

Dr Gyanendranath Chakravarti – husband of Monica, later Sri Yashoda Ma, founder of Mirtola ashram near Almora – studied Law at Allahabad University. Disillusioned with the way the law was actually practised, he joined the Department of Education. At university he became friends with Motilal Nehru (father of India's first Prime Minister and a leading figure in India's Independence movement) and with other students who went on to become well-known lawyers in Almora. When he retired as Chief Inspector of Schools in the United Provinces, he was invited to be Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University right from its inception.

He developed a deep and lifelong interest in Theosophy, which influenced Sri Krishna Prem greatly. He was General Secretary of the Indian branch of the Theosophical Society, and represented it at the famous World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, where Swami Vivekananda's speech first made such a powerful impression on the West. He became a close friend of Annie Besant, and of another prominent Theosophist who later came to live at the ashram, Bertram Keightley, who had worked with H.P. Blavatsky (the founder of the Theosophical Society, with Colonel Olcott) during the writing of her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine*.

As it became clear to Monica that she should devote her life to the way of the mystic, she asked her husband for initiation and later for permission to take the vows of sannyas. By now Dr Chakravarti, who was much older than his wife, had been told that his health would not allow him to live in the Himalayan foothills near Almora, while his wife was advised to move there because of her lung problems.

He died in 1936, with Sri Krishna Prem and Moti Rani by his side. As a trusted advisor and elder companion to Sri Krishna Prem, many stories about Dr Chakravarti have become part of Mirtola lore. Here is one that seems to embody his essence.

Gopalda – still Professor Nixon – was faced with the decision whether to move with the Chakravartis to Banaras and accept a salary half of what he got at Lucknow University. When he asked Dr and Mrs Chakravarti for their advice, both said that the decision had to be his own.

Dr Chakravarti added:

‘Whenever I am faced with a crucial decision, I try to decide in consonance with what I feel to be highest in myself. I do not always succeed. When I do succeed I have never had reason to regret my decision. When I fail to live up to this ideal, I have always regretted it.’