inquiry, Bhai was served with a *sub-poena* to appear as a state witness in *Rex vs Krishnan*. He remembers spending night after night at meetings, going over the details of the case and the statements he had collected from residents, in preparation. During the trial he was questioned by the defence attorney for over three hours and says of this first experience:

It was the first case of its type at the Home. We realised there could be many more. We were no longer dealing with people who worked at the Home because they supported what we were trying to achieve.

The pressure my father-in-law had been under made me realise that the 'winds of change' had arrived and we had to transform our thinking and tighten up our systems (of control).

In Bhai's life, this was also a period of accelerated spiritual growth and service. The first *hawan* conducted at B. M. Singh's house in 1934 began a life-long process which sometimes left him exhausted and drew him away from home frequently. His serenity and charm, his dignity and sincerity, his very *goodness* drew people to him. They turned to him for spiritual guidance and support and in times of personal problems and dire need. No family function was complete without his highly appreciated presence. There are countless entries in his diary which reveal the selflessness that has been a characteristic feature of his life - officiating at religious ceremonies, assisting (and often speaking) at weddings, funerals and prayers, visiting the sick and dying, comforting the bereaved - all these in addition to his duties as a teacher, his own studies and his role in the structures of the Home and the Sabha. In the latter, too, there was active involvement beyond the call of duty. For the fund-raising concerts he played many roles - choirmaster, make-up artist, costume manager, production manager and, invariably, coach to those taking part. It was, he says, vicarious experience that brought him as much fulfilment as his later stage roles did.

Yet, amidst all this, he found the time to study the *Vedas*, to engage in deep, philosophical debates and to deliver prepared or impromptu talks on the scriptures to audiences comprising some of the most learned Hindu scholars and priests, among them visiting officials from the International Aryan League. Social, religious and charitable organisations turned to him for assistance and knew they could depend upon his wholehearted and active support. A glance at the diary entries for a short (edited) period of time captures the essence of such involvement:

- 4/3/51 *children for Shivarathree Celebrations*
 5/3/51 *In Jening spent a few hours at APS Hall regarding Shivarathree.*
 9/3/51 *Performed Hawan at D. N. Singh's home*
 18/3/51 *Marriage of Thara, A. B. Singh's sister. Worked there from about 2 pm on the 17th to 2pm today. Awake all night.*
 25/3/51 *Kesho Ramklass., wedding. Went to Stanger. Helped Pandit in the Mandap*
 1/4/51 *Naming ceremony of Krishna 5 baby. Helped with the cooking.*
 2/4/51 *Performed Mudan Sanskar of Pyriam's daughter Aditi*
 9/4/51 *Performed hawan at B. D. Singh's place. Ramnaumee*
 15/4/51 *Hawan at Ashram. Hawan at Mansfield Road. Hmvan at 39th Anniversary celebrations of APS.*
 19/4/51 *Delivered impromptu lecture.*

Freed from his duties as President of the Sabha, Bhai turned his attention to issues at the Home that had been the cause of concern for many years. The ever-increasing intake had resulted in a congested dining room at meal times as well as hopelessly inadequate kitchen and ablution facilities. Both Dalip Singh and he maintained close contact with the "Big Three" and the Sabha's two supervisors to explore ways and means of ameliorating conditions there. For the founders, the Home was still their greatest priority, though they had passed the reins into other hands. At one of their informal meetings Bhai voiced the need to bring order and dignity to the communal living conditions at the Home and in this he was supported fully. At the next Council meeting he recommended immediate extension of the existing kitchen, construction of a second ablution block and a larger dining hall. The latter, as S. L. was quick to point out, could double as a multi-purpose room for staging plays and concerts to bring in funds. This would off-set the initial costs and contribute to the development fund. With official

approval gained, it was once more a period of intense activity that all such developments at the Home generated. In 1956, Mr Ramawtar, that genial donor of bread, laid the foundation stone for the multi-purpose Dining Hall, which was officially opened by Mr Sorabjee Rustomjee in September 1957.

Not long after, another problem arose, this time in connection with the old wood and iron AYS School building, where the roof had begun to cave in and constituted a real danger. The need for a new school to replace the old was a hotly debated issue at Sabha meetings, with some of the older members reluctant to contemplate a development in stages of the new property: "Make do with what we have until we can afford to develop the whole property" was the majority view. S. L. Singh disagreed strongly. He was adamant that action had to be taken immediately and that the AYS School should be shut down, even if it meant erecting a temporary structure to replace it. Bhai agreed with him and openly supported the idea of commencing a new structure, though it pained him to be in conflict with Mr Satyadeva, Pandit Nayanah Rajh and others to whom he owed so much. Fortunately S. L.'s determination and spirited approach eventually won support and ended the stormy battle. He generously volunteered to raise funds for the new school himself and welcomed the assistance offered by his young colleague.

For the next four months the two men worked on an accelerated fund-raising project. One of their appeals was directed to the Natal Education Department (NED) for a school building grant, but they were told to re-apply in 1958. The NED, Bhai surmises, probably had advance information that Cato Manor was to be re-designated in 1958 for white occupation. However, largely as a result of S. L.'s established reputation in the community and Bhai's open and sincere manner, they were able to raise the money in a remarkably short period of time. They identified the one-third portion of the 'Salvation Army land' for the school and worked closely with plan drawers to bring the project to fruition. Bhai brought to bear on the

discussions his own knowledge of the essential amenities in a modern school building. When they were about to commence the building, the Group Areas Proclamation(1958) brought everything to a standstill. As B. D. Lalla expressed it later in the Commemorative Brochure of 1971:

The knell had struck! Doom followed in 1958. Mayville! Cato Manor! ... All that represents the sweat and toil and blood and sacrifice for years and years, for that sweetness from which springs the compound of rich elements termed happiness and above all, contentment of those who nestled at 186 Bellair Road - young and old, feeble and weak, who from the storm-tossed wreckage of poverty, want and need ... sought the sanctuary of contentment.

1958! The proclamation - precise, to the point and finite - for White occupation and settlement. It is difficult to clothe our feelings with words. What words? - there are no words - language is too poor to express feelings that are intense.

With this sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, all they could do was look at other, non-structural improvements to the existing facilities and begin the search for another site for development in an area proclaimed for Indian occupation. Fortunately the Home was granted an extension of stay after urgent representations by the officials of the Sabha and the Home, on the grounds that finding alternate accommodation for their residents and pupils would take time. The school roof was patched up at minimal cost to the Sabha through the generous weekend service of its members. Attention then turned to the Children's Home. When Members of Parliament had visited the Home in October 1951, they had been critical of the condition of the Children's Home where the stench from the mattresses had become overpowering. Owing to shortage of money for replacements, Bhai set in motion a process of hosing down two mattresses per week and drying them out in the sun. It meant that children had to share beds for that period, but it

did help to overcome the deplorable condition of their mattresses, though it proved to be a long and time-consuming task. When, five years later, a limited amount of money had been collected to purchase mattresses, Bhai enlisted the assistance of Mr S. Batohi, a Council member and teacher and together they spent the time after school hours searching for affordable replacements. They visited other Homes again, this time to look at their discarded furniture and bedding that was for sale. At the Star Seaside Home, for example, they found mattresses that were in appreciably better condition than their own old, sagging and soiled ones. Bhai kept his ear to the ground, made contact with personnel in other institutions and scanned the newspapers for bargains such as these. Ironically, these cast-off items of White institutions made for considerable improvements at the Children's Home and the Home for the Aged.

Apart from these minor improvements, no progress was possible because of the restrictions on development imposed by the Group Areas Proclamation as well as the insecurity of their tenure in Cato Manor. The hard-won Salvation Army property would be taken away from them, in all likelihood at a loss to the Sabha and the Home, while the large sum of sixteen thousand pounds (R32 000), expended on plan drawers' fees and other costs could not be recovered. *'Money spent to make our dreams a reality,'* was how Bhai expressed it to his colleagues at school, unable to hide the bitterness and anger he felt. Helpless against the might of the National Party Government which, by the stroke of a pen, was to uproot the long-settled communities of Cato Manor, Mayville and other areas, he resolved to do whatever had to be done to find an alternate site for the new Home and began the search immediately.

In Cato Manor, meanwhile, the exodus had already begun. Many houses stood forlornly where there had been the happy sound of children playing, neighbours chatting over low fences and music playing from the radiograms. Those who could afford to had sold their properties and moved to other "safe" areas, while those who did not have the means waited in numbed resignation to know their

fate. The giant Indian township of Chatsworth, in the south of Durban, was where many were destined to go. As more and more sold their properties to the Group Areas Board and left, the darkness at night was intensified, with only a few homes casting small pools of light into the shadows. The AYS School's enrolment dropped drastically as there were no longer pupils to fill the classrooms. Cato Manor was in its death throes, its rich community life, its cultural heritage and its ethos broken and scattered.

The Sabha, in all likelihood, would soon be ordered to move out as well and the property on which the Home stood would be expropriated. The thought alone brought on periods of intense depression for all concerned, more so for those who had given the major part of their lives to caring for and serving the desperate and needy persons who came to them for shelter and support. Finding alternate accommodation for a single family was difficult; how much more difficult was it going to be to find premises for the destitute aged and children? Despite the gloom that hung over the local communities, service to the Sabha and the Home went on as usual. Residents married and left, others took their place, fund-raising continued and cultural activities went on, though invested with a greater poignancy by the uncertainty of their future.

In 1959, at this time of heartache about their future, strong leadership was essential. Members of the Sabha had talked long and hard about this and none could see the present President able to cope with the rigorous task. Some talked to Bhai, saying they needed him at the helm. Others made it clear their hopes were pinned on him to lead them *'out of darkness into light.'* His indisputable skills as a negotiator and as the voice of the Home against officialdom had been seen when he served as Secretary. He had carried numerous burdensome tasks upon his shoulders, all of which he had performed excellently, bringing approbation to the Home from the community and from sister organisations. It was obvious that he would fill the position of President with distinction. It was even more obvious that his skills as a negotiator and his ability to relate

to those in authority and win their support were going to be prime factors in ensuring that the Home continued to operate, albeit in a different geographical setting.

It was to be a year of singular achievement in his life. In May 1959, at its Annual General Meeting, he was elected President and Chairman of the Aryan Benevolent Home Council. To this day he regards that as the greatest honour conferred upon him. At the AGM of the Sabha, which took place immediately after, he was elected Trustee of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha. The two organisations to which he owed so much and to which he had dedicated his life honoured him on the day that they celebrated their respective thirty-ninth and forty-seventh anniversaries.

At the celebrations which were held at the Natal Tamil Vedic Society Hall in Carlisle Street, there were a number of carefully chosen speakers: Dr Hilda Kuper, respected academic and author, P. R. Pather of the Natal Indian Organisation, Councillor C. I. Boswell of the Durban Corporation. It was time, Bhai had suggested to the Executive, to pull in all the support they could, across the widest range possible. In his capacity as master of ceremonies, he gave a concise introduction to the history of the Home, its trials and tribulations and its uncertain future. This was followed by Mr Satyadeva's speech, which served to heighten the general public's sensitivity to the plight of the Home, which featured regularly thereafter in the local press. Of particular significance was the open support given by Mrs Saraswati Bramdaw, wife of the late proprietor of *The Leader*, whose reading public was largely Indian. The result was a surge of interest from all sectors of the community, with many younger people offering their assistance.

The day of his election to the highest position in the Home's Council was also the occasion for intense pain. Bhai was humbled by the resounding support for his nomination by S. L. Singh but saddened by the obvious hurt this brought to Mr Satyadeva, who had served in that official capacity from 1954, though he actually

An Inspired Leader - 1951 - 1966 took over after Arjoon Dalip Singh suffered a stroke during the previous year. Bhai becomes very serious when he speaks of the events of that memorable day:

Mr S. L. Singh stood up as soon as nominations were called for by the Chairperson (Mr Satyadeva). He put forward my name. There was dead silence for a moment, then someone started clapping and others joined in. I was overwhelmed.

S. L. then began to speak in support of my nomination, saying that it was time to inject new blood into the Council: the future of the Home was uncertain and we had to plan ahead and be alert to every move from the Group Areas Board and the Durban Corporation. He told us that our personal feelings and our emotional ties were irrelevant when set against what was best for the Home.

When he stopped talking, Mr Satyadeva made a special request to be re-elected. No one responded and he got up and walked out of the meeting. He left an uncomfortable silence behind him. It was very sad. I know that he felt betrayed and hurt. He had devoted his life to the Home since its inception, selflessly and compassionately.

Mr Satyadeva had aged considerably and his health had begun to deteriorate. For some time the heavier burdens of responsibility had been taken over by the younger, energetically-charged secretary. The change in the Presidency was, in reality, a change in name only. Yet Bhai felt a deep sense of guilt and a desperate need to re-establish the vital contact that he had always had with Mr Satyadeva. That founder's wisdom was needed, even if the changing times called for a different leadership style. He met Shanandev, Mr Satyadeva's elder son to ask for help. Shanandev and his brother had followed in their father's footsteps at a young age, giving active support to the Sabha and the Home. Bhai asked him to find a way to heal the breach for Mr Satyadeva no longer attended meetings at the Home and had distanced himself from all its activities. Shanandev set up a meeting at his home which Bhai

attended with Mr and Mrs S. L. Singh. After a long discussion, during which Mrs Singh pleaded with him to accept the change that had taken place, Mr Satyadeva agreed, though reluctantly, to return. The crisis over, and a peace of sorts established, the President of the Aryan Benevolent Home could get down to work in earnest, assisted by the newly appointed Treasurer, H. Kisoonsingh, and Secretary, Mrs Vidhyawathie Singh, the first woman to be elected to an executive position on the Council. Her appointment would not have been possible but for Bhai's 1951 initiative to admit women as members of the Sabha. He was justifiably proud to nominate her for the position he had held for eight years and the SUPPOlt he received was wholehearted. The winds of change had certainly come.

In line with the new thinking, change took place also within the Sabha's structure: Pandit Nayanah Rajh declined to continue as President and Mr S. A. Naidoo was appointed in his place. B. D. Lalla captures the essence of the Sabha's new President accurately when he says in the 1972 Souvenir Brochure:

Brought up the hard way and denied a college education, he cultivated the precious virtuous life of simplicity. Extravagance, sloth, greed, idleness and non-profitable engagements were all anathema to him. If you missed that broad smile on his face sometimes... and his face was puckered, it was the index of the man who is always in deep thought over some matter of the Home.

Combining their energies, the two Presidents brought a new look to the Sabha and the Home, with the pace being set by younger people who combined the richness of the past with the aggressiveness necessary to face a challenging future. One of the first steps they took was to form an *ad hoc* committee of the Home, on which Bhai served as Chairman. Its mandate was to examine the implications of the *Group Areas Act* and take whatever steps were deemed necessary to protect the interests of the Sabha and the Home.

The committee's first action was to lodge a strong objection to the inclusion of the Sabha's properties as part of the area proclaimed for 'white occupation'. They knew it was a futile exercise, but believed they had to make themselves heard and their presence felt.

Support for their endeavours came from within the ranks of the Sabha, particularly from its younger members. Bhai thinks of them with nostalgia and reels off the names of some of those he worked with closely at Executive level during the first few years of his first term as President:

Mrs V Singh, S. Rugoobeer; S. Ragannath, H. S. Singh, S. R. Moodley, G. Hulasi, V Somiah, Mrs D. Roopanand, G. A. N. Gmmden, S. K. Maharajh and, of course, our stalwarts, Mr and Mrs S. L. Singh, both still young at heart and vibrant - these were some of the people who cared deeply, who worked hard to steer the Home into new directions while maintaining its character and upholding its spiritual dimensions. There were many others I have not mentioned. It would take an entire book to name all those who served the Home in that time. They all worked with me and gave me encouragement and strength.

Sewpersad Rugoobeer - the R.R. Persad of Bhai's Vir Dal days - took over as Secretary of the Home's Council in 1961 and brought to the post all the experience he had accumulated as a teacher at the AYS School. He was specially assigned the task of helping the children of the Home. His close friendship with Bhai, his untiring service to the Home in the past and his warm and caring nature combined to give the kind of support the President needed at the time.

Bhai set up a number of other sub-committees, each with its designated function. Each sub-committee was required to submit a report of its activities or its recommendations to the Executive meeting, so that at all times the Executive had its finger on the pulse of the Home. S. A. Naidoo or Bhai served on the executive of a number of these committees, thereby ensuring a consolidated effort

that was to bring greater solidarity and common purpose. In Bhai's diary, the entries for just one week in 1959 suggest the staggering amount of time this demanded after a normal working day:

- 7/6/59 *Hawan at the ABH*
- 9/6/59 *Meeting of the Constitution Revision Sub-Committee (ABH)*
- 10/6/59 *Meeting of the Welfare Committee of ABH - presided*
- 11/6/59 *Meeting of the Executive of the AYS*
- 12/6/59 *Meeting of Ad Hoc Committee of AYS re: Group Areas Proclamation.*

Revisions to the constitution were necessitated by the increasing call on the Home to provide shelter for children with more complex problems than the architects of the original document had foreseen. Provision had not been made for the admission of those termed to be 'destitute' or 'handicapped' or those with behavioural problems. By 1958, the Department of Welfare, magistrates in three of the four provinces - the Orange Free State was the exception as it was an 'Indian-free' province - and even probation officers sought admission for children in need of care and supervision.

In order to gather further support for the Home's cause, Bhai invited senior personnel from the Provincial Department of Child Welfare and officials from the Department of Indian Affairs to the traditional Christmas Cheer at the Home. It was a well-considered approach that won the Home many friends in high places and set the pace for the struggle yet to come.

In the years that followed the Group Areas Proclamation of 1958, its social ramifications were overwhelming. The calculated uprooting of settled communities impacted unfavourably on the traditional Indian joint family system. Those who could afford to buy homes did so, but in many cases people had no choice but to

accept the accommodation offered - homes designed for a single family unit, that split larger families and destroyed the hierarchical system of family care and control. Strained financial resources compelled many women to seek employment to contribute to the family's finances. The consequences were often disastrous for children.

When Places of Safety for Indian children became overcrowded, the Home was prevailed on to take in a number of children who were under retention orders. This not only led to a deterioration of the general tone of the Children's Home but also affected the behaviour of those who were already there. When questioned why the Home accepted children with behavioural problems or criminal records, Bhai responds with a single statement that characterises the humanitarian impulse that drives him. *They had nowhere else to go.*

In his first year as President he made concerted efforts to find a new home for the Home, before the axe actually fell. This in turn meant an accelerated fund-raising drive once more. When it is suggested to him that fund-raising seemed to occupy a large part of their attention, Bhai says, quite simply:

Yes, it did. In 1957, for example, our only source of regular income was the grant of two thousand two hundred and fifty six pounds, six shillings and sixpence (R4512, 65) for the yeQ/: Look at this against just one of our regular expenses - the wages/salaries of our staff, which amounted to one thousand and forty eight pounds (R2096). We had to take a loan against our property to ensure that we had funds to fall back on in an emergency.

We were blessed in that in our community there were generous, public-spirited people, whose donations in cash and kind made up some part of the deficits. We owe our deepest gratitude also to the Durban Public House Trust which donated five hundred pounds. We invested it and the interest earned supplemented our meagre resources.

Responsibility and Leadership The number of voluntary workers at the Home increased during this period, as it always seemed to do at moments of greatest need. The ongoing special classes for the schoolchildren had been taken over by Mrs V. Sathie and Mr I. Munien, teachers who craved their time unstintingly after school hours; Mrs S. L. Singh volunteered to oversee the special needs of the girls, while Mrs Polly Bharat Singh, a nightingale in her own right, was employed to teach the children music and singing and give the girls sewing lessons as vocational training. This was the beginning of a long process to introduce other life-skills programmes, to equip the children of the Home to face the world and contribute to society. As a man who always put thought into immediate action, Bhai soon had a modest woodworking room set up and a small exercise room functioning at the Home. From this stemmed the later establishment of a sheltered-employment workshop in Asherville and a reasonably-equipped gymnasium for residents and staff. He believed implicitly that a sound body led to a sound mind and that self-help restored the dignity of people. He refused to allow financial considerations or the insecurity of the Home to stop progress. Though the Home's expenditure often outstripped its income during this time, he used his influence and considerable charm to extend its credit and to increase its overdraft facility. His simple response to those who worried was, *'Life must go on. Have faith in the future.'*

Yet the despair that had begun in 1958 brought with it a persistent sense of horror, even to him, though only when he was alone. In company, he was optimistic and undaunted. Leadership meant bringing hope and meaning even in hours of darkness. In 1960, in a bid to offset the growing despair that the uncertain future held, and to re-instil lagging faith and hope, he put forward a suggestion that resulted in a moving ceremony held at the Home. B. D. Lalla describes the factors that led to it:

... we sought a merciful diversion. The year was historically significant. It registered the Centenary of our settlement in our Fatherland. We were deeply rooted in South African soil, the soil that our forefathers had first come to till . . . , where they settled after the expiry of indenture. Cato Manor was settled in this way by our forefathers. We gave it shape and form and animation that saw the birth of the Aryan Benevolent Home.

Among those who pioneered the work of the Home three names claimed remembrance in the year of our Centenary. We thought how best to perpetuate their names - not in marble or granite which time, impending rapidly on the wings of bull-dozers, would raze to dust

The ground behind the second block of dormitories was 'ceremoniously hallowed and hollowed in three different places' and Mr Satyadeva, Pandit Nayanah Rajh and Mr S. L. Singh each planted a tree of remembrance as a lasting symbol of the Home's ability to survive against all odds. Those trees flourished and are, it is believed, there to this day as a living memory of the past.

Sadly, neither Mr Satyadeva nor Pandit Nayanah were to live to see the day on which the Sabha celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1962

Mr Satyadeva died a year earlier, when the preliminaries for the celebration were being discussed; Pandit Nayanah Rajh died in 1962, shortly before the celebrations were held. It was left to Mr S.L. Singh to speak at the celebrations and pay tribute to the 'twin pillars of selfless service.' These three men and all who served the Sabha were honoured through a Members' Gallery, Museum and Archive. A room was set aside in the Home for this purpose. As S. L. said on that day.

The past speaks through the silence of its preserved records; it brings to life the past in a tangible and authentic way; it gives meaning to the present which it inspires towards a future. Loyalty to the past

on which the present has built and on which the future will stand firmly erected is loyalty that claims not only the upholding of sustaining principles, but paying homage to those who conceived and established the principles and found the means for it. It is for this purpose that the 'Memorabilia' has been created and is being handed as legacy to posterity.



Arya Yuvak Sabha - Officials and Members - 1972/1973 From Left to Rights - Standing:

First Row: K. T. Maistry, S. Sewpersadh, H.S. Singh, Devadas Naidoo, N. Rajaram, P. Kalidas, S. Ragoobeer.

Second Row: Mrs V. Singh, Mrs N. Francois, Mrs P. Ramharakh, Mrs D. Singh, Mrs M. Salikram, Mrs P.B. Singh, Mrs K. Sewpersadh, Miss E. Sullapen, Mrs Iadoo, Mrs K. Satyadeva.

Third Row: G. Dhanjee, A. Bispath, S. Satyadeva (Vice-President), L. Naidoo, K. Iugoo, R. Iea won (Patron), Gobind Hulasi (Hon. Secretary), P. Seebran, G. Naidu, M. Naidoo, S. Ragannath (Treasurer).

Fourth Row: Mrs P. Lalla, M.T. Govender (Patron), S. Bechan (Trustee), B. Purthab, (Trustee), Pt. S. A. Naidoo (President), Mrs S.L. Singh (Vice-President), S. Rambharos (Vice-President), Mrs D.G. Satyadeva (Vice-President)

Sitting: K. Pillay, Rabi Govind, C. Ragoobeer, A. Rajkumar, V. Somiah.



Welcoming Amitabh Bachchan to the home. The movie star donated R250 000 to the home.



Sonia Gandhi visits the ABH with her son (behind centre) and daughter (obscured)



With Deputy-President Thabo Mbeki at a function at the V.N. Naik School



Honoured by the APS in 1995, on its 70th Anniversary

PART THREE

A LIFE FULFILLED



Excitement on tree planting day at the Children's Home



Feeding a helpless patient

III.1.

CHAPTER 9

THE LURE OF THE STAGE

Bhai Rambharos is better known for his leadership of the Aryan Benevolent Home and it will no doubt come as a surprise to many to learn of his ability as an actor. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Sabha's massive drive for funds saw, among other things, the organisation of variety concerts at Bharat Hall, in which Bhai was given an opportunity to bring his acting skills into play. The years that followed saw him playing many parts - from drunken layabout to more serious roles, though the former - the comic and cameo roles - are what he enjoys most. Many of these productions were taken to other centres in the province where there was a sizeable Indian population. This meant long absences from home for those involved, but significant increases in the coffers of the Home.

He recalls the entire cast of *Bhagyachakra* (Wheel of Fate) being transported by bus to Pietermaritzburg, Estcourt and Ladysmith and the camaraderie that developed along the way as they sang and danced. Food was an all-important part of the Journey:

Even before we got to Pinetown, everyone was hungry! We all carried food - roti with a filling or sandwiches prepared by our families - and most brought tea in flasks. It was before the days of 'Ultra Cities'. If we stopped at garages to use the separate 'non-white' toilets or at cafes that had a separate service hatch, we felt their impatience for our large group to leave. Stopping at the side of the road was preferable. In any case, most of us couldn't afford to buy prepared food.

Rajish Lutchman, who has had many years of association with the Home and is currently Secretary of the ABH Council, interviewed Bhai in 1993. The result of the discussions were published in the Arya Yuvak Sabha's Eightieth Anniversary Souvenir Brochure, which honoured Bhai Rambharos for being a 'true son of the Sabha'. Rajish found that, on the subject of the theatre, Bhai becomes animated: his eyes light up, he gesticulates and there is a look of passionate intensity on his face. In the interview, he described how his 'career' on stage began:

It all goes back to 1932, when I was in Standard Two. My friend Mohanlal and I were acting out a little scene we called 'Three times three is ten'. For us it was a game, but a teacher asked Mr M. R. Devar to watch us. Soon enough he had our little act on stage, as part of the school concert. After that I took part regularly in Hindi and English school productions.

Between 1936 (when he left the AYS School) and 1950, there was little time to follow this interest. Apart from being in full-time employment at B. K. Singh's Wood and Coal, he had committed himself to relieving the burden of work carried by S. L. Singh. Yet the stage was like a magnet that drew him. He tried to satisfy his yearning through energetic involvement in the Avoca Primary School's productions, often seizing the opportunity to show the young actors how *he* would do it. For the 1951 concert he wrote and directed *Harischandra* and *Nothing is a Secret*. Yet the hunger persisted.

He played the role of a father in a short sketch entitled *Bhagyachakra* (Wheel of Fate), which was part of the December concert programme of the ABH. He followed this soon after as Vikram, the villainous brother of the king in *Raja Bharathari*, which was produced by his father-in-law, Arjoon Dalip Singh and Tommy Nanoo. The latter had returned after a long absence, to renew his efforts on behalf of the Home.

When Mr and Mrs S. L. Singh approached the Red Hill Social Club to help with the Home's 1952 fund-raising drive, Bhai gave his wholehearted support to the idea of producing a Hindi musical drama. It was the opportunity he had been waiting for. Enlisting the co-operation of the Sharda Orchestra to provide the musical interludes, they commenced with rehearsals for *Bhakt Prahald* as a 'recorded' drama: that is, acting out scenes to pre-recorded dialogue. However, he soon began to have serious doubts about whether the play would go down well with local audiences, as it was far too studied and serious, its dialogue too stilted. There was no space for creativity and very little that could capture the interest of younger people in the audience. After giving it much thought, and discussing it at length with the cast, he wrote in comic scenes to balance the 'heavy' ones and happily took on the part of the comedian. A well trained technician took over the responsibility for turning the recorded dialogue on and off, at the appropriate times. It was an intricate process which, it seems, they eventually managed to get right. A skilful blend of traditional drama and modern wit, of tragedy and comedy, the play was received enthusiastically in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

Fired with enthusiasm by its success, he wrote two short sketches for a programme on family life entitled *Home Fire*, which the ABH staged at the Bharat Hall eight months later. He played the two main roles with characteristic ease, though each demanded different acting skills. As Ramu, the drunken husband, he staggered convincingly across the stage, clutching his bottle and screaming abuse at his wife; as the father of Vino, he portrayed the anguish of a man caught between loyalty to his daughter and to his second wife. The role of Ramu ensnared him completely. His entire body vibrates with laughter and his eyes crinkle as he says

Ramu has to be my alter ego! It has remained one of my favourite roles. Each time I write a sketch or play, I can't stop myself from including a drunkard. It's almost as though I am writing it so that I can act it.

He has kept the letter he received from an ex-pupil a few days after the show. He regards its sentiments as the greatest accolade he has received for his acting:

When the play called you to be a drunken man, you did it better than those who know it. When you had to be angry, you were angry. And, of course, when the play called you to be stupid, you were the stupidest of all.

His directorial debut came in 1957. When the Hindi Shiksha Sangh embarked on the production of *Raj Tyaag*, scripted by Pandit Nardev, and based on a text he had written for students of the Hindi language, Bhai was once again cast as the villain of the piece, this time as the drunken Ranmal. Rehearsals had already commenced under the guidance of P. R. Singh, a well-known Indian dance and drama artist, but progress was disappointingly slow. Alarmed that the production would not be ready for the scheduled performances, Pandit Nardev asked Bhai if he would take over as director. He accepted with alacrity and soon had the rehearsals under way and on schedule. *Raj Tyaag* was a great success in Durban and went on tour, during the school vacation, to major towns in Natal and also to Pretoria and Johannesburg. Bhai pays glowing tribute to the Hindu communities in the areas outside of Durban who accommodated the entire cast at their homes

provided for all their needs and feted them.

The recurrence with which he played drunkard or villain amuses him immensely; even his elevation to director of the play pales into insignificance. He explains it as follows:

Directing the play was an honour; a big leap for me in the theatre world, but I enjoyed the villain's role. I prefer to act. As Ranmal, I had to get 'drunk' in a number of scenes, and did so with great relish - slurred speech, glazed eyes and all. For me, that is what acting is all about - thinking yourself into a role, becoming that person, letting that personality take over your own. Having an

appreciative audience helps. I know that some of my friends who watched me as Ranmal began to wonder if I was actually drinking on the quiet. They asked me!

When the HSS embarked on another production, *Sita Haran*, a few years later, Bhai was the obvious choice for director. He also took on the role of Lutchman, the devoted younger brother of Ram (played by Narain Rao, a talented local musician).

His insatiable thirst for the stage received a boost in 1964, when Krishna Shah, a highly acclaimed New York director, arrived in Durban to direct the dance drama, *King of the Dark Chamber*. When it had completed its run, Shah ran a series of theatre arts workshops in Durban. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Bhai took six weeks' leave from his work as President of the ABH Council to attend the afternoon and evening sessions on acting. Of the experience, he says:

It was like a revelation. Suddenly I was plunged into the mainstream of drama enthusiasm and rubbed shoulders with very intense and dedicated people. Among them were Ronnie Cavender and Muthal Naidoo, who subsequently made a strong impact on the local theatre world. Ronnie's account of life in Cato Manor brought back many vivid memories for me. Muthal won a scholarship and moved on to America to further her studies in drama.

Training under Krishna Shah was like trying to swim upstream! He demanded a high standard and spurred us on to make the best use of our talents, for, he said, 'there is an actor and writer within each of you that is struggling to emerge.'

We had to work on a given theme around which we devised the plot, created the characters and wrote the dialogue. All aspects of theatre arts were covered extensively: costume, stage make-up, lighting, direction and so on. It was an intellectual and artistic explosion.

The production that emerged from this workshop was *Trio against Trains*, three short plays that were presented at the St Aidan's Hall in Short Street. To build upon the excellent training they had received, a group led by the husband and wife team, Fatima and Ismail Meer, as well as Devi Bughwan, established the Durban Academy of Theatre Arts, which became the nexus of local drama

talent. Bhai took part in two of the Academy's productions, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth*. Spurred on by this, he auditioned for and acted in Des Morley's production of Dr Ansuyah Singh's *Cobwebs in the Garden*. It was, he says, a period in his life when his childhood ambition to act reached its fulfilment.

In their desire to move away from the eurocentricism of prevailing drama and promote a specifically South African theatre language, Ronnie, Muthal, 'Slim' Moodley and other young drama enthusiasts later established the Shah Theatre Academy. Bhai says, rather sadly, that the Home and its problems of relocation had to be given his full attention at the time. He withdrew from the exciting venture to concentrate on his work as President of the ABH Council.

Ronnie gives warm praise for the man he calls 'a gentle soul.' Of Bhai's acting ability he says:

Rambharos had great potential as an actor: He had a progressive approach and with the opportunity and the experience necessary to hone his skills, he would have gone much, much further

This 'progressive approach' was not given a chance to show itself until much later in life. When Bhai retired from teaching in 1980 to devote himself to raising the one million rands required for the new ABH complex in Chatsworth, he made a number of promises to himself. One of them was that he would return to acting. This was not to be, however.

Saras suffered from dementia 'during the late 1970s and had to be nursed and monitored

continuously for the next eight years. An acceleration of the Home's development at the same time circumscribed his time severely. Only in 1987 was he able to return to active involvement in the theatre.

The long separation had in no way dulled his enthusiasm or hampered his creativity. Together with the Dayanand Stree Samaj (the Women's Group of the Aryan Benevolent Home) he began working on an adaptation of *Shakuntala*, written by the Indian poet, Kalidas. It was a time-consuming project, but one that provided the opportunity to experiment with an aggressively modern approach to drama:

The intense poetic language had to be simplified. To give the play folk appeal and to demystify its academic nature, we added Bhojpuri songs as well as dances. Sound effects were included as embellishments - birds singing, animal sounds, the whistle of the wind and the intonation of Vedic Mantras in the background. For those who did not understand Hindi, English sub-titles were beamed onto a screen by means of an overhead projector. It was an ambitious venture, but it worked. The play was a resounding success in Chatsworth, Ladysmith and Newcastle. I played the part of Kanwaji: Shakuntala's father.

During the 1993 interview by Rajish Lutchman, Bhai was asked about his theatre and acting plans for the future. With the same broad smile that any mention of the stage brings to his face, he produced a script that he had been working on and began to read. Rajish was struck by the change that came over him:

Sri Rambharos's eyes sparkle with enthusiasm. I could see him in the role of the protagonist Ravi, waltzing his way across the stage in a drunken stupor, his utterances an almost unintelligible slur as he scolds his wife Indhu for not having supper ready. As he reads, his voice trembles, exuding the pathos of a man who comes to terms with his own fallibility after witnessing how his alcohol abuse had ravaged his family.

The passionate intensity with which he reads out the various parts, his ideas for the stage setting and props and the production details are indicative of his fervent desire to see this project to fruition.

Intrigued and fascinated by his love of the theatre, Rajish probed to find out what impels him, at the age of seventy-two, to use the little time he can spare from his work to write a play and to become so animated and excited about it:

'Why the stage? Why acting?'

He grins mischievously and replies, 'Why not?' Then, on a more serious note he continues, 'Acting forces you to get under the skin of different characters, so what better way to understand people and empathise with them? It allows you to perceive people from different angles, therefore it sharpens your skills in inter- personal relationships. '

The script from which he read on that day dealt with social problems, family relationships and the role of women. Fired with enthusiasm after the success of *Shakuntala*, he had written it in a week, but it was to lie untouched on his desk for the next four years. When the 1994 elections gave the country a new democratic order, he was inspired to portray the new South Africa and sat down to include additional scenes that captured the impact of a non-racial society. He completed *Naya Savera* (New Awakening) in 1997 and the following year it was produced at the Pattundeen Theatre in the ABH complex in Chatsworth, as part of the celebrations to mark the respective anniversaries of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, the Aryan Benevolent Home and the Hindi Shiksha Sangh.

Yasantha Naidoo, a local journalist, prepared her readers for the unexpected in an article published in the *Tribune Herald* on 28 June 1998:

A stagger in his step

They say seeing is believing, but seeing 79-year-old humanitarian and teetotaller Shishupal Rambharos stagger with a bottle in his

hand must surely be a trick of the imagination.

This is exactly what several hundred people will be witnessing next Sunday but they can rest assured Rambharos has not taken to the bottle in real life - he is merely portraying a character in a play.

Since then, this redoubtable leader of the ABH - the only institution in the country to cater for both the aged and children has had little time to pursue his passion for the theatre. He occasionally entertains the Home's residents in their dining hall by playing one of the cameo roles for which he has become so well known. It has them rocking with laughter. The ability to play a part convincingly is still very much there.



As the father, Kanwar in 'Shakuntala'



A brown face in a sea of white - at the Natal Settlers Home for the Aged



Regional Welfare Committee - S. Rambharos in last row, third from the right

CHAPTER 10

A TRANSFER OF SKILLS

GROWTH OF A POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

During the 1999 General Elections in South Africa, Bhai Rambharos was a member of the Concerned Citizens' Group (CCG), formed by Professor Fatima Meer and other equally enlightened people. They took up the difficult task of arousing the Indian electorate to an awareness of their political history and to remind them of the years of struggle, within the country, for basic human rights. It had been denied to all who were not 'white,' until the first democratic elections in 1994. The CCG's specific mandate was to dissuade Indians from voting for those who had previously been the voices of white supremacy - the National Party (under the banner, in 1999, of the *New National Party*); the Democratic Party (which had its roots in the government that passed the 'Ghetto Act' of 1946); or other right-wing political organisations. In its rallying call to Indian voters, the CCG honoured all those Indians who had given their freedom and their lives in the struggle for liberation - members of the South African Indian Congress, the South African Communist Party and other pro-liberation movements that were committed to the ideal of '*one man, one vote*', a cornerstone of democracy. And they honoured Mahatma Gandhi, who had come to South Africa in the last decade of the 1890s and led the opposition against racial discrimination and other forms of social injustice. As Gandhi was to say later,

... God laid the foundations of my life in South Africa and sowed the seed of the fight for national self-respect. 1

Today is, in many ways, a milestone in my life. I am truly thankful to all the wonderful people who have rallied to my assistance in the past and to those who have helped to mould my life into what it is today.

To have a biography written on one's life is indeed an honour. But to have such a biography written by an eminent person such as Mrs Kogi Singh is more than just an honour, it is a privilege. I am grateful to her for the many months of "laborious days and scomed delights" as she so diligently worked to assimilate information from countless interviews and dedicated research in order to consolidate the infonnation into an excellent and easily readable text. I sincerely hope that the sentiments and experiences described therein will give readers a brief but informative glimpse of life experienced by people from our community in the early years. Once again, Kogi, thank you very much and I sincerely hope that you have enjoyed the experience as much as I have.

Often, occasions such as these force one to reminisce about the past and in doing so treasured memories come flooding back. Perhaps the most recurring memory is that of my dear and loving late wife, Saras. As I look back, I think now in retrospect, of how we complemented each other. Saras was cheerful, fun loving and commanded the respect of all our family, friends and neighbours. I was, for most times the absent husband, continually involved in community work giving most of my time in the service of the poor and needy. It was largely her SUPP011 and acknowledgement of my duties that spurred me on. Perhaps it was because of the late Dalip Singh, her father, who had also given much of his time to the home that led her to understand and accept my involvement in community work. In her youth she often visited the Home with her family and joined the congregation in Sandhya (Evening Prayer). Here too, she was able to empathise with the plight of the aged and the handicapped.

But most of all, I miss her for how she so conscientiously cared for my daughter Reshma and me. She always saw to all my needs whether preparing hot rotis for supper or shopping at Greenacres for the perfectly matching ties and socks. These little things which

I had, for so long, taken for granted. Our home was open to everybody. She had a special knack to make everyone welcome in our modest home. I remember how she so kindly cared for patients who had come from Mauritius for special medical attention. She selflessly opened her heart to them catering to their every needs and ensuring that they were comfortable in their illness.

Now, as I receive all these honours being bestowed upon me, I feel compelled to accept them on behalf of both of us. It would not have been possible to have achieved the little I have if it were not for her tacit support, gentle persuasion and strength of character.

From the early days of our marriage we sacrificed our personal aspirations, for Saras to take care of her ailing mother and others.

The very latter part of our malTiage saw her afflicted with serious illnesses and she finally spent her last days at Dayanand Garden Home for the Aged and Disabled - largely through the insistence of the officials and staff. It was indeed a tragic end for a personality who was charismatic, who enjoyed life with zest and one who taught me to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

I wish she were here today to share in this moment, for if it were not for her all this may not have been possible. I want to thank Kogi Singh for so kindly allowing me to add these thoughts to her work. These are my personal sentiments and I feel that I needed to share these thoughts on such an auspicious moment in my life.

Kogi has been able to plunge into my life- style patterns in order to highlight the service of love as an inborn trait in me - very much befitting the vision of the culture of Ubuntu and Arya. As the germ of the fledgling new South Africa flourishes by promoting a bright future with abounding resources and the integration of all cultures in our rainbow nation, I believe that the maxim.

"Vasudaive Kutumbakam" (One Universal Family) reflects the potential within our own homeland to lead Africa and the world.

God Bless.

The pathological fears of Indians - of being dominated by a 'black' majority and of losing their identity - had been widespread since before the 1994 elections. Much of it was based on a nightmare vision of the 1949 race riots in Durban. Yet many who were haunted by those fears were not even born at the time and had to rely on what they heard, rather than what they knew. Undoubtedly, it had been a traumatic period, the reasons for which are still to be disclosed openly.² It was a fear that was readily capitalised upon by previously whites-only political parties that were struggling for their survival.

Growing up in the Aryan Benevolent Home, Bhai was exposed from a very young age to an awareness of social and political injustices, though these remained on the periphery of his consciousness until his early teens. His personal experience of it at the Tollgate Post Office in 1934 brought the topic sharply into focus. Through his close relationship with members of the AYS he first developed a reverence for Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the passive resistance movement who was spoken of with reverence as an admired example of fearlessness and tenacity; as a man who put the search for Truth before self. When Ramashankar Srivastava arrived in Durban, to teach Hindi at the AYS School, he brought with him tales of Gandhi's social and political achievements in India, in the struggle for independence from Great Britain. To Bhai, Gandhi represented the ideal of service.

At 186 Bellair Road, meanwhile, there was every evidence of a vast system of social injustice, which brought the frail and the aged, the orphaned and the neglected to the shelter that the AYS provided. He lived with them, yet accepted their situation without question, for he knew of no other reality. As he grew into his early teens and became accustomed to spending his evenings at the Sabha's offices, he came to understand, gradually, that there were other possibilities for life. In that process of education, S. L. Singh played a very significant role, by his own striking example of a man whose religious beliefs transform and inspire other areas of

his life - welfare services, trade unionism, sport, politics and education, to name but a few. There were many others as well, who made their mark upon his emerging consciousness, all strong followers of the Arya Samaj ideals of Truth and Justice, who used that commitment try to effect change in the political arena. Among them were F. Satyapal of Pietermaritzburg, a foundation member of the AYS and the Home and an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress; his son-in-law, Pandit Jugmohan Singh, who combined his religious work with headlong confrontation with injustice, and suffered imprisonment for his political beliefs. Later still, there were those he interacted with on a social or professional level, whom he admired for their political commitment and for their articulate expression of their beliefs Fatima and Ismail Meer, J.N. Singh and Ashwin Choudree, all active members of the core group of the Congress Movement and friends of Nelson Mandela. There was every reason to suppose that the early decision Bhai made could change, given the people he knew.

However, he had decided early in life, that service to others in a practical sense, by ministering to their physical and spiritual needs, was where his mission lay. It was a decision shaped by his special circumstances, as a resident at the Home, surrounded at all times by those in need of care. A change in perception probably began during the 1980s, when Bhai met many Vedic scholars and priests, some of them riveting social reformers. The latter helped him see that service was excellent, but that involvement in the political life of people was an essential part of that service, as the first step to restoring their dignity. During the later 1980s, when the momentum for change accelerated, Bhai was approached on a number of occasions to lend his support to the liberation struggle. He was a highly respected member of the Indian community and in the welfare, education and business sectors. His support, he was urged, would bring credibility to the African National Congress (ANC) among the Indian population and reassure them.

One of those who approached him was Dr Korshed Ginwala, who invited him to join in an Indian delegation attending the Lusaka Conference at the invitation of the ANC, at a time when the organisation was gearing itself for its official re-entry into the country. He went, out of curiosity, and describes his experience:

This was my first step in the direction of the political sphere. I had mixed feelings about the ANC, repelled by what I saw as a destructive process in the fight for democracy. I am, to the core of my being, a man of peace. I see now that there was little choice as it was perhaps the only 'weapon' of strength left.

I learnt, at the conference, of the massive preparations that had been taking place - the training (for government) of selected persons identified as potential leaders, in different portfolios, in countries all over the world. It was an eye-opener for me as it demonstrated the will and determination of the ANC to prepare for a better government of the people, by the people and for the people. Those who attended were of all colours, a precursor of the present 'Rainbow Nation'.

When he returned, he was imbued with hope for the future of South Africa, impressed by the vision and depth of the ANC's philosophy and its stated policy, and encouraged to become its ambassador amongst the Indian communities. He addressed a number of groups, to give an outline of the banned organisation's vision for South Africa. An excerpt from one address, to a Hindu Youth Organisation, is given below:

I see that the ANC has a broad outlook for structuring a society or government in such a way that every citizen shall be provided with facilities so that he may develop to the best of his potential, physically, morally, intellectually, spiritually and socially. Ours is a multi-racial society made up of ethnic groups of varying customs, languages and religious beliefs. But we are all sons and daughters of the soil of South Africa and therefore we must

work in concord and co-operation with each other with certain set goals for a happy co-existence. The Rig Veda gives us the direction in the words: 'O citizens of the world, live in harmony and concord. Be organised and co-operative, speak with one voice and make your resolutions with one mind.'

Swami Dayanand Saraswati inspires us towards a new form of flexibility that must loosen us from prejudice and racial barriers and the hold of outmoded rituals. Apartheid is no more than a racist's ritual, based on prejudice.

The impact of the Conference was also to be seen in his work as President of the ABH Council and the APS, where the members were driven by the need to support the fight for justice. On 8 January 1989, the anniversary of the formation of the ANC, the APS held a prayer for peace at its Veda Mandir, on for those in detention without trial and for the crisis that faced the country. Bhai was President of the APS at the time and explains that he saw it as a duty, in terms of the 7th principle of the Arya Samaj.

From 1989 onwards, to recruit Indians to the ANC, he hosted many meetings at the Pattundeen Theatre, in the ABH Complex in Chatsworth. One of them is a vivid memory of meeting Nelson Mandela, whom he welcomed on behalf of the ANC's Area Committee. This was followed regularly by open support for the democratic order before and after its establishment on 27 April 1994:

21.02.90 Special hawan at the APS Veda Mandir for the freedom struggle.

05.03.90 Press release by the AYS: Welcome to Dr Nelson Mandela for his Struggle for a Just South Africa.

07.12.92 Aide Memoire on co-operation between the ANC and the people of India in the struggle towards democracy, presented by Pandit Ramachandra Rao, Senior Vice President of the International Aryan League to Mr O. R.

Tambo, National Chairperson of the ANC, at Shell House, Johannesburg. (Senior members of the APS, including Bhai, were present).

14.04.94 Prayer meeting at the APS Veda Mandir, to commemorate the assassination of Chris Hani. Letter of condolence sent to both Mrs Limpo Hani and Nelson Mandela.

22.05.94 Brochure published by AP S officials in honour of the new President of South Africa.

The man who had deliberately turned his back on political involvement had seen the concurrence between political ideals and Vedic teachings and set out, on his own and with the support of his fellow Arya Samajists, to transform thinking.

THE BUSINESSMAN

When Bhai Rambharos wrote the Junior Certificate Examination, obtaining distinctions in History, Geography and Bookkeeping, he was employed at Singh's Wood and Coal Yard, where his duties were largely clerical. In the Senior Certificate Examination written thereafter, he obtained a distinction in Commercial Arithmetic. Seen together with the Secretarial and Bookkeeping Diploma he obtained in 1940, they all indicate a marked ability for working with figures and a sound knowledge of business practices. He was to put this knowledge to use in the attempt to establish his financial security at a reasonably young age.

The first project was in 1951: a take-away food outlet in Cathedral Road, in partnership with his brother-in-law, Surie Purmasir. It was closed a few months later because of their difficulties in obtaining a trading licence, which was not unexpected in the days when licences were hard to come by if you were not of the privileged class. The area they had chosen was a hub of activity, near the bus terminus and the city market but it already had a number

of such outlets, conveniently placed in the larger streets nearby. Those established businesses could cater adequately for the passing clientele. It was a gamble, in which both Bhai and Surie lost most of their capital.

In 1975, he was again drawn to the business world through a close friend, Hans Munewar, who had gained extensive experience in furniture sales. Putting their resources together and inviting a few others to join them, they opened Embassy Furnishers, run by a Board of Management on which Bhai served as Chairperson. It proved to be a lucrative venture, in which Hans handled the sales, while Bhai controlled the accounts. It was a good working relationship in which the expertise of each was utilised sensibly as Bhai had little time available to be at the store. His daughter Reshma was employed as a clerk. The steady additional income boosted his financial status considerably. Towards the end of 1980, after he retired, he left to attend the International Aryan Conference in London and, at its conclusion, accompanied Pandit Harishankar to Canada, the United States of America and South America. During his absence, the business was closed after a dispute amongst some of the shareholders, who subsequently demanded that their money be repaid.

On his return, he began to look for other ways to increase his capital, which had been swelled by his retirement gratuity. On 18 October 1987, on his initiative, a Businessmen's Club was formed, with a membership of approximately 30. Shortly after its launch, at his suggestion and by consensus, an investment company was formed instead. The South African Hindu Association Investments Company, Ltd. (SAHA) was registered, with its capital invested in the property market. Bhai served as Chairman of the Board until 1997, when T. S. Maharaj took over. He is still a core member of the Board. Over the years, the fluctuations of the property market have seen a variation in profits, but, as he says, *'We're doing all right.'*

The way in which SAHA runs is interesting: each share is worth one rand, but each shareholder is required to make a compulsory loan of R5000 to the company. It serves to swell the investment

- fund and brings in additional dividends. At present there are over 400 shareholders, but the company is open to new investors. A short while after its inception, Bhai initiated the inclusion of women on the Board, as significant role-players in its decision-making process. It was a repetition of his role in during the 1940s, when women were admitted as members of the AYS. The SAHA Women's Forum came into being at about the same time, to take over an important aspect of SAHA's focus - charitable work among the less fortunate in society, for which funds are set aside. At present it takes the form of distribution of food hampers to the needy during the festival periods of Deepavali and Christmas. The present chairperson, Mrs S. Pattundeen, is the daughter-in-law of philanthropist, Mr K. Pattundeen, a long time friend of Bhai and ready supporter of the Aryan Benevolent Home.

His astuteness in the field of investments has also contributed

- significantly to the financial stability of various religious and
- cultural organisations to which he belongs, mostly in an executive
- capacity. In tum, with wise investment of their funds, they are in a position to assist other groups, either by way of donations to support their charitable work, or for building projects that offer a service to the community. His focus in this respect has not changed.

Notes

1. *My Experiments with Truth*, M. K. Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1927.
2. In *The South African Indian Question*, B. Paehai makes the following observation:

The Report of the Commission (of Inquiry), dated 7th April 1949, gave as the cause of the riots the increasing lack of discipline on the part of the African; bad precepts and bad examples; the character of the parties to the riots; increasing tension between the Indians and the Africans; unsatisfactory local conditions. However, the contention advanced by Dr Lowen who

represented the Joint Committee of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress deserves particular mention. Dr Lowen said that the root cause was the slum conditions for Indians and Africans alike; yet another cause, he said, was the racial antagonism, racial hostility, and racial hatred which had been propagated for years by the previous government and continued by the present government; that the speeches made by Cabinet Ministers had the effect of creating hatred in the European and in the African. All these factors combined, said Dr Lowen, to bring about the tragic riots.



The ABH Finance and Development Committee 1981 / 1982



Arya Pratinidhi Sabha officials



With Saras (Left) in Ajmer, India (1983)



*With Mrs and Pandit Govindjee (2nd and 3rd from the left) and
Pandit Nardev Vedalankar (centre) in India (1983)*

CHAPTER 11

A CULTURAL AMBASSADOR

In Bhai Rambharos's life, the period between 1970 to the present day has seen an acceleration of spiritual development, an inner harmony that has characterised his involvement at both local and international level. His role as President of the ABH was to place him in a position of prominence as the reputation of the Home spread and was to provide opportunities for him to interact with Arya Samaj institutions and organisations throughout the world. Yet the visits of internationally renowned scholars are what has left the deepest impression on his consciousness.

Though the process of establishing links with its mother organisation began much earlier, and was constantly revived by the visits of eminent Vedic scholars, it was primarily a position in which local Arya Samaj-affiliated bodies were the hosts and learners. The arrival in South Africa of Pandit Nardev Vedalankar signalled the beginning of a period of change, in which the religious and cultural consciousness of local Indian communities underwent a transformation. Literature on the scriptures, previously awaited from India, became freely available with the establishment of the Veda Niketan Press; Hindi studies were structured to meet the standards of the examining body in India, the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti of Wardha; new text books were written by Pandit Nardev to provide the basic materials for study up to standard ten (the Wardha Kovid), while the training and induction of priests developed rapidly with the establishment of the Vedic Priest Academy in 1952. The APS played a vital role in that development, as the South African arm of the International Aryan League.

Under Pandit Nardev's guidance and strict control, observance of the religious nature of Indian Vedic weddings was re-established, to discard its image as a platform for social interchange at the expense of the religious ceremony. Ritualistic aspects contrary to the Vedic approach were also dispensed with summarily. Pandit Nardev's advocacy of simplicity in all aspects of life and his unwavering commitment to reviving religious and cultural awareness among Hindus was to leave an indelible impression on Bhai. He served on the core group that established the HSS and on many of the organisations to which Pandit Nardev was closely affiliated. Exhilarated by the challenging environment in which he found himself during the 1950s, he continued with his studies in both the scriptures and Hindi, completing the standard ten examinations through the Veda Niketan, the examining body set up by the HSS. From 1948 to 1985, it was under the direct supervision of Pandit Nardev. Bhai also participated actively in programmes of the HSS, delivering speeches on religious tracts, participating in debates and speech contests and addressing religious organisations during observance of Hindu festivals. In an article written in the Veda Jyoti Souvenir Brochure (1992), Bal Ganesh, an ardent supporter of the work of the HSS and one of the prime movers for the introduction of Hindi as a school, technical college and university subject, says:

In 1950, the Sangh launched two activities, namely, the Hindi debate held in memory of Swami Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi and the Hindi Eisteddfod.

At that debate, on the subject, *'The Study and Propagation of Hindi and other Indian Languages is Essential in this Country'*, Bhm was awarded a certificate for being the second best speaker, though he had to argue *against* the topic and all that he believed in. The best speaker, Dasrath Bundhoo, beat him by half a mark! The HSS has continued to provide him with the incentive for

development of his language skills and reading of the scriptures, though he has not had time to go beyond the Wardha Kovid level; the Arya Samaj, through the AYS and the APS, has continued to be his spiritual home. The close association established with the HSS, has continued over the years and it is still a prime concern in his life. He has given his wholehearted support to Pandit Nardev's successor, Dr R. Hemraj and still serves on its executive structure. As a respected and honoured member of the HSS, Bhai was awarded the Sangh Ratna Award for Meritorious Service in 1998.

During the 1950s and 1960s, as a senior official of the AYS, President of the ABH and Council member of the APS, he met and interacted closely with men of the calibre of Swami Ganga Prasad Uphadyaya and Swami Krishnanand, a non-Vedic missionary. It was a period when he was undergoing a personal crisis in his family life. He was struck by their simplicity, their dedication to their calling and, above all, by their serene natures. It was, he knew, what he needed to find. Consequently, in December 1966, he left on an extended tour of India, Europe and North America, hoping that the distance from South Africa would help him make an objective analysis of his life. In Canada, he decided to sever all his links with his past life and try to begin anew, in another country. He applied for a position as a teacher, was granted an interview in Toronto and was accepted for a teaching post. That night and for days after, he underwent a major re-evaluation of his life, in which he tried to come to terms with leaving the Home and South Africa and reneging on his promise to Mr Satyadeva. He realised he could not do it. It became, instead period of spiritual revival, from which he returned, strengthened in his resolve to dedicate his life to promoting religious awareness and serving the Home.

The pattern of his life developed according to this resolve. In 1975, during the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the APS, the Swami Dayanand Bhawan (Aryan Hall) was opened and the Veda Mandir was consecrated at the new APS buildings in Carlisle Street. The celebrations, which took months of intense advance planning and

preparations, was steered by the Chairman of the APS, Mr S. Chotai, and his joint honorary secretaries, Mr R. Boodhay and Bhai Rambharos. The occasion is captured in the description given in the 1992 Souvenir Brochure of the *Veda Ivoti*:

The Celebration was marked by a grand religious procession consisting of well decorated floats, thousands of Hindi school children, officials and members of the Sabha and affiliated institutions, together with well wishers, who moved in great jubilation in a well-disciplined march from the Veda Mandir in Carlisle Street to the City Hall in Durban. Lecture sessions and the Mahayajna was continued daily, in the evenings from 19.30 to 21.30.

The Conference also featured a women's session, which involved addresses delivered by speakers such as Mrs S. Pillay, Mrs Pramda Ramasm; Mrs Fatima Meer and Dr Kastoor Bhana, under the chairperson, Dr Ansuyah Singh.

Significantly, fifteen women candidates successfully completed the examinations conducted by the Priest Academy of the APS and were inducted as priests by Shri Archarya Krishna that year. In 1989, Pandita P. Nanackchand became the first woman to hold the position of chairperson of the Academy. The rights of women, upheld by Bhai Rambharos as a young secretary of the Sabha in 1951, were to be realised fully within the structures of the APS almost thirty eight years later, when, by some coincidence, he served as its secretary. It took a long time for perceived roles of women to change, despite the fact that the Vedas preach the most modern and progressive thoughts and uphold the equality of men and women. Coincidence or not, the progress made by 1989 can rightly be said to have begun in South African Vedic institutions in 1951, when Mrs S. L. Singh pointed out to Bhai that she did not attend meetings 'because your constitution does not allow it'.

He was active in the Vedic Revival Campaign that was undertaken after the Conference in Chatsworth and other parts of the city and province. It entailed religious meetings, lectures,

conducting *satsangh* and *hawan*, with the assistance of two distinguished guests from India, Acharya Krishnajeet and Archarya Ved Nath Shastri. A few months later, Pandit Nardev and Bhai led 300 delegates to India to participate in the Arya Samaj Centenary Celebrations. His diary records his sense of being overwhelmed by this experience:

Unique experience of the teeming masses of India and the huge gathering of hundreds (of thousands) of people. Most slept in the huge marquee over a few days. Food served to several thousand at each meal. The long procession which lasted the whole day was spectacular in most ways - in terms of numbers: thousands of Samaj adults, youth, children, women's groups; horses, elephants, cars; various musical instruments played by groups; regional folk dances, songs, acts, different costumes. Along the way, people were ready with cooling drinks, coconut water; orange juice, puri-parta, prasad, fruits, etc. to have the satisfaction of making their contribution towards the success of the procession. I had not had the personal experience, I could never have imagined the magnitude of the procession in terms of numbers and related aspects.

After the celebrations, he continued, alone, to visit other countries, among them Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad, where he had his first experience of the world's condemnation of apartheid. If the Mayor of Port of Spain had not been there to receive him personally, he believes he would not have been allowed to land. In Guyana, he had a similar experience:

In spite of the arrangements made by the Mayor with the Guyanese Minister of Internal Affairs, I was turned away. After landing, I had to return to Trinidad. I was advised by the same Minister to return on the third day. The plane landed late, at about midnight. I was first in the queue. The Immigration Officer, an Indian, said, 'You are back. Wait.' And I waited until everyone else had passed through. He told me quietly that he could get into trouble for

letting me in, but as there was no flight out, he allowed me in until the next morning. I eventually arrived at the home of my host, Mr Hari Prasad, by taxi, at one o'clock in the morning. He had gone to the airport to meet me, but had been told I was not on the plane. We met the Minister the next day, and there were no further problems.

On these islands, he was impressed by the strength of the Arya Samaj Movement. The Guyana Vir Dal was very active, despite restrictions placed on currency being sent out of the country, which affected the importing of essential literature and prayer goods. Impressed by the dedication and fervour of the Vir Dal, on his return to South Africa he launched an APS campaign to revitalise the local Aryan Youth League, which was flagging.

In 1980, after retiring from the teaching profession, he attended the International Aryan Conference in London, where he stayed, as he always does, with his friend Hansraj, who had lived opposite the ABH in Chatsworth before moving to settle overseas. At the conclusion of the Conference, he accompanied Pandit Harishanker on a tour to Canada and major centres in North and South America. On this occasion, as on many before, from the time of Swami Krishnanand's visit in the 1960s he was asked to become a Sannyasi, a Hindu religious mendicant. He refused, as he could not contemplate a life without the Home:

It would have meant giving up what was most important in my life. In Canada, in 1967, I had committed myself to the Home and could not see myself going back on the vow I had made then.

The year 1983 was to see an accelerated programme of interaction with representatives from the International Aryan League. It was the Dayanand Death Centenary Year which was observed by the APS to create greater awareness of Vedic teachings amongst the Indian community. Bhai reports it in his diary as follows:

Pandit Satyapal Sharma of India was invited. He was herefor four months. Satsanghs, Sammalans, Mahayajnas held at many centres, with all major cities included. Panditji ran a Swadhaya (self study) group for ladies at Dayanand Gardens for about a month. Trained the ladies to sing bhajans, chant mantras and do the yajnas.

In July, an African Aryan Meet was held. Unfortunately, delegates from Nairobi and other countries could not come because of the S. African political situation.

Two months later, Dr Satyakam Varma of New Delhi arrived in Durban, on the recommendation of Shanan Satyadeva, to conduct study groups at the Aryan hall and deliver lectures at the University of Durban- Westville.

All these visitors to South Africa came at the invitation of the APS, under its Chairman, Bhai Rambharos, to bring renewed inspiration to local communities and to officials of the various Vedic religious groups in the city. In the midst of these important re-strengthening activities, he was called away to Mauritius by Swami Krishnand Sarasvati, to assist the Human Service Trust with its take-over of the Callabases Home for the Aged from a Christian organisation. His experience at ABH proved invaluable to them and they asked him to prepare guidelines for the administration of the Home. He spent 10 days on the island, completing it. During this stay in Mauritius he interacted closely with local Arya Samaj groups, but was disappointed to find that each worked independently. It was a matter, he decided, that had to be addressed. He did so subsequently

In October 1983, Pandit Nardev and Bhai led a delegation to the Celebrations of the Dayanand Nirvana Centenary, held in Ajmer, India. Bhai had left a week earlier, to visit Mauritius and find out how the Callabases Home was operating. In his diary, he records his impressions of the Ajmer celebrations:

They were held early in October. Huge marquee - beyond the conception of South Africans, if they have not seen it. Indira

Gandhi did the official opening. Hundreds of people from all parts of India. Easily a few million people streaming in and out. The procession was fantastic - difficult to imagine - over a few thousand samajes participated - little girls, little boys, teenagers, youths, adults. Sri Samajes moved in groups, singing. At the exhibition, the big attraction was the Satvarth Prakash!, page for page, in metallic print on brass sheets.

I spoke at one of the sessions, in Hindi. At another session, Pandit Nardev, Shri Shanani Satvadeva, Shri B. Govindjee, Pandita Nanackchand and I (five South Africans in all) were awarded the Arya Ratna. Selection was made by a committee set up for this purpose, through the persons for their contribution to the cause of the Arya Samaj Movement.

The awards threatened to split the APS at Executive Council level, after they returned to South Africa. There were strong objections to the manner in which they were singled out for honour and demands that the awards be returned. Bhai recorded the dispute in his diary, as follows:

The matter of the Arya Ratna Awards brought serious repercussions. There were views for and against. Why most of those who protested at the manner in which it was awarded, were not prepared to accept the fact that none of us five was responsible for the selection of the names, is something I could not fathom. The festering sore remained/c) quite some time.

It was a period in which he underwent a great deal of pain, not for himself, but for Pandit Nardev, who had made outstanding contributions to the Vedic Dharma in South Africa for thirty eight years, yet was called upon to explain why he had accepted the award. Notwithstanding this conflict, Bhai and Pandit Nardev led the preparations for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the APS in 1985:

Pandit Nardev and I wrote extensively to overseas Samajes to attend. We were expecting a few hundred delegates from India and other countries, but the political situation in South Africa, which was given extensive coverage in overseas newspapers, influenced people not to come. The Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha sent four delegates, namely, Swami Satvaprakash, Shri Om Prakash Tyagi, Shri B. D. Natak and Shri Subaschandra Pal of Bombay. The Indian Government authorised only five delegates. The fifth was Shri Baleshwar Agrawal of the Antra Rastriya Sahayog, who was also a journalist. I spent two weeks trying to obtain a visa for him through the Department of External Affairs in Pretoria. I had to give an undertaking that he would not take part in politics.

On the international front, his reputation has spread far and wide. He is a Council member of the World Hindu Federation, to which he was appointed on the suggestion of Mr B. Agarwal, a leading figure in the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO). He has addressed the Conference on issues pertaining to the South African Diaspora. In India, he is a valued visitor to the Avvai Home for the Aged in Madras (Chennai) where he has spent much time, advising the officials on improvements to the facilities. He is also regarded as an esteemed colleague at the Training, Research and Development Centre of He/pAge, India. In 1994, he was the chief guest of the Matri Mandir Kanya Gurukul, a Girls' College, where he joined in a *hawan* prior to laying the foundation stone of its new building.

The Aryan Benevolent Home has been visited by a number of dignitaries, government officials and artists from countries all over the world, brought there by their respect for him and his work for distressed people of all ages. His name is inseparable from the Home, and has a direct bearing on the substantial donations the Home has received for its development projects, as well as the recognition it is accorded internationally.

His interests have covered a range of subjects, some of which have stirred him into a blunt approach that is normally

uncharacteristic, but asserts itself when the Arya Samaj code is transgressed. At a talk delivered at the International Hindu Conference in July 1995, he approached the subject, 'Wealth in a Socialistic Society', by a return to the scriptures and advocacy of a form of socialism:

Hoarding cannot be justified and our religious texts are clear on the issue. The Rig Veda, Chapter 10, says, 'The rich man who does not utilise his wealth for noble deeds or does not offer it for the use of his fellow being, but fills only his stomach, is selfish and has earned the wages of sin only. Vedic Socialism, if put into operation by all earners of wealth, will go a long way in balancing our economy and feeding more hunger-stricken people and reducing the crime rate

In 1987, in a talk on 'Hindu Dharma', after pointing out the strengths of Hinduism, he addressed its weaknesses in an honest way:

Our scriptures are many and varied and subject to many interpretations and schools of thought, while Islam and Christianity each have as their source a single, very practical and easily understood text.

It is this honesty, this transparency, that marks him out as a singular human being. He is neither an intellectual giant nor an aggressively modern man; instead, he has been likened, very often, to his childhood hero, Mahatma Gandhi, for the way he lives his life, for the positive response he awakens in others, for his untiring efforts in the cause of Truth and Justice. In an article in the Daily News on 19 April 1996, for example, journalist Greg Arde wrote:

Softly spoken and unassuming, a slender little man walks slowly through the wards of withered and decrepit bodies. The lights are dim and the smell of antiseptic cannot quell the odour of urine. It is



Dr Tai Feng: Consulate General, Consulate General Republic of China-Durban visit to the ABH In 1993



Another distinguished visitor to the Home: Anup Jalota



1995 APS 70th Anniversary Celebrations



Mr S Rambharos leading the train of residents and staff at the Annual Sports Day held during Honour the Aged Week.



Unveiling the Bust of himself at Dayanand Gardens

here that Mr Shishupal Rambharos, 76, is at his happiest. Why? The answer to that question is, as they say, as elusive as the stars .

.... It is humbling to watch this Gandhi-type figure shuffling through the wards of the Chatsworth Home, greeting ailing patients by name and stooping over them to offer a hug or a reassuring word, sometimes for the elderly in Hindi or Tamil. It's difficult to imagine such a selfless person really exists.

Since 1986, when his ailing wife was admitted as a patient to Dayanand Gardens Home in Chatsworth, and he moved from their flat in Queen Street to the Home to be near her, he has become more involved in the care of the aged and of children, though his religious involvement continues unabated. He is an executive member of the Durban Chapter of the World Parliament of Religions and an executive member of the South African National Council for the Aged, among many other positions that he holds, in addition to being the Honorary Life President of the Aryan Benevolent Home. As he says, '*Charity begins at the Home, but it does not stop there.*'

He is a remarkable man, an energetic 80 year old, who lives simply and eats sparingly, who has a spring in his step, a smile on his face and a kind word for all - a man of the people.



Mr Essop Kajee, Philanthropist & Tireless in his community service, draped a Shawl around Mr Rambharos's shoulders

Clayton Gardens:
Joy - The day of
the big move.



Watching
intently the
prayer being
performed at
the site
of the new
Chatsworth
Complex



Discussing the plans for
the Chatsworth complex
with the Architects



A sad farewell at
Clayton Gardens

1.

CHAPTER 12

A PLACE IN THE SUN

From a Bungalow to a Garden

In 1959, helpless to continue with their plans to build a new Home because Cato Manor had been declared an area for White occupation, Bhai initiated the search for other premises to accommodate the Aged. The army hutment that had served its purpose adequately since 1948 had become overcrowded and uncomfortable. Not far from the Home was the vacant Salvation Army Bungalow, discarded because it was in need of repair and unlikely to be bought by any White person in its present condition. The alternatives had already been discussed: either cut down on the intake, or move to larger premises. The former was unacceptable to all. As B. D. Lalla explained it in the 1972 Brochure:

We were caught in a fast growing new pattern of Indian living, in which the Aged were becoming human shuttle-cocks, bandied about. The happy days, when aged parents enjoyed the typically Indian security of a joint family system was gradually giving way to the forces of western nuclear living. Married children chose to live on their own and in the process the Aged were squeezed to isolation.

With a special residential permit obtained from the Group Areas Board, the elderly were moved to the far more conducive surroundings of the Bungalow, which needed limited renovations to make it habitable. The total parting of the elderly and the young turned New Year's Day into a sad one, for in their separate dwellings - the Children's Home and the army hutment - they had

come to value one another much more, creating an harmonious family environment. The elderly could shut their doors when the noise became too loud or the boisterousness tired them. The movement to the bungalow was a '*sundering of a happy family*'. There was a subdued sense of jubilation as well, as the bungalow had many rooms, was built on the top a hill that commanded scenic views and the air was fresh. The aged revelled in their new surroundings, became busy with tending the gardens and planting vegetables, their pride in a more productive life obvious. Approximately six months later, the City Council requested that the ABH vacate the Bungalow, which had been allocated to the SPCA. The agony they underwent is captured in the 1972 Brochure:

Which claimed priority - the protection of stray dogs or straying old men? Our Aged had nowhere to go, not even to a place acquired for them, for that was also within the boundary walls of Cato Manor. Time was eternal; man was mortal and must die, the Aged sooner; could not a fleeting fraction, a mere insignificant drop in the ocean of time, be granted, to our Aged till time accommodated them elsewhere? They had already experienced three separate settlements and to be bandied about from pillar to post - what was the consolation to anybody?

Fortunately, Clayton Gardens Home in Asherville was already on Bhai's mind as a possible permanent lodging. He lived in Hibiscus Place, close to it. The news had spread quickly that the White pensioners who occupied the fifty units were going to move to a proclaimed White area. He arranged a meeting with officials of the City Council, to begin negotiations to take over the Home. An unexpected setback was the information he received from friends at the Council offices that a decision had been taken to use Clayton Gardens for Indian pensioners. He met the Regional Representative of the Indian Affairs Department, Mr M. J. De Wit van Eyssen, who intervened on their behalf with city authorities. The matter was also taken up by Councillor Mrs V. Thompson, in

her capacity as the City Council's representative at ABH committee meetings. Consequently, on 18 March 1965, the Mayor of Durban gave the official approval for ABH to take over the Clayton Gardens Home, on a fifty-year lease, provided that a percentage of the cottages were used to accommodate pensioners as well. Subsequently, when the ABH bought the property outright, it continued to make provision for pensioners, who paid R2.50 per month as rental. Though it could have turned the property into a Home for the Needy, the ABH recognised that one of the problems of modern life was the difficulty of caring for elderly members of the family. It was the first time in the history of the country that Indian pensioners benefited from such a welfare scheme.

To attend to the three different services now provided - the Children's Home, the Home for the Aged and the Pensioner's Cottages - three committees were established. Bhai served as Chairman of all three, as well as Chairman of the ABH Council and its Management Committee. The volume of work these positions engendered can only be imagined. By the end of 1965, his work-load was increased by his determination to provide the best possible form of service. Informed by the knowledge he had gained by attending meetings of whites-only national committees (firstly, the South African Council for the Aged (SACA) and, later, SANCA, (the South African National Council for the Aged), he asked Deva Naidoo, the Principal of the Clayton Gardens Home, to undertake a survey of the aged and disabled residents. They established that they fell into three main categories, each of which required a specialised form of care:

Category A : Those in need of regular medical attention and special diets: those discharged from hospitals as incurable; bed-ridden pensioners with no one to take care of them;

Category B : Those in need of specialised care: cerebral palsy; physically handicapped; disabled or crippled or those without limbs; mentally retarded.

Category C : Those with essential needs - food, shelter, some occupation: destitute persons.

The survey was the first of its kind to be taken among residents of the Home and painted a grim picture of the kind of services required, the costs involved and the organisation it required. He presented his findings at the Conference of the National Council for the Aged in November 1965. The following extract, taken from the minutes of the Clayton Gardens Home for the Aged Committee, dated 25 January 1966, reflects the impact it had:

Commenting on the report, Councillor Mrs V Thompson, who also attended the conference, paid compliments to the Chairman for the excellent manner in which the report was prepared. Further, she said that it covered every aspect of the care for the Aged, which was of immense value to all who are engaged in the field of care for the Aged.

The survey provided the impetus for a systematic programme of development that the ABH set in motion almost immediately. It was a new area, quite unlike anything Bhai had known before, a learning process that entailed long meetings with social welfare workers, the Executive of SANCA, White welfare organisations, the Inspector of Hospitals and university personnel. It encompassed training programmes for staff, the provision of specialised facilities and building alterations. The services provided at Clayton Gardens - a Physiotherapy Clinic, a 0 Grade Hospital for the Frail Aged (the only one of its kind in the country), a Day Centre for the Aged in the community and Occupational Therapy - were new and progressive ideas that brought community and professionals into full participation. The publicity given to these services subsequently aroused a greater interest and many offers of assistance were made by different sectors of the medical profession and the community. Notable among these voluntary medical officers of the Clayton Gardens Home are Dr M. G. Naidoo, Dr B. F. Reddy, Dr E. B. Ibrahim and Dr B. Chirkoot, for their very long periods of service and their willingness to make regular visits. They took care of an area of grave concern to the ABH Council. Though much of the

changing ethos of the Home was achieved by the trial and error method, it was an experimental precursor to the impressive array of services the ABH offers today.

Financing these additional facilities often presented difficulties. The cost of purchasing Clayton Gardens, the tolerance extended to pensioners who were unable to pay their rental and the expenses involved in maintaining two different structures placed a strain on available funds. Immediately after the ABH acquired the use of Clayton Gardens, Bhai had applied for financial and professional assistance from the Natal Provincial Administration, for an increase in the grant-in-aid from the City Council and approached Natal University Charity Rag for a larger allocation. Often, funds had to be diverted from one Home to the other to offset deficits. The financial burden was increased by the need to offer professional services - nursing staff, a social worker and a physiotherapist. Yet, at every meeting, the President urged the Committees on, to seek ways to provide what was still needed and to find people who could assist in ever-widening spheres of operation, regardless of the costs involved. *'We'll find the money somehow,'* was his usual response, and, amazingly, they did. His inspiration at the time came from people who brought new insights into the management, as well as the 'old guard' - Pandit S. A. Naidoo, Mrs S. L. Singh, S. Ragoobeer and the Satyadeva brothers. He seemed, without much effort, to inspire professional men and women, businessmen and the community to offer their services free of charge and to get others to donate their properties or make bequests to the Home, to allow for further expansion. As many have said, there is a rare quality in him, that makes it impossible for others to refuse him anything.

After the Aged had moved from the Bungalow to their new Home on 1 May 1965, Bhai said, in his presidential address at the Official Opening of Clayton Gardens:

I do believe there is an inexhaustible fountain of compassion in human hearts, for it is this that has kept our Home fires burning and spreading its warmth of benevolence among the inmates.

That 'inexhaustible fountain of compassion', for which he shows his gratitude to others, is the most distinguishing feature of his own life. It strengthened his resolve to serve others, particularly during the most unhappy period of the Home - its search for a permanent place in the sun, where aged and children could once more be together.

The search for land

The children were still at 186 Bellair Road, in a steadily depleted area that no longer provided the vital community involvement the Home had enjoyed in the past. A special committee had been set up, under the leadership of Paraw Seebran, the President of the Cato Manor Arya Samaj, urging people not to move out of Cato Manor, to dig in their heels and wait while objections were being lodged. Though some heeded the call, many others left, to join the exodus to Chatsworth.

From 1964 to 1978 - the year in which construction of the present Dayanand Gardens Complex began - Bhai Rambharos steered an intense and exhaustive search for land on which to build a new Aryan Benevolent Home, to perpetuate the tradition that had been established by the AYS in 1921 and in honour of all those who had served it. Every avenue was pursued, prompted by a network of information givers comprising city officials, businessmen and any organisation where he was given a sympathetic ear. It was a time that brought recurring periods of depression, followed by elation and then disappointment. On-site inspections, protracted meetings and ceaseless negotiations were the order of the day. The search led them to Verulam, Newlands, Reservoir Hills, Asherville, Clare Estate and Chatsworth, but all the land they examined proved to be too small for a complex to house both the old and the young and to provide essential, modern amenities to cater for the different needs of the residents. The Hindu Cemetery Trust donated land in Clare Estate as well, but it, too, was not large enough and was sold to swell the Development Fund.

Total separation of the aged and the young had been an enforced measure, imposed by circumstances. Bhai now argued that children needed to interact with older persons, as they would do under normal family circumstances and that every effort should be made to find property on which the different Homes could be constructed on the same site. The focus moved from a too-precipitate purchase of land for the Children's Home to finding a site where both young and old and the physically and mentally challenged could mingle on the same complex, with the provision of separate accommodation and facilities for each. It proved to be a difficult task and dominated the ABH Council's attention for the next five years.

When Chatsworth was planned as a giant Indian township shortly after the Group Areas Proclamation, no provision had been made for Homes for either the elderly or for children. Nevertheless, in 1966, Bhai identified two sites - an eight acre plot in Unit 5, which might be suitable for a Home for the Aged, and a larger acreage in Unit 9 for a Home for Children, if no other site could be found. Though it would mean establishing two structures, each with its own administration, and therefore more costly, he was driven to pursue every available option. City Estates officials assured him that the ABH application would be given priority, on a needs basis. Four years later, they were informed that the Unit 9 site had been allocated for the construction of a Police Training College and the Unit 5 site, opposite the R. K. Khan Hospital, had been demarcated a religious site. The AYS immediately applied for the latter, as a 'foot-in-the-door' manoeuvre, as it waited for the outcome of the renewed search for land. At one stage, negotiations were on track, concurrently, for four different properties, in different parts of Durban.

The search continued until 1970, when, through contacts in the Chatsworth community, Bhai realised that there was a 10 acre site, not far from his school, that had not been developed though it had been demarcated for a secondary school. He immediately conducted

a survey of the surrounding Unit 6 and Unit 7 residential areas to ascertain the need for an additional school. Thereafter, he met representatives of the community and ratepayers' associations at his school, to gain their support for his application for the land that fronted the intersection of Roads 60 1 and 70 1. That support was given willingly, as there were already more schools in the two areas than was required, according to a Education Department of Indian Affairs, Division of Education survey of current and future needs. Many of the residents of Unit 7 had come from Cato Manor and were eager to see the Home established in their midst. The ABH submitted a motivation for the site and the Department supported the application. The agreed purchase price was set at R53 000. The AYS applied for the land adjacent to it, on the grounds that it was larger than the Unit 5 property and could accommodate a temple and a hall. Thus it became possible for the founding organisation and the Home to be together again.

By October 1971, the Bellair Road properties had been sold to the Community Development Board for R61 956 and negotiations were being conducted to sell the Salvation Army property. All money gained through the sale of properties and by way of donations was deposited into a Special Development Fund for the Chatsworth Project. The Children's Home plans were passed and a loan of R315 000 approved by the National Housing Commission in 1975. In the subsequent four years, the original plans for the Home for the Aged, drawn up for the Salvation Army property, had to be amended as the technical advisers of the Department of Community Development (DOCD) regarded them as being *'too luxuriously planned, resulting in the cost thereof exceeding the available loan.'* These frustrating delays went on for the next four years. The funding from central government was inexplicably delayed and it required a disaster to prompt the Commission to release the funds in 1977.

In 1976 a devastating fire at the Children's Home in Bellair Road precipitated a crisis that turned the development of the new site into

an urgent priority. It is best described by H. Sewnath, who was on its administrative staff at the time:

It was a winter day. The administrative staff had just taken their seats to have their lunch in the dining room when we heard a loud noise that sounded like a firecracker. Flames engulfed the roof of Dormitory B, which accommodated teenage girls. The nearest fire station in the city was alerted and the staff; assisted by colleagues from the Ahmedia Mosque opposite the Home, struggled to put out the fire with the in-house fire-fighting equipment. Others started the evacuation of the younger children and also tried to salvage what they could. Then the wooden beams caved in. Mr Rambharos was telephoned immediately. He probably contravened every traffic regulation as he rushed from the AYS Memorial School in Chatsworth, to get to the Home.

By the time he arrived, the fire had spread to the surrounding dormitories A, C and D. With tears in his eyes, he pointed to Dormitory A and said, 'That was my dormitory when I was a child.' Then he said, 'I now mean business! There is a limit to patience and tolerance.' He went to the telephone and began the calls, first to officials of the DOCD, demanding that they come to see for themselves the ruins of the dormitories; then he telephoned well-wishers, asking for help. He tried to comfort the children as they arrived from school and joined them in picking through the ashes in the hope of finding some of their meagre personal effects or treasured belongings. He cried as he heard them scream 'We can't find anything!' As the message spread, donations in cash and kind began to pour in. People came all afternoon and evening, bringing winter clothing and food parcels. A number of the children were taken away by host families. He stayed with the children at their supper and personally tucked them all in, in the makeshift sleeping arrangements in the dining room.

He did not stop there. When the lights went off for the children to sleep, he returned to the office area, where he worked through the night, writing letters to the authorities, reminding them of their obligation to the children, and working on alternate plans to raise

funds for the new building project, in the event that the DOCD slammed their door on him. But that didn't happen. People just couldn't say 'no' to him.

The following day, Bhai sat in the offices of the DOCD and made it clear to all and sundry that he would not move until he received an assurance that the payment of the building loan would be expedited. The urgency of the need was obvious and he was able to show that the Home had already raised the collateral required for the state loan. He was even able to persuade the DOCD to embark on restoration of the Home in Cato Manor. It took almost a year, during which time the makeshift sleeping and storage arrangements continued. The fund-raising drive gained momentum and officials of the Home visited the Cape Province and the Transvaal to sell Deepavali cards to raise funds. They used the opportunity to meet local Indian communities and obtain promises of further help as well.

The image of Bhai in the Durban city centre, as he went round seeking donations, is indelibly imprinted on Mr Sewnath's mind:

I remember Mr Rambharos in his white safari suit and white sun cap, carrying a brown satchel with the donation book, trudging the streets in central Durban, knocking on the doors of businesses. He would not leave until they made a commitment. He reminds me of Rabindranath Tagore, who once said words to the effect that, 'when you call and nobody answers, continue on your own.' Fortunately, there were those who answered the call, and we went on a massive campaign.

He devised a clever strategy - to take a prominent member of a particular language group with us when we approached that community - for example, Pandit H. Trikamjee was picked up when we went to the Gujarati business community. That way, people found it hard to refuse.

The building of the Children's Home commenced in 1978 and the honour of turning the first sod was given to the oldest active member of the Sabha, Mr S. Bechan - 'Uncle Bechan', who had lovingly cut the hair of all residents at the original Home in Bellair Road, when Bhai was a child. Construction did not go smoothly at first, as the ground was rocky and had to be blasted with dynamite. It took the government three months to grant permission to do so, with a concomitant escalation in costs. Bhai once again approached the manager of Barclay's Bank, West End Branch, for assistance and secured a 'soft loan' of R100 000, at a low rate of interest. Once the building project was well and truly on its way, he left for the United Kingdom, at his own cost, to search for ideas for the Home for the Aged. He came back with many suggestions that were incorporated into the plans, but which required vast sums of money.

Within the next four years, the ABH sold the Salvation Army property and embarked on a fund-raising drive on a scale never before seen, to raise further capital necessary for the development. Large corporations, smaller businesses, schools and individuals responded to their call, while an aggressive 'advertising' process was implemented by newspapers such as *Post*, which has since given extensive coverage to the Home and all its activities and joined in its ventures.

The ABH Children's Home

On 1 December 1979, in what was appropriately celebrated as *The International Year of the Child*, the ABH Children's Home was officially opened. The Graphic, a weekly newspaper aimed largely at the Indian population, published the programme for the day:

It will commence with prayer conducted by Pandit S. A. Naidoo. The Deputy Mayor of Durban, Councillor Mrs S. C. Hotz will welcome the guests. The Presidential Address will be delivered by Mr S. Rambharos. The other speakers are Mr J. N. Reddy,

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the South African Indian Council, Mr W J. Schreuder, Regional Representative of the Department of Indian Affairs, Mrs Shirley Dark, Area Chairman of the South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare and Mr H. N. Naran, President of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha. Representatives of a number of sponsors will unveil the following plaques:

Foundation Plaque - South African Sugar Association; Riverview Cottage Plaque - The Cato Manor Indian Education Society; Clads and Cadipa Cottage Plaque - The Clairwood Literary and Debating Society and Clairwood and District Indian Parents' Association; Harry Oppenheimer Cottage Plaque - AngloAmerican Corporation and De Beers Consolidated Mines Group Chairman's Fund; Rustomjee Hall Plaque - Rustomjee Trust.

The impressive list of donors that responded to the Home's appeals are, in themselves, a tribute to Bhai's tireless efforts and leadership, given with no reward but the joy of '*caring, serving and sharing*'. Remembrance of that happy day, over twenty years ago, still brings a sparkle to his eyes, though he also remembers, vividly, the destructive human impulse that attempted to create havoc with their carefully prepared programme. The following article which was printed in *The Graphic* on 7 December 1979 describes what almost went wrong:

Not even a cruel hoax could prevent an impressive turn-out on an extremely wet Saturday afternoon, for the opening of the Aryan Benevolent Home's Children's Home in Arena Park in Chatsworth on 1 December. A telephone call to a radio station had resulted in an announcement being broadcast that the opening ceremony had been postponed, but guests, learning that the announcement was untrue, braved the wet weather to witness this colorful ceremony.

In a message to the same newspaper, Bhai makes no mention of this, but concentrates, typically, on the support and generosity of the human spirit:

We have had hundreds of donors, over a long period, who have contributed in kind - daily, weekly, monthly or occasionally towards the maintenance costs of our homes. Such gracious acts and thought for the needy have helped us keep our home fires burning for the past 58 years, continuously. On behalf of our Building Development and Finance Committee, I want to thank most sincerely and humbly all who have made the project possible.

The Arena Park property on which the Dayanand Gardens Complex stands, is a testament to one man's vision, that was supported and strengthened by all those who worked under his leadership. It is that vision that has given the Aryan Benevolent Home its unique character, as a service provider in a multi-dimensional way; it is a vision that led to an expansion programme to other parts of Natal, to the Western Cape and to the Transvaal (Gauteng), where he personally met and inspired local communities to set up branches of the ABH, under their own control; it is a vision that has shaped and directed the Home to become an internationally renowned institution. It is a vision that needs to be explored, in the attempt to understand Bhai Rambharos and what drives him ceaselessly to serve humanity. However, no matter how deep we probe, perhaps we shall never quite understand why one man has become a torch-bearer of hope, a crusader for justice and for service, at the expense of everything else in his life.

On 28 February 1980, Bhai retired from active service as an educator. Many had tried to dissuade him, as a new salary dispensation was expected. Among the most vocal was Mr Mulla, his Deputy Principal, who urged him to wait a few months so that he could retire on an improved pension. Bhai refused. There was urgent need to raise one million rands for the construction of the Home for the Aged and provide all the additional resources needed for the total care of the frail, the very frail and the disabled residents. He submitted his application for retirement on the day that details of the new salary structure were received at schools and

has not once regretted his decision. The Home had become a passion that could not be denied, and which he allowed to take over his life.

One can only view his accomplishments during the next two decades with a kind of breathless wonder. The time, energy and devotion that he has given to establishing care centres in different parts of South Africa has brought hope to shattered lives, enriched those who have worked with him and brought new dimensions to the belief that *'service to man is service to God.'* The Arya Samaj principles, which were engrained on his consciousness as a child, have been carried to fulfilment, through his all-encompassing vision and the support of his colleagues. The table of achievements which is indicated below is also an indication of the generosity of the public, who donated funds to make the expansion possible:

1980 : ABH Pre-school

1981 *Service Centre for the Aged and Disabled at Clayton Gardens*

1982 *Dayanand Gardens Service Centre for the Handicapped
Dayanand Gardens Home for the Aged*

1985 : ABH Creche

1986 : AYS/ABH Cultural Institute and Pattundeen Theatre

1987 : Veda Mandir and Paraw Seebran Library

1989 : ABH After-Care Centre

1990 : Umzinto Home for the Aged

Woodstock Respite Centre

Glencoe Home for the Aged

Westsun Home for the Aged

1992 *Home Help Service, Chatsworth*

Sheltered Workshop, Springfield, Durban

1993 *J. and N. Bechar Children's Home, Lenasia*

1995 *Mahatma Gandhi Clinic in Bhambayi*

1998 *V.J. Kara Ayurvedic Clinic*

One of the projects listed above - the Mahatma Gandhi Clinic - operated satisfactorily for a while, with the help of Mew a Ramgobin

ARYAN BENEVOLENT HOME COUNCIL - 1997



Seated: Mr R Ramnarain (Patron), Mr VJ Kara (Patron), Mr S Rombharos (Hon. Life President), Mr SI Sewgulum (Trustee), Mr P Seebrian (Trustee), Mr K Jugoo (Trustee), Mr PD Kalidas (Trustee), Mr RJ Kusimjee (Patron)
Standing First Row: Mr JG Nair (National PR Manager), Mr P Polban (Deputy President), Mr P Pataik (National Fundraising Manager), Mr KR Sitarum (Director), Ms N Grounden, Mr J Seewersad (Chairman: P&FR Committee), Mr C Soobayee, Mrs N Govender
Standing Middle Row: Dr B Chirhoot, Mr R Jagesar, Mrs S Sarjoo (Recording/Minutes Secretary), Mr PB Govender (Principal), Mrs V. Haripersad (Nursing Services Manager), Mr R Lutchman (Hon. Secretary), Mr S Batabhi, Mr R. Boodhoo
Standing Back Row: Mr P Blohoo (President), Mr P Isaac, Mr GD Raghubhai, Dr J Reddass (Chairman: ABH Northern KZN Branch), Mr S Booshun, Mr A Boodhoo (Vice-Chairman: ABH Gauteng), Mr S Padmanabhan, Mr J Rambhass, Mr O Guier (Assistant Personnel Officer)
Absent: Mr K Pattundeen, Mr N Beebar, Mr DS Satyadeva, Mr K Patel, Mr V Chibbhai, Mr R Bondadai, Mr H Mahantjee, Mr J. Singh, Mr P Lutchman, Mr R Singh, Mr B Behadar, Mr J Nagesar, Mr R Redai, Mr RR Kallie, Mr C Narrendas, Mr JBB Deyu, Mrs R Pillay (Human Resource Co-ordinator/Senior Social Worker)



*Shishupal Rambharos, Doctor of Social Science (Honoris Causa)
University of Natal - 6 April 2000*

and S. L. Sewgolam, but failed to sustain itself after the initial training of women from the Bhambayi community, at the ABH Children's Home in Chatsworth. The Home Help Service has continued as an essential service despite the withdrawal of state funds. All the other services are active and on-going. The Riseford Care Centre in Chatsworth has been running very successfully for many years. It offers senior citizens the opportunity to socialise and to earn a little money, though packaging goods for local businesses. In 1999, another house, like the J. and N. Bechar Home in Lenasia, was donated to the ABH, so that its service in Gauteng could be extended. The donor wishes to remain anonymous.

The vision that informed and continues to inform Bhai's work, as the President and now Honorary Life President of the ABH, incorporates a strong belief in helping to keep families together. The re-named 'Bhai Rambharos Children's Home' provides smaller family units, each comprising a housemother and a maximum of fourteen children, to foster closer relationships. A qualified social worker serves as the Principal of the Children's Home and ensures that their social and emotional development is a strong focus of attention. The provision of home nursing services works along the same principle, to keep the elderly with their families, but reduce the burden of responsibility to manageable proportions. The vision extends to placing children in approved homes during school holidays, so that they can interact fully in a normal family environment. It has often happened that host families adopt the children they have come to know over many years.

The picture that is given, of a Home that has operated successfully as a service provider, does not take account of the many failures and disappointments that Bhai has had to face along the way. Human nature and human reactions are not always predictable and have created situations of tension that have occasionally turned quite ugly. Some have resulted from the recklessness or behavioural problems of the young, others have resulted from drunkenness or belligerency of the aged, while

administration problems and conflicts among staff members are a constant cause for concern. When seen from the perspective of his mission in life and the successes it has brought, however, they count for very little. While they cause him a great deal of heartache, they have not disillusioned him or swayed him from his avowed intention to do his best at all times. One can almost hear Mr Satyadeva's words, in the early days of the Home: *'It is our religious duty'*. Yet there is a marked difference between the young boy who listened and learned from his elders at the home in 186 Bellair Road and the man who developed out of that world. He has not simply carried on a tradition of service, but has invested it with a dynamism that has taken it far beyond what was envisaged in the early days. Though he has kept steady to the purpose of the founders of the Home and to the Principles of the Arya Samaj, he has adapted to changing social and political realities and kept abreast of modern developments in care-giving, offering a service that is guided by his religious convictions and supported by new generation techniques.

In 1982, the *International Year of the Aged* and the year, coincidentally, in which the Dayanand Gardens Home for the Aged was officially opened, Bhai Rambharos received his first public recognition for the services he has given over a period of seventy years. There have been many since. The most recent, an Honorary Doctorate in Social Science, was awarded to him by the University of Natal on 6 April 2000 at the Durban City Hall. It is richly deserved.

S. L. Sewgolam, the Honorary Vice-President of the ABH, who shares his office and works closely with him, pays a glowing tribute to him:

I have yet to meet a perfect man. All of us have certain flaws in our personalities. They are the very essence of our humanity However, if there is a man who comes closest to perfection, it has to be Sri Rambharos. He is the epitome of service.

At eighty years of age, Bhai Rambharos still puts service to others first: it is seen in the joy with which patients in the hospital wards greet him, in his familiarity with each one's affliction or need, in the smiles and ready conversation of those he meets in the passageways, in his gentle and caring attention to children and adults. It is a personal touch that brings a sense of significance to the lives of those he lives and eats with - people who have been abandoned or are unable to care for themselves. Though he has slowed down the pace of his life and placed his faith in the democratic structures that have developed at the Home, he is still the man that everyone turns to in a crisis. He is the one who is called for help, at any time of night or day, when temporary shelter is required - for those found senseless in the streets, for abused women, for children in danger of being harmed. His response is always the same: *'Bring them here. I'll make arrangements for them.'* He is also the one whose presence is still sought to grace social functions, to lead in prayer, to join peace marches, to participate in conferences, seminars and religious debates. Housemothers come to him for help and guidance and children come to the man they call 'Bhai', just to say *'hello'*.

One senses the uneasiness about the future that is a cause for growing concern among all who work at or serve the Aryan Benevolent Home. It underlies what they say and how they say it. Iace Nair, Head of the Public Relations Section, is the only one who has voiced it openly: *'Who will succeed him? Who can?'* It is a serious dilemma for an institution that holds a proud record of service, but which has grown primarily under the will and direction of a single inspired man. The problem must be faced and the solution found quickly, to ensure that the tradition begun in 1921 continues, and is invested with the vision and intensity that Bhai Rambharos has brought to it.

CONCLUSION

When Martin Luther King, the American civil rights leader said, 'I have a dream ', he spoke of another country but of ideals that reflected the South African dream of freedom from enslavement. Here too, there was a dream, an aspect of which was the affirmation of the dignity of all people. Oppression of people of colour had serious social ramifications - the destruction of hopes, the stifling of educational and employment opportunities and the entrenchment of brutal poverty.

In that climate of despair, Mr D. G. Satyadeva was stirred to action and, in turn, inspired others to begin a process that brought the gift of Bhai Rambharos to the world of needy and destitute persons. This biography, of a true son of the Sabha, is as much a tribute to those pioneers as it is to him. The ideals they cherished, the spirit of service that impelled them and their infinite compassion is honoured through the life of the young boy whose life they touched.

It is a tribute also to those members of the South African and international community who have contributed through service and financial support, to keep the Home fires burning. Their commitment and their inability to say 'no' to the man who has given most of his life in service to others has ensured that, no matter what the future holds, the needy will always have somewhere to go.

The words of Mahatma Gandhi, in the concluding chapter of *An Autobiography - or My Experiments with the Search for Truth* aptly brings this biography to a close. They capture, in my belief, the thoughts and feelings of Bhai Rambharos in his eightieth year of life:

My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. The little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact, what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence.

ADDENDUM A

RECORD OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

WELFARE AND EDUCATION

The Aryan Benevolent Home

1930: Became a member of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha

1937: Became unofficial assistant secretary of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha.

1941 to 1950 : Hon Secretary of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha

1951: President of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha

1951 to 1958: Hon. Secretary of the Aryan Benevolent Home Council

1952 to 1957: Hon Treasurer of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha

1959 to 1965: President of the Aryan Benevolent Home Council 1970

to 1997: President of the Aryan Benevolent Home Council 1997 to

date: Honorary Life President of the Aryan Benevolent Home Council

1997 to date: Chairman, V IKara Ayurvedic Clinic

Welfare

1964 to 1966: Board of Management, Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind.

1966 to 1969: Ladysmith Child Welfare Society

Board of Management, Lakehaven Children's Home Natal

Indian Council for Child and Family Welfare Durban

Committee of the International Year of the Aged Coastal

Council for the Aged

South African National Council for the Aged
 Regional Welfare Board - Natal, Cape Province and Transvaal
 Mouton Committee on Pension Benefits
 National Committee for the Health Care of the Aged National
 Committee for International Year of Aged Persons

EDUCATION

Institute of Indian Languages
 Hindi Syllabus Committee, Department of Education and Culture
 House of Delegates ' Hindi Shiksha Sangh, South Africa

RELIGION AND CULTURE

Hindu National Convention Committee Chairperson (1982)
 Arya Pratinidhi Sabha:
 Member since 1930
 1962 to 1975: Hon. Secretary
 1980 to 1981: Vice President
 1983 to 1997: President
 1997 to date: Hon. Life President
 South African Hindu Maha Sabha
 1983 to 1997: Vice President Council
 member
 Member: World Council for Religion and Peace (Durban Chapter)
 World Hindu Federation (HQ in Katmandu, Nepal)
 Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (S.A. Chapter)

ADDENDUM B

AWARDS / HONOURS / CITATIONS

- 1982: Civic Honour conferred by Mayor of Durban
 Scroll of Honour (*'The Rag Picker'*), from Aryan
 Benevolent Home Council
- 1983: *Arya Ratna* (Jewel of the Noble), conferred at International
 Vedic Conference, India
- 1985: 1. Civic Honour awarded by Durban City Council
 2. Distinguished Service Award from Chatsworth Jaycees
- 1992: Distinguished Service Award from Durban Association for the
 Aged
- 1993: Bust of Shishupal Rambharos unveiled at 80th Anniversary of
 Arya Yuvuk Sabha
- 1994: 1. Merit Award for Contributions to a Just and Equitable South
 African Society, from the University of DurbanWestville
 2. Post/Gwinneth Skinner Community Award for Outstanding
 Community Involvement and Social Responsibility
 3. *'Make the WorLd NobLe'* Award from Congress of Arya
 Samjes, New Jersey, USA
 4. Citation for Outstanding Contribution in the Struggle for
 Liberation and Human Dignity in South Africa, from Natal
 Indian Congress

- 1995: 1. The Ridge Lion's Club Appreciation of Invaluable Services rendered towards Upliftment of Underprivileged Children and the Aged
2. Message of Congratulations on 75th Birthday from State President Nelson Mandela, read by Minister Mac Maharaj
3. Certificate of Honour from Arya Vidyapeeth, India
4. Certificate of Recognition for Distinguished and Dedicated Service, from World Hindu Federation.
- 1996: 1. Title of '*Deen Bandhu*' (Friend of the Poor) conferred by Sastri College Alumni
2. Aryan Benevolent Home Children's Home named 'Bhai Rambharos Home for Children'
3. Odeon Cinema Shield for Community Services
- 1997: 1. Paul Harris Fellowship Award, bestowed by Rotary Foundation of Rotary International
2. '*Welfare Services as a Religious Duty*' - Film of life of Shishupal Rambharos by MTV Amsterdam, Holland
- 1998: 1. '*Practical Involvement in We(fare Services)*' - SABC film on work done by Shishupal Rambharos
2. Seva Ratna Meritorious Community Services Award from the Hindi Shiksha Sangh
3. Citation for Meritorious Service from Chatsworth Hospice
4. Citation for Meritorious Service from Anchorlite College
- 1999: Special Award from the S. A. Council for the Aged to mark International Year of Aged Persons
- 2000: 1. Doctor of Social Science, *Honoris Causa*, conferred by the University of Natal.
2. Launch of the Bhai Rambharos Trust.

ADDENDUM C

***EXCERPTS FROM 80TH ANNIVERSARY
BROCHURE OF THE ARYA YUVUK
SABHA, 25 APRIL 1993: 'HOMAGE TO
SHRI SHISHUPAL RAMBHAROS'***

This true son of the Sabha has given tangible meaning to the spirit of the ideals of the Sabha.

Editorial

This gentle gem has made invaluable contributions on behalf of the people of Indian origin towards the human society of the South African soil.

Pandit Nardev Vedalankar

Such service is unparalleled in our community.

Prof. J. Reddy,
Vice Chancellor, University of Durban-Westville

I pray to the Almighty for his long life so that he continues to serve the people for many years to come.

Swami Anand Bodh Saraswati,
Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha

His sacrifice and personal dedication are remembered as an example to the generations to come.

U. Bissoondyal,
Director: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius

He has left an indelible impression in the hearts of Mauritians by his friendliness.

Hon. Rajnarain Guttee, M.P.
Arya Sabha, Mauritius

He has been a source of inspiration not only to the Arya Samaj in South Africa, but throughout the entire world.

AmarErry,
President, Arya Samaj, Toronto

Mr dear friend and brother is a DEVAPURUSHA - a godly person whom nobody can beat in the field of selflessness, dedication, devotion, sacrifice and steadfastness.

Satyapal Sharma,
Vice Chancellor, Vedic University of America

His dedication and unselfish service to the Sabha made possible the accomplishment of the Sabha's goals.

Girish Khosla,
Sabha Mantri Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, America

His very quiet and humble Gandhian nature lights the dark contours of existence and fills life with beauty and joy.

Mrs Ramola Parbhoo
ABH Council, Western Cape

He is a true child of God.

Y. Krishnaswamy Naidoo
President/Spiritual Head, Om Shanti
Cultural Centre

We welcome the hero who is bestowing on your country-wide respected leader, Mr Shishupal Rambharos.

Nelson R. Mandela
President, African National Congress

His life exemplifies what the Aryan Benevolent Home is doing for many in creating a new pathway so that each person's full potential can be realised.

Helen Starke
National Director, S.A. National Council for
Child & Family Welfare

A 'Karam Yogi' who has rendered compassionate service with unselfish dedication for the well-being of others.

K. L. Maharaj
President, Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of
South Africa

He is a glowing example of a true and sincere human being who has put duty before self.

S. Ramasar
ABH Home Council, Umzinto Local Committee

May Parmatma bless him with good health to service the community with the same distinction as he always did.

S. L. Sewgolam
AYS-ABH Cultural Institute



Honoured by the City of Durban



Seen on grandfather's day at the children's home

ADDENDUM D

THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF THE ARYA SAMAJ

1. **God, His Characteristics:** The Primordial Root - the Eternal Unseen Sustainer - of all true knowledge and of objects made known by true knowledge - any of all these - is the Supreme God
2. **His Attributes and Worship:** God is Personification of Existence, Intelligence and Bliss. He is Formless, Almighty Just, benevolent, Unborn, Endless and Infinite, Unchangeable, Beginningless, Incomparable, Support of All, Lord of All. All-pervading, Omniscient, and Controller of all from within. Undecaying, Imperishable, Fearless, Eternal, Holy and Maker of the Universe. To Him alone is worship due.
3. **His Word, the Veda:** The Veda is the Scripture of true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of every Arya to learn and teach The Veda, to hear it, read and to recite it to others.
4. **Truth:** We should be ever ready to embrace Truth and to forsake untruth.
5. **Righteousness:** All acts should be done in accordance with Dharma after deliberating what is right and wrong.

6. Benevolence: The prime object of the Arya Samaj - the Vedic Church - is to do good to the world, that is, to promote physical, physical, spiritual and social good of every sentient being.
7. Love and Justice: Our conduct towards all should be guided by Love, Righteousness and Justice.
8. Nescience and Science: We should dispel 'avidya' nescience, and promote 'vidya' - science, spiritual and physical.
9. Individualism and Altruism: No one should be content with promoting his good only; on the contrary, he should look for his good in promoting the good of all.
10. Subordination and Liberty: All men should subordinate themselves to the laws of society calculated to promote the well-being of all; they should be free in regard to the laws promoting individual well-being.



*At the KwaMashu Home for the Aged
with Ramola Parbhoo Councillor Margaret Winter and Mr Wolpe*

ADDENDUM E

SOME ILLUMINATING OBSERVATIONS

Dr Trilokhi Nath Pande, V. J. Kara Clinic:

In people of his calibre, there is a kind of divinity. Wherever you put him, he will glow. Yet he is a humble man. Once, when he had to leave a meeting, he brought my shoes from outside the door and placed them at my feet. I said to him, 'Do not do that again. You are my senior.' He brought tears to my eyes.

Edward Malinga, Senior Storeman, ABH.

He is a man of God, a living saint. In Zulu we say 'Ubuntu' - he is a man full of ubuntu. He is a good Samaritan and a good Aryan.

Numsie Gounden, voluntary worker and member of the ABH Council:

He is such a good person. He never gets angry or impatient or irritable. I'm the one who gets angry when people take advantage of him! He can never refuse people anything.

Shyra Devi Ramfol, resident voluntary typist, filing clerk and secretary:

I call him 'Bapuji' because I love and respect him. His coming into my life has calmed me. He is a saint. My father said to me, 'You must try to be like him.'

I've taken control to make sure he eats. He never asks for anything to be made specially for him. I know he loves soup so I prepare it and cut up toasted bread to add to it. Even when he is ill, he won't

stay in bed and won't listen to Dr Chirkoot. He makes the doctors and nurses dance! He says 'I'm fine, it's just a temperature. I have to go to a meeting.' Everyone here loves him and everyone - the patients, the children, the cleaners - calls him 'Bhai'.

Mrs Manormani Pather, immobile stroke victim, ABH hospital ward:

He's golden. I have nothing but praise for him. May God keep him safe.

Havisha Rampersad, granddaughter:

Nana is the first person I will call if I have a problem. No matter what he is doing or how late it is, he will come immediately. I can talk to him about anything - religion, television, Y2K, politics. He knows so much. When I was little, I regarded him as mine and actually became jealous when my father and he talked! Wherever we go, there's ALWAYS someone who knows him and wants to talk to him.

Meenatchi Naicker, patient for four years, hospital ward, ABH:

Such a lovely man. If he's not here to read the prayer in the morning, then the day is not right.

Earline Naidoo, formerly a resident from the Children's Home:

From the first time I saw him, I felt I was in the presence of a divine healing power.

Mrs Sivagami Naidoo (85), blind patient, hospital ward, ABH:

He teaches us how to pray and how to live. I would miss him if he was not here.

Mr S. L. Sewgolam Hon. Vice President of the ABH Council:

He is a workaholic who cannot say 'no' to anyone. He mixes equally with 'kings and beggars'; is so diplomatic that, if he has to castigate

someone, he does it so gently that when they leave, they're unaware that they were being reprimanded! He can become angry, too - I've seen it happen, though it is rare - but is always fully justified when he does so.

Anjalay Thaver, classmate at AYS School (1936); later, teaching colleague:

I was the only girl in our class. He treated me like a sister and was very protective. On one occasion, when boys from Mayville Primary School saw us returning to our school (after we'd written an examination paper at their school), they came to attack us with bicycle chains. Rambharos and his friend Mohanlal picked me up and threw me onto the seat of a quarry truck and told the driver to go quickly. Then they turned to face the other boys. He was never afraid of anything.

Prem Polton, AYS President:

He does not like confrontation and always tries to please. He has the ability to calm things down when they become heated and creates the opportunity to turn the issue in favour of his point of view. I have learnt from him how to listen and how to respond.

Nelson August, blind. Has lived at ABH for four years:

To me he is inspiring, an example of who and what is God. I am blind, but I hear in his voice a good heart and loving warmth. He is like one of the prophets -like Jesus and Mohammed. When he reads the prayer, he also speaks words of wisdom that inspire us. He says, 'When your heart is feeling low or sore, think about God and see how comfortable you feel.' He is a simple, humble man. He eats with us, lives with us and always praises us.

Sookchandrie Ramlugan, immobile patient, hospital ward, ABH:

He calls me 'Queen' and treats me as special. When he comes to

see us, he waves, talks and jokes. He is a very happy man. We miss him if he's not here.

Kamlawathi Naicker, patient, hospital ward, ABH:
When I was very sick, he used to come at night to feed me.

Winnie Obermeyer, patient for 7 years, hospital ward, ABH He comes round to talk to us and brings visitors to see us. He is a wonderful man. I am a Christian, but I participate in the prayers he reads, because I believe there is only one God.

Sridevi Padmanathan inscribed the following message on her B.Mus.(Hons) thesis, before giving it to him on 6 May 1991:

My dearest Anna Rambharos,

God knows your inspiration so much, which I'm sure will lead me to Paramatma, the Lord Natarajah, the same, one and only God, who all of us are in search of knowingly or unknowingly. May your guidance be an everlasting one, the best thing that has happened in my life. Thank you so much.



Overcome with shyness at meeting a mega-star!

ADDENDUM F

A TYPICAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF SHISHUPAL RAMBHAROS (RECORDED ON TUESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 1999)

Awakened at 05.30.

Yoga exercises and meditation.

Read communal prayer over public address system (linked to all the wards).

Breakfast in room: cereal and fruit.

07.45: to the office. Took car to fetch Numsie Gounden, volunteer, to work (she had a leg problem).

Preparation for meeting with Mrs Paddy Meskin, Co-ordinator of World Conference of Parliament of World Religions, Cape Town, re: programme.

10.45: Drove to Mrs Meskin's home in North Ridge Road.

Meeting lasted 2 hours.

13.20: Returned to ABH. Light lunch (soup and bread).

13.40: Meeting with Mr S. L. Sewgolam: matters concerning ABH Umzinto Home, in preparation for imminent meeting.

14.00: Sorted photographs of the Home to be made into slides for talk at Cape Town Conference in December.

14.30: Checked mail and went over typed copies of draft letters done the previous day. Corrected and returned to typing pool.

Drafted two other letters.

Made arrangements for wheelchair for husband of a Mrs Doul Left for Merebank, picked up wheelchair and went to deliver it to Mrs Doul. No one at home. Will go back later. Interview re: biography.

Returned phone calls received while at morning meeting. Discussions with officials of ABH to prepare for meeting with 5 professional persons who have expressed a desire to become involved in ABH work.

Attended to backlog of work and matters to be attended to while he is away at Cape Town Conference (12 days' duration).

Preparation for 5 meetings on the following day:

1. Indian Consulate
2. SAHA Investments Ltd.
3. Jubilee Year 2000 Meeting (Diakonia)
4. Meeting with concerned professional people
5. 21st Anniversary of Montford Women's Group at Sol Namara Hotel

Read evening prayer over public address system.

Supper.

Preparations for talk/slide presentation at Conference.

Reading.

Sleep (at about 10.30 pm).

*..Cife is mostly froth and bubble;
Two things stand like stone:
..:Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.*

ADDENDUM G ADDRESS BY DR SHI SHUPAL

RAMBHAROS

(On the occasion of the Graduation Ceremony of the University of Natal (Durban Campus) on 06 April 2000.)

The Honourable Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor, Members of Staff, honoured guests, parents, well wishers and Graduates: I thank the University of Natal (Durban Campus) for conferring the Degree of Doctor of Social Science (*Honoris Causa*). I am privileged and honoured to present a short address to this distinguished assembly.

The theme of my address is 'SYNERGY'. The word implies the utilisation of resources, both material and human, to create a competitive, economically viable and highly productive environment by conjoining the resources of the merged entities.

However, before I launch into my theme, allow me to introduce you to a significant arena of the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa - that of the eradication of poverty.

The current focus of our ANC government is the alleviation of the desperate plight of the 'poorest of the poor' in our country. That focus lends credence and substance to this aspect of the struggle for a better life for all. The struggle against endemic desolation and destitution which are the outcomes of oppression, has been the sole responsibility of the non governmental organisations which, with limited support from communities and benefactors, still continue to function to alleviate the ravages of social ills that have plagued the majority of our population from the apartheid years.

My life has been dedicated to that end. I was a beneficiary of one such NGO - The Aryan Benevolent Home. The home was the

result of a minor incident - police abuse against a homeless vagabond in Victoria Street in the winter of 1918, at the end of the First World War - the war that was *'to end all wars'*. The war against poverty, abuse, exploitation and oppression was not even considered in that maxim. One of our founders, Mr D.G.Satyadeva observed the violent removal, by a policeman, of a destitute man from the public toilets in which he had found shelter. He was beaten and driven out into the winter cold. There was no place for him to go to. This horrific scene initiated the establishment of a home for the destitute and for the neglected aged.

I was brought to the Home on my father's death in 1927 and have remained its faithful servant for 73 years, rising within its ranks from Secretary to Chairman to President and Honorary Life President. It provided me with the theatre of life in which many role players taught me, the lonely lives of the inmates instructed me, and the struggle against a callous state enlightened me. The experience was a journey of discovery, and of growth into maturity and sensibility. My environment developed in me a consciousness of a spiritual centre in my being. I have tried to repay the kindness showered on me, by dedicating my life in the service of suffering humanity.

However, the needs and the growing numbers of neglected and abandoned children and adults as well as the perennial economic crises that every NGO suffers have rendered the fight against desolation more difficult. By contrast with the plight of the aged and the young, the other ills of our society are well documented. The latest facts reveal that one child under 18 is raped every two days. Between January and June 1999, KwaZulu Natal recorded 2055 rapes of minors and in Gauteng, 2438 in the same period. These are only the official statistics. The Aids epidemic has soared to millions of victims; abuse of women and children has risen dramatically; crime and unemployment have reached astronomical proportions.

We know that these social ills have their roots in a single source - poverty. It follows, therefore, that the reduction in poverty will result in a concomitant reduction in our social ills.

However, while I applaud the Government's avowed objective to attempt to reduce poverty and ensure an equitable distribution of resources *'to serve and build a self-reliant nation in partnership with all stake holders in an equitable, sustainable, accessible, people-centred development'*, yet the plunder of welfare resources by civil servants and the non-delivery of funds and services by departments tasked with these responsibilities has rendered the objective largely sterile. The Minister of Welfare and Population Development, Mr Zola Skweyiya apologised in March this year because his department had failed to deliver. His department had made available less than one percent of the 200 million rand poverty relief donated by foreign governments. The balance of the fund remains unspent. In the same period, 10 civil servants in the Eastern Cape were standing trial for the theft of R7 million of pension funds. The robbery of pension pay-points, extortion of money from pensioners, chaos in payments to both ghost and living pensioners and teachers are a part of our social history.

The need has arisen for synergy as an urgent priority. Remarkably, the recent, devastating floods in Mozambique illustrated the power of synergy, with a host of organisations pooling resources and co-ordinating efforts to relieve the distress and despair of a whole neighbouring nation, as well as parts of our own.

That SYNERGY is lacking in the NGO movement in South Africa. Each NGO is an island unto itself, jealously guarding its turf and resources. As a consequence, no effective lobby exists to root out the mismanagement of state funds, to co-ordinate plans of action to tackle poverty relief in a businesslike and comprehensive programme. That synergy is absent and its absence guarantees a continuation of the ills of our society.

I acknowledge the exhortation by the Editor of the Daily News, Kaiser Nyatumba in his address to parents, teachers, pupils and all

role players in education. He demanded that all intellectuals in our society '*participate and contribute to issues of public interest*'. He challenged intellectuals to identify with issues that afflict our society and to participate in debates that will deepen our relatively new democracy instead of the current preoccupation with making money, holding down good jobs to live well and 'forever hold their peace'. '*For Pete's sake*', Kaiser said, '*there is a world beyond the campuses of our schools, tertiary institutions and immediate communities.*'

This is the SYNERGY I refer to. In addition to recognising common cause among welfare agencies, the intellectual resources of our graduate population is indispensable to that synergy, in forging a purposeful partnership dedicated to the elimination of poverty and consequently of crime and aids and abuse and rape and other atrocities.

May I exhort our graduates in this campus and elsewhere, in a similar vein. The seduction of the good life, the race for prosperity and the emphasis on hedonism is everywhere apparent. That ours is a fledgling democracy is a recognised fact. However, what is not recognised is that it is a *participatory democracy*. Its growth into a fully-fledged democracy depends on the participation of our intellectuals, thinkers and role players. Together, throughout the country, they can create a forum and a lobby to transform the lives of the '*poorest of the poor*'.

I ask, humbly, that graduates - and more especially those of you who have lived a life of disadvantage - and the community of the University of Natal to commit yourselves to the struggle for the elimination of poverty and the ills that stem from it. Without your active involvement, the battle will be lost and many more millions will join the ranks of the destitute.

Will you meet this challenge? Will you dedicate a small part of your lives in this ground of struggle which decimates our society and destroys all our hopes and dreams for a peaceful, progressive and prosperous country? The future is truly in our hands.

GLOSSARY

<i>aaaji</i>	paternal grandmother
<i>appam</i>	A sweetened South Indian 'bread', made of rice flour, sugar, coconut and milk, it is cooked on a <i>kadai</i> , a heavy cast iron utensil with a rounded base. daughter.
<i>beti</i>	brother; also used as a term of respect or address to a man.
<i>bhai</i>	devotional song
<i>bhajan</i>	Indian sweetmeat made of gram flour, which is steeped in a sticky syrup after being fried in oil/clarified butter
<i>boondhi</i>	religion. teacher.
<i>dharna</i>	Hindu festival of lights, which celebrates the victory of good over evil.
<i>guru</i>	Indian wind instrument, with black and white keys similar to a piano. It produces sound through the action of pumping the bellows at the back of the instrument, while playing the keys
<i>deepavali/divali</i>	prayer performed round a sacred fire
<i>harmonium</i>	mixture of seeds bark and leaves, used in a hawan
<i>hawan</i>	A purification ceremony is performed before the wedding, in which a paste of ground tumeric (<i>huldee</i>), mixed with other sweet-smelling powders and oil, is smeared over the face and limbs of the person to be married.
<i>hawan samagree</i>	Indian sweetmeat made of flour and a raising agent, which is fried in hot oil and dipped in a sticky syrup.
<i>huldee</i>	
<i>jelebi</i>	

<i>mangalam</i>	song of celebration and invocation of blessing
<i>mahayajna</i>	hawan with many participants
<i>mantra</i>	Vedic hymn; Hindu devotional incantation
<i>pandit</i>	priest
<i>patshala</i>	school
<i>puri</i>	small, disc-shaped, flattened Indian bread, which is fried in hot oil/clarified butter
<i>roti</i>	unleavened Indian bread, which is rolled into larger circles than puri and cooked over a hot griddle gathering morning and evening prayer
<i>sammalans</i>	morning and evening prayer
<i>sandhya</i>	self-immolation of a woman at her husband's funeral
<i>sati</i>	pyre.
	communal or group devotional prayer
<i>satsangh</i>	a pair of small drums played with the hands an
<i>tabla</i>	Indian savoury made of ground lentils religious
<i>Vadde</i>	mendicant
<i>sannyasi</i>	

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In Gratitude ...

By Dr Shishupal Rambharos