



**ISHWAR SWAROOP SWAMI LAKSHAMAN
JOO MAHARAJ**

(1907-1991)

A LIFE SKETCH

BIRTH

Swami Lakshmanjoo, born in Srinagar, Kashmir on May 9, 1907, has been the most recent of the greatest saints and masters of the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. At his birth his family's Guru, the great Shaiva master Swami Ram literally danced in joy exclaiming, "I am Rama, let the child be called Lakshmana."

At birth Lakshmana had five siblings, one elder brother and four sisters. His revered father, Pandit Narain Dass Raina and his mother Arnimal, were noble and God-fearing parents. Pt. Narain Dass was the first person to have introduced Houseboats in Kashmir, which earned him the title "Nav" Narain. He was also the first in Kashmir to wear a coat and ride a bicycle

CHILDHOOD

Lakshmana, when 3 years old, reveled in making Shivalingams out of clay for worship. At five, he would get absorbed in meditation and this raised a concern with his parents, who thought that their son had developed some unusual behavior which may have be some kind of illness.

Swami Ram simply brushed aside their concerns by saying, "I should be blessed with such a condition." When Lakshmana turned 15, his parents thought of arranging his matrimony, which was the standard practice in those times and ages. But Lo! And Behold! Lakshmana vehemently opposed the idea saying, 'I am already married to Almighty God!'

SELF

REALIZATION

Lakshmana continued to amaze people around him and had the experience of Self-realization for the first time, at the

youthful age of 20. His spiritual urge was just increasing by the day and one day it ignited the desire to leave home for practicing yoga at the famous ashram of Sadhamalyun in Handwara (Sadhu Ganga), Kashmir. He left a note for his brothers asking them to look after his parents and another for his father stating that he was leaving in search of almighty.

It was at Sadhamalyun that he had many divine experiences of masters and saints of the past. Upon Lakshmana's request (and as a precondition for his return), his father built a small house in the factory premises, where he could practice his meditation undisturbed. For seven years (1926-1933) he one-pointedly devoted himself to the study of Sanskrit grammar, Indian philosophy and Kashmir Shaiva literature, under the tutelage of Pandit Maheshwar Nath Razdan. He authored his first book, the bhagwadgita, in 1931.

MOVING TO ASHRAM

In 1934, Swamiji moved to a secluded plot of land at the foothill of the Zabarwan mountain range, above Ishber village, Gupta Ganga. A bungalow was constructed by his parents and over the next 18 years Swamiji turned the barren plot adjacent to his house into an Oasis of fruit orchards, mingled with flower and vegetable gardens. Adjacent to this spiritual abode, Sri Jia Lal Sopori of Srinagar built a house for his daughter Sushree Sharika Ji, who, after taking a vow of leading a celibate life, had found her worthy preceptor in Brahmachari Lakshmanjoo.. Later, Sharika Ji's sister Sushree Prabha Ji, after her husband's death also joined Sharika Ji in the ashram for learning Shaiva Shastras. Over the next two decades devotees and seekers steadily increased.

SWAMIJI ON A PILGRIMAGE TOUR

At age 31, Swamiji made a "Maun" (silent) pilgrimage across India. He wanted to re-confirm and exchange his experiences by interacting with other recognized saints, and also learn about other spiritual traditions. He spent a short time with Mahatma Gandhi at Sevagram, Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan and then proceeded to see Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. He continued from there to Raman Ashram at Tiruvanamalai, where he met the Revered Ramana Maharshi. Bhagavan Ramana was full of fondness and love for the young saint Lakshmana. Swamiji spent a few weeks in the presence of the Maharshi and later expressed, "I felt those golden days were indeed divine". On return to his Ashram in Kashmir, Swamiji took to strict seclusion for several months. Over the next two decades he worked on and published Hindi translations of the Sambapanchashika, the ancient Krama

Stotra - a mystical treaty on the nature of the 12 Kali's in Kashmir Shaivism, and Utpaladeva's Shivastotravali.

MOVING TO NEW ASHRAM

In 1962, after almost two decades in his first ashram, Swamiji moved to a new location (the present ashram), just a stone's throw from the ancient Mogul garden of Nishat Bagh.

This ashram also came to be known as 'Ishwar Ashram'. It was here that Swamiji began holding regular Sunday classes on the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. On Mondays he would observe a day of silence (maunam). He spent his day in 'God's House', the small cottage for meditation, built in a beautiful small garden, adjacent to his previous ashram. He started regular classes for westerners and serious seekers on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

HONOURS CONFERRED

In 1964 Swamiji wrote a paper on 'Kundalini Vignana Rahasyam'. In fluent Sanskrit he read his paper at the All India Tantra Sammelanam, held under the auspices of the Varanaseya Sanskrit Viswavidyalaya at Varanasi and was applauded the great luminary Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj and other scholars of great repute. A little later, the Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishva Vidyalaya conferred upon Swamiji, the degree of 'Doctor of Literature with Honours'. The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, also presented him with the robe of honour at a special function held in Swamiji's honour.

MEETING SAINTS AND SCHOLARS

Swamiji's contribution to the promotion of the studies in Kashmir Saivism, propagation of the Trika philosophy and growth of Kashmiri culture will be remembered as long as the Sun shines. Swamiji's effort considerably helped the revival of this philosophy and way of life, which had otherwise been fading away. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi visited the Ishwar Ashram (1968-69) and invited Swamiji to the house-boats in the Dal Lake, where he was residing. Privately he taught the 112 practices of the Vijnana Bhairava to Maharishi, and he also delivered a lecture to Maharishi's students on Kashmir Shaivism. Swami Ramdas of Kanhangarh, Mangalore, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, and Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri were also pleased to meet Swamiji when they visited Srinagar. Swamiji occasionally attended and presided over spiritual meetings held in and outside the valley. He also was an occasional visitor to Haridwar and Rishikesh where he use to meet saints , especially Swami Shivananda of the Divine Life Society. He would address Swamiji as the " Lion of Kashmir". Swamiji's

disciples also enjoyed these trips. In 1976, Swamiji presided over a spiritual congregation organized by Sri Ramakrishna Ashram Srinagar and graced by the presence of Swami Ranganathananda, the world famous cultural ambassador of India at that time. Innumerable scholars from India and abroad came to Swamiji for studying and learning Kashmir Shaivism. Among them were the late Lilian Silburn and her colleague Andre Padoux, both of whom were Scholars of Tantrism in Paris. Alexis Sanderson, now a renowned professor at Oxford, Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, a young scholar of Shaivism associated with Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, Benaras, and others came to Swamiji to understand the nuances of Kashmir Shaivism. Others who made the pilgrimage to Swamiji's Ashram included Professor Harvey P. Alper, Professor J G Arapura, Gerald J Larson and K Shivaraman. From Benaras came Pandit Rameshwar Jha and Thakur Jaidev Singh seeking a more profound understanding of Shaiva doctrine and practice. Pandit Rameshwar Jha composed the famous "Gurustuti", a compendium of verses in Sanskrit on the greatness of Swami Lakshmanjoo and his masters. Among the many devotees from Western world, John Hughes, Denise Hughes and George Barselaar spent several years at the feet of Swamiji and diligently recorded many of his commentaries and teachings for the benefit of future generations.

VEGETARIANISM

Swamiji was opposed to eating meat and would specifically ask his devotees to spread the message of vegetarianism. Swamiji said, "Predominantly non-violence is the shunning of that which is the worst of all violence, the killing of a living being, the taking of its life, for the leisure of eating it. He would say there is no greater sin than this."

GENERAL

Every year, in late spring, Swamiji used to celebrate his birthday with pomp and show. Devotees would come from all over Kashmir, India, and abroad to participate in and celebrate The Divine Day. On this special day, He had meals served to everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or gender. And any number between 10,000 to 15,000 people including Muslim brothers would have the Holy Meal also known as Prashad in the Ashram.

Swamiji never accepted money from anyone, nor did he ever charge fees or ask compensation for his teachings. People often tried to offer him money but he always refused. Affectionately, Swamiji was called "Lal Saab" or Friend of God.

Swamiji travelled widely with his devotees to pilgrimages in various parts of Kashmir and the rest of India. From 1970-1991 he would regularly spend the winter months in Jammu, at the residence of his brother and ardent devotee the late Sri Bhagavan Dass Raina. Sometimes, on the request of devotees, he used to visit New Delhi, where he would invariably stay at the residence of his nephew Sri M K Raina or lifelong devotee, Sri Samvit Prakash Dhar.

In March 1991, Swamiji went to the USA. It was his first trip ever outside of India. He had received this invitation to travel umpteen times from his devotees abroad, but he had always refused. This time he had a clear objective: The propagation of Kashmir Shaivism in the USA with the assistance of his western devotees who were based there. After a few months stay, He came back to India in June of 1991.

And then the Great Master of Shaivism of this Age and Time decided to leave his earthly body and merge into the Supreme Shiva on 27th Sept. 1991 at Noida, New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh. Shaivacharya Ishwara Swarupa Swami Lakshmanjoo was the perfect combination of life and spirituality. His very presence was solace to the depressed, hope to the forlorn, joy to the seeker, inspiration to the scholar and satisfaction to the soul striving for spiritual upliftment.

In the words of Abhinavagupta, "Some beings are enlightened only for their own liberation, and some others for the sake of redeeming the whole world. Just as a firefly shines only for itself, jewels shine for others, the stars shine for more, the moon shines for still more and the Sun bestows light on the whole universe." Swami Lakshmanjoo was such a Sun indeed.

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