



My Journey to Mirtola

A personal account from Commander Dusmanta Jena

As I type the word 'Mirtola' or pronounce it or think of it, I enter into a unique frame of mind and feel I am at the doorstep of Thakur's abode. Such is its power. However, I was oblivious of Mirtola and its lineage until December 2018. Today I am writing about my Mirtola experience. How is it possible; it is none other than Thakur's *lila*; that is all I can fathom.

I visited my Physics professor Shri Suresh Chandra Nayak, who is both the powerhouse and lighthouse in my life's voyage, in December 2018 on the way to my native place, and stayed with him for a day. Whenever we meet, I initiate a topic and, after that, prefer to listen to him quietly. Each word spoken by him is a treat for my ears, brain and heart. That evening, I started the topic of my love for the Himalayas, my participation in the Himalayan Marathon

at Ladakh, trek to Gaumukh and plans to visit a few Ashrams en route. After listening to me, Sir spoke briefly about Sri Krishna Prem and his Guru Sri Yashoda Mai. He suggested that if I wished to remain rooted at an Ashram, I should visit the Ashram established by Sri Yashoda Mai and Sri Krishna Prem at the earliest opportunity.

I kept thinking about Sri Yashoda Mai and Sri Krishna Prem. After I came back to Kolkata, I took the

next step, using Google to find information about Mirtola. I encountered the website "Mirtola Reflections", which acted as a conduit and, through "contact us ", I sent a message about my intention of visiting Mirtola.

I waited for a week and got no response; I approached Sir and asked if he could find some way out. He remained silent. I have, over the years, learnt to decode his silences to some extent. I was sure that was also the

case with Mirtola. I thought, was it so easy? If yes, I only needed to browse the internet and book a slot to stay there.

What was the difference between Mirtola and other Ashrams, which are just a few steps away from typical commercial institutions, almost like hotels? If it were so easy, then Sir would not have told me to go there! I waited impatiently, checked my inbox regularly and kept thinking about Sri Yashoda Mai and Sri Krishna Prem.

With each passing day, I became more and more eager to hear from Mirtola, and my resolve to go there became stronger and stronger. In hindsight, I feel that the delayed response was Thakur's way, designed for me to meet an intrinsic requirement before crossing the threshold to Mirtola.

Around two weeks passed. And then, one day, I was delighted to receive an email. I was advised to get in touch with Mrs Chitra

lyer, who resided in the Ashram. I sent her an email immediately. She replied, suggesting that we talk on the phone. After a couple of conversations, we finalized my month-long visit to Mirtola after the Durga Puja holidays. During this month, I volunteered to teach maths and science subjects in the two local schools. I booked my tickets.

Two weeks later, an unforeseen change in my work duties compelled me to defer my long-cherished

visit to Mirtola. Utterly disheartened I spoke to Shri Suresh Chandra Nayak Sir with a heavy heart. He counselled me to request to visit for a short duration. Chitradi agreed and told me to keep the longer visit for some other time.

This once again felt like Thakur's Lila. Before one paints a surface, a coat of primer is required. My short visit was to play the role of a primer for the main coat of the long stay.

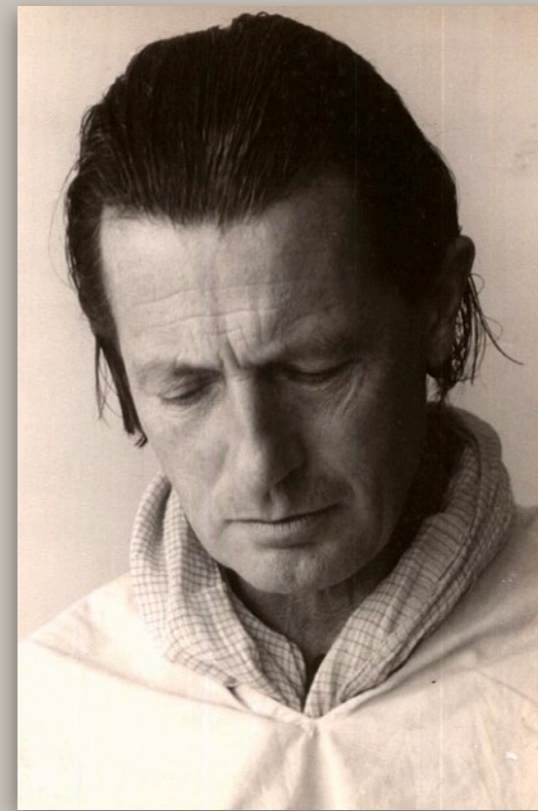
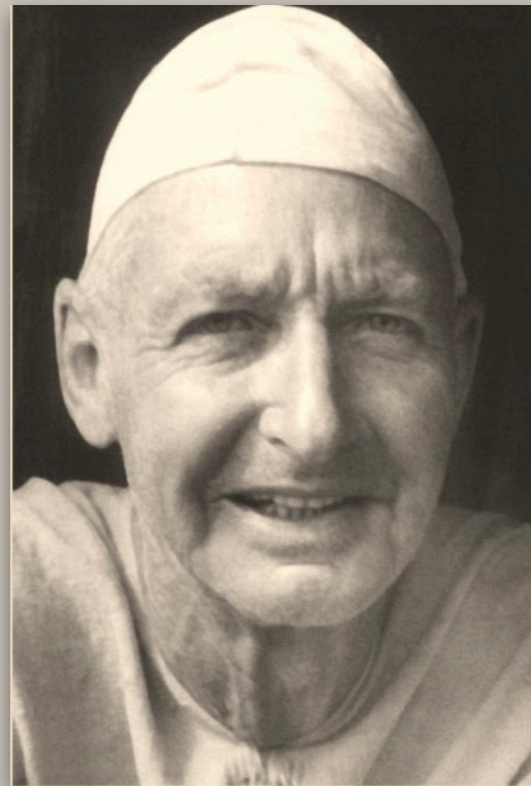
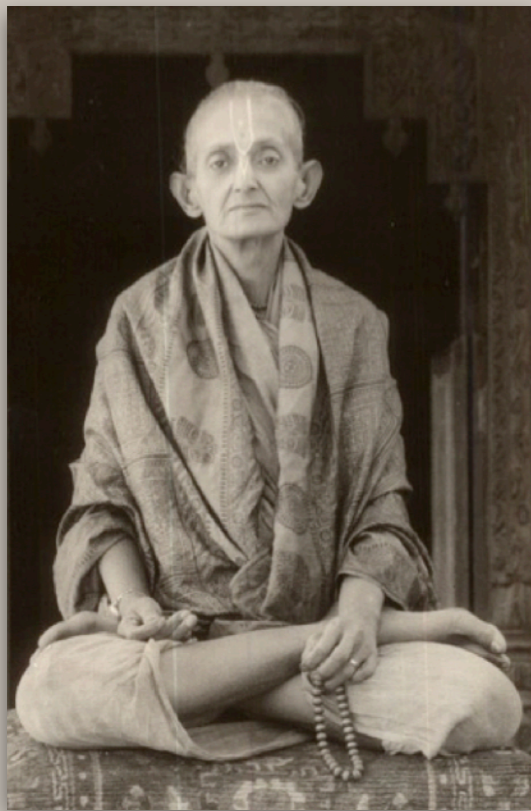


My maiden journey to Mirtola began with a train and then a bus ride to Panuanaula. The journey from Kolkata to Panuanaula was accomplished without a hiccup and it seemed as though Thakurji himself made the arrangements for me. From Panuanaula I walked up the few kilometres to the Ashram. It would be too embarrassing to describe my feelings as I opened the first gate and stepped into the Ashram. All I can say is that I get goosebumps whenever I

think of those moments. I was stunned by its beauty and tranquillity.



After settling in I sat down to pray and first paid reverence to Thakurji and Radharani, Sri Yashoda Mai, Sri Krishna Prem and Sri Madhava Ashish for calling me to Mirtola and then to Sri Suresh Sir for introducing me to Mirtola and instructing me to be there.



Through conversations, I learnt that devotees refer to Sri Radha Krishna as Thakur and Radharani, and the Gurus are called Ma, Gopalda and Ashishda. During the evening quiet hour, usually spent meditating or reading, I walked around the temple premises, which by then was glowing with the saffron rays of the setting sun. My first visit to the temple at evening arati was mesmerizing. Every activity in Mirtola is connected to the temple. Thakur's

kitchen, His garden, His utensils, His cows, fields and flowers etc. and, therefore, the reminders help us remain aligned with His lotus feet.

All three meals of the day were frugal yet nutritious, and I believe essential for any form of *sadhana*.

Thakur's kitchen logistics are met mainly through Ashram products except for rice, dal, salt, and condiments. Even the mustard used for oil extraction is grown in the

Ashram fields. The many opportunities I got to serve Thakurji by working in the garden, ploughing fields using a power tiller, cleaning temple and kitchen utensils, mopping floors, cleaning toilets etc, revealed two aspects in particular. One was the freedom extended to the devotees, and the second was manual labour. Mirtola offers a certain freedom to Sadhaks to choose their own times for meditation, reading, and work. Unlike other Ashrams, there was

no fixed time for prayer or meditation. I was free to find my slots during the day. Even the quiet hour is designed chiefly to watch the unruly mind.

After the hard physical work, which engaged me from head to toe, it was easier to turn inwards. I relate it to my horse-riding experience, where, at the beginning of a ride a horse tries to deviate from the desired route, and the rider has to make an effort to keep the horse on track.

Once the horse has covered 3 or 4 rounds of the race track, with all its horsepower drained out, any rider can keep his horse on track without any effort. The way of life at Mirtola is not simply by default to meet day to day requirements or put one foot in front of the next, but is for the benefit of an earnest sadhak. The routine is engineered to convert the mind into fertile ground where the seed of devotion can germinate readily and be nurtured into an ever-

growing tree, which needs no further protection and is capable of withstanding and transforming any number of storms or cyclones or super-cyclones or any other type of hostility with a compassionate eye.

During my entire stay, I was in a state of ecstasy and rapture. Mirtola is so different from any other Ashram I have visited or read about. Before my visit, I assumed that there would be a lot of bhajan kirtan and the day would be filled with

spiritual discussions. Suresh Sir had warned me once, "don't go with the idea of listening to a lot of discourse there". I realized that Mirtola is not a typical Ashram but a way of life where the focus is not on theory but on practice and implementation; where the attempt is to spend every moment as a meditative moment; to sense consciously the inner rhythm of a disciplined way of life, where even a novice like me could meditate with very little effort.



A shloka from Odia version of Srimad Bhagawatam comes to my mind:
*"Prabhu padaravindagate
 mana mo rahu avirate"*
 which means "Oh Lord may

my mind be focused on your lotus feet uninterruptedly". There is a possibility of experiencing such a state of mind at Mirtola.