

Sr. Prasanna Devi, An Indian Christian Hermit

Sr. Prasanna Devi was born on 13th March 1934 as the eldest of three siblings. Her parents were Joseph and Mariamma Kunnapallil of Karimannur parish in the Diocese of Kothamangalam in Kerala. Her baptismal name was Annie. From her early childhood she had an unusual inclination and tendency for religious life and spiritual matters. She studied up to SSLC in St. Joseph's School, Karimannoor. She spent her early years of life centered on the Church and activities of the Parish. However, she gave a deep thought about the future of her life and the course of action she had to take.

In the year 1956, at the age of twenty two, she joined the order of the Little Sisters of Sacred Heart, Founded by St. Charles De Foucauld. It was a contemplative Order, however, unfortunately, while she was about to complete her Novitiate in the year 1963, her Convent in India was closed down. She did not know where to go and what to do, her future seemed totally uncertain, she was left alone. But the loving providence of God, our Lord came to her help. Circumstances led Annie to Manmad in Maharashtra and she settled down there for three years looking after a poultry farm, but her mind and heart aspired for a life rooted in spirit. Rev. Fr. Ferrer S.J. was looking after her spiritual needs in these years. She was sent to Nagpur for higher studies in Fine Arts. After graduation she came to Akkola and started earning her livelihood by teaching tailoring and drawing. In Akkola she stayed under the care of Rev. Bishop Rosario of Amravati.

From Akkola, with due permission from the authorities, she travelled to Bangalore and joined the Convent of the Benedictine sisters there. She lived there for two years, but her soul was restless, she did not find spiritual solace and mental satisfaction. She felt that her call was something very different, she strenuously prayed to discern and realize her real mission of life. In the inner core of her being she felt a strong call to be a **hermit**.

In 1973, Sr. Annie started a life of wandering *Sanyasini*, as it is envisaged in the Indian tradition. In the spirit of a pilgrimage she travelled the length and breadth of India, visited different Hindu and Christian Ashrams and gained personal experience of their specific charism, particular action plan and style of functioning. In her quest for an Ashram life she visited most of the well known Ashrams and pilgrim centers of India and met some of the leading Sanyasins like Swami Jnananda and Ramana Maharshi. She also visited many religious spiritual centers, so she could understand the life of Sri Buddha, the prayerful atmosphere of Kurisumala Ashram, Vagamon of Fr. Francis Acharya, and Shantivanam, the spiritual birthplace of Swami Abhishiktananda and others.

On 1st January 1974 at the age of 40, she reached the Girnar Mountains in Junagadh where she wanted to stay only for a week and to leave for Himalayas. But God had different plan for her, her inner self advised her not to leave Girnar. Hence she stayed on in Jatasankar Mahadev for five months in a cave. Fr. Dominic, a Benedictine Monk was her inspiration and spiritual guide. From Jatasankar, in 1974 September, she moved to Atmeshwar. This was the end of her life as a wandering woman.

She decided to live like a hermit and finally found a home for her near Atmeshwar in Girnar. Her friends built a small hut in 1976 which was called *Jyoti Mandir*, later this abode was renamed as *Sneha Deepam*. This was an answer to her quest for a place to carry out her vocation. In July 1978 she was visited by Rev. Dr. Dominic of Ashirwanam Monastery at Kenkery, Bangalore, whom she considered as her Guru. Fr. Dominic's arrival in Gujarat was due to the special interest and initiative taken by Bishop Jonas Thaliath, the first Bishop of Rajkot, to start Ashrams in the Diocese. In spite of having language barrier, through his silence and saintly presence, he inspired many visitors who considered and revered him as their Guru.

Slowly and steadily Sr. Annie became a spiritual rallying point for the people around and for the devotees who visited her. As the time passed she started getting visitors from all over the state of Gujarat. Some visited her occasionally, some regularly and still some others became her very close friends. By her simple living, teachings and guidance she has inspired hundreds and thousands.

In the year 1978 Bishop Jonas, went up to her Ashram and gave her the right to have Holy Communion regularly. In those days only once a week Holy mass was celebrated but later on every Sunday the Parish Priest of Junagadh was celebrating the Holy Mass there.

The year 1997, 25th of March was a memorable day for the sister. For it was on this day along with the faithful of Junagadh Parish, Bishop Emeritus Gregory Karotemprel cmi, conferred her the status of a hermit according to the provisions of the Oriental Code of Canon Law. It was on this same day she made her perpetual vows. In 1999 she celebrated the completion of 25 years of arrival in Junagadh. In the year 2000 she completed 25 years of life as a hermit.

Prasanna Devi which means, ***“The woman blessed by God and who is pleasing to him”*** was given by Rev. Fr. Dominic. The grace of God has led her to live her hermit life with utmost simplicity but with great discipline. She used to rise early at 3.30 in the morning and would start her day with prayer. She had a small Chapel which was also built by her well wishers. She had many visitors irrespective of caste or religion. Whoever was in difficulty or in trouble would visit her and left the place with much peace and solace. People called her *Mataji* and greeted each other by saying *Jai prabhu*. All her visitors respected and loved her and were very keen to visit her again and again.

In the year 2014, Sister's health started deteriorating. At last she had to leave Sneha Deepam and pitched her tent in ANNEX in St. Anns Church Junagadh with heavy heart. Several times she decided to go back to Atmeshwar but her health and age did not allow. Thereafter almost every year she had to be admitted and get treated in Rajkot Christ Hospital. In the year 2019, August, she had to be shifted to the presbytery for better personal care and attention.

None of us were prepared that God would call her this time. On 25th February, Saturday she was discharged from the hospital, on Sunday 26th and Monday she was much better, she could recognize everyone, talk to all but around 2.35 pm after taking few spoons of tea, in the presence of Fr. Christnanda, Sr. Catherine, Manjibhai and his wife, and me, she breathed her last very peacefully. Her simplicity and life of poverty is noteworthy. Let us pray fervently to the Almighty that He may welcome her to His Kingdom, and that she may enjoy in the company of all the Saints and Angels.

God bless you all.