

Paramananda Mission in India

Swami Paramananda and the beginning

Paramananda Mission was founded in October 1978 on the outskirts of the small, poor village of Banagram, deep in the Bengal countryside, by a young man of 23 with unusual experiences of life. Swami Paramananda was a most extraordinary man who started his welfare organisation from a tiny mud hut, with the help of only a handful of young dedicated apprentices and friends who owned no more than the clothes they wore. An all-encompassing love for the human being together with an unshakeable will to help, was the driving force. In the previous eleven years Paramananda had been wandering alone the length and breadth of India, without money or support, and came to know his country and people both positively and negatively. The misery of the poor and the ruthless exploitation of the weak made an especially strong impression. Often pestered by others, going days at a stretch without food or shelter, he had no difficulty in identifying himself with the poor, destitute and helpless children and orphans who grow up on the streets of India, lacking love, care, proper food or education. His feeling of pain and compassion gave him a rare spiritual experience, and by the end of his long and lonely journey, he decided to return to his native land of Bengal to serve his needy fellow human beings.

Paramananda Mission to-day

What Swami Paramananda achieved in his relative short life-span since he founded the organization in 1978 is fantastic and impressive. Paramananda Mission is today a well established spiritual and welfare organisation engaged in various welfare activities, with more than twenty centres spread all over West Bengal and a few also in other parts of India. Common to most of them is that they lie on the outskirts of small, poor villages in districts with neglected and oppressed populations. The main centre situated by the village of Banagram in Burdwan district is set in idyllic and peaceful surroundings with a wide horizon surrounded by green fields used for agriculture. It is a widespread complex covering a total area of 20 acres and housing around 450 members, including children, teachers, kitchen personnel, gardeners and co-workers of various kinds. The financial responsibility for Paramananda Mission is borne mainly by friends and followers of Swami Paramananda through voluntary contributions. They consider it a great opportunity to be able to support a noble cause. The organisation's goal is to become self-sufficient through small-scale industry producing various kinds of handmade articles and this work has already started. The main centre at Banagram is already also self-sufficient in food with cultivated land enough to provide for both residents and visitors.

Welfare activities

Paramananda Mission offers help and services in four main areas: 1) **Orphanage**, i.e., home for orphans; 2) **Education**, i.e., Primary School and High School for orphans and the surrounding village children; 3) **Medical treatment**, i.e., modern small scale hospitals and health centres offering free diagnosis, medicines and treatment within allopathy, homeopathy, ayurvedic medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, yoga therapy and other forms of natural treatment for physical and mental illnesses, as well as micro surgery eye operations, and a variety of pathological tests; and 4) **Spiritual guidance**, for those who are truth seekers and looking for help and guidance. Paramananda Mission (Banagram) also prints and publishes books by Swami Paramananda, and has a large library with a reading room open to all. The Mission produces English and Bengali editions of the quarterly journal "Charaiveti".

Daily life and lifestyle

Today, about 350 children are taken care of by the organisation. Here they are treated considerately and given what they need by way of clothing, food, education and care of various kinds. Those with the desire and ability receive higher education. After finishing school or studies, the organisation helps them to establish themselves in life by finding housing and work through its innumerable friends and contacts all over India. Most of the 100 adult members are dedicated souls who – besides their own spiritual practice, and the renunciation of family life and personal career – have chosen to work voluntarily and wholeheartedly in those areas which interest them the most, with simple means and in modest circumstances, satisfied with basic necessities. They are of both sexes, from all classes of society and from different religious and ideological backgrounds. No artificial rulebook has been made to direct their activities.

A couple of hundred sick people visit daily for medical aid, twice as many at weekends. Many also come to listen to or to participate in the open conversations with the centre's leaders that are held daily, or for initiation into meditation or spiritual life, or simply to pay their respects, as is the tradition in India. All these come from near and far, none need leave without having at least one cooked meal.

There are no temples in Paramananda Mission. They are replaced by the orphanage and medical facilities.

There are also no dogmas or set of disciplinary life-rules. Here spiritual, religious and philosophical ideals are

made practical. The human body is the only real temple of God, Swami Paramananda says. He also says that true education is humanity based on conscience and sincerity, and that spiritual life does not deny or reject anything in life, rather it embraces life and transforms it to perfection by art of life.

SPM (Norway)

In Norway, the special interest organisation **SPM – Stotteforeningen for Paramananda Mission's barnehjem i India** ('The Organisation of Support for the Paramananda Mission's Orphanage in India') – was started in October 2000 for those interested in, as stated in SPM's objectives: "supporting with economical aid and other forms of practical support the work Paramananda Mission is doing for orphans in India". The initiative to form the organisation was taken by the founders, the married couple Hanne and Harald Harnang in Narvik. Its purpose is to organise a solid and secure way of support for a growing number of orphans at the Paramananda Mission in India. All organisational work is based on voluntary effort. And with a registered resolution (§6 in the foundation document) that the organisation's working expenses will not exceed 5 % of the turnover, there is no danger that the collected money will disappear in administration. To date all the money collected has been sent in full to India and all the operational expenses have been covered privately by the founders. A newsletter is to be found on the organisation's homepages <http://hharnang.home.online.no> and they welcome all who would like to become members to be able to render secure help to needy children.