

**A Pilgrim's diary to Badri, Jyoshi mutt etc  
Visited and penned by Sri Varadan**

**NAMO NARAYANAYA**

SRIMAN NARAYANAYA CHARANAU SARANAM PRAPATHYE  
SRIMATHEY NARAYANAYAH NAMAH  
SRI ARAVINDAVALLI NAYIKA SAMETHA SRI BADRINARAYANAYA NAMAH  
SRI PUNDARIKAVALLI NAYIKA SAMETHA SRI PURUSHOTHAMAYA NAMAH  
SRI PARIMALAVALLI NAYIKA SAMETHA SRI PARAMPURUSHAYA NAMAH  
SRIMATHE RAMANUJAYA NAMAH

Due to the grace of the Divya Dampadhigal and Acharyar, Adiyen was blessed to visit Thiru Badrinath and other divya desams enroute during October,2003 along with my family. After returning from Badrinath, Adiyen also visited Tirumala-Tirupati and participated in Vimsathi darshanam a scheme which allows a family of 6 members to have Suprabatham, Nijapada and SahasraDeepalankara seva for any 2 consecutive days in a year . It was only due to the abundant grace of Thiruvengadamudaiyan adiyen was able to vist all the Divya desams without any difficulty.

Before proceeding further, Adiyen would like to thank all the internet bhagavathas especially Sri Rangasri group members and M.S.Ramesh for providing abundant information about these divya desams. I have uploaded a Map of the hills again downloaded from UP Tourism site for ready reference . As Adiyen had not planned the trip in advance, it was not possible to join "package tour" organised by number of travel agencies and could not do as it was Off season. Adiyen wishes to share my experience with all of you and request the bhagavathas to correct the shortcomings. Adiyen was blessed to take my father aged about 70 years a heart patient , to this divya desam and it would not be an exaggeration to say that only because of my acharyar's and elders' blessings , the trip was very comfortable.

Adiyen boarded Secunderabad Rajdhani Express bound to New Delhi on 1<sup>st</sup> October,2003 and spent the whole day in train . Chi Ranganathan my younger brother ,Chi Narayanan and Chi Srinivasan my nephews had come to see us off. On 2<sup>nd</sup> , we reached Delhi at 5.15 in the morning . From Hazrat Nizamuddin station, we went to Delhi station and boarded Dehradun-Shatabdi Express at 6.45 A.M. Reached Haridwar at 11.30 A.M. The train stops here for about 3 minutes only. We checked in a nearby Hotel Darshan (Rs.175/- per day) which is on the banks of Holy Ganges . We stayed here on 2<sup>nd</sup> night and 3<sup>rd</sup> morning and visited Brahma Kund, Hari ki Pauri, Chandi Devi Temple, Saptarishi Ashram, Gayatri Devi temple and went to

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Rishikesh by 7 seater auto (fare Rs.20/- per head). There are few Madrasi hotels like Mysore Hotel where you get South Indian food.

**A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HARIDWAR :**

**HARIDWAR** is a busy small town with a floating population of pilgrims. The days are hot and the nights are not that cold. This place is surrounded by SHIVALIK mountains. "HARIDWAR" is Hari ka Dwar or Har Ke Dwar " the Gateway to Heavens". This is the starting point to visit the four sacred "dhams" (sacred places) namely, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath. This town is situated at the foot of the Himalayas. Haridwar is the temple town of India. The moment one reaches Haridwar , THE THOUGHT ABOUT MATERIAL WORLD GETS DISSOLVED AND WE START LIKING THE PEOPLE AND PLACE .And after a holy bath in the Ganges, the spirit in us gets charged with bhakti-ras , all the sins get wiped off. We try to understand Lords creation and start accepting that in the fast moving world one can find solace when we visit these Holy places . There are innumerable ashrams and temples in Haridwar. We can find innumerable saints , foreigners and Yogis on the street. If one finds time, one can visit few temples like Manasi Devi temple, Chandi Devi temple, Hari Ki Pauri, Brahma Kundam, Bharat Mata temple, Vaishnavo Devi temple, Saptarishi Ashram, Gayatri Devi temple etc. Other temples of interest are Maya Devi temple dedicated to Goddess Durga, Shravan nath temple, Bholagiri temple, Gorakasha nath temple, Kangra Mandir, Gita Bhavan, Bhairon Akhara, Bilkeshwara Mahadeva, Pawandham temple, Gurudwara Shri Guru Singh Sabha, Parmath Ashram etc .Few of which were visted by us .

It is at this place that the holy Ganges enters the plains to atone the sins of millions of sinners. Once in 12 years, "Kumbh Mela" takes place at this place and once in 6 years "Ardh Kumbh Mela (half Kumbh Mela). The other places where Kumbh Mela takes place are at Allhaabad, Nasik and Ujjain. The astrological date of Kumbh at Haridwar falls when Venus (Sukran) and Jupiter(Guru) coincide with Aquarius (Kumbh) and the Sun and Moon are on the Aries and Sagittarius respectively. It is believed that few drops of nectar are believed to have fallen here and hence a dip in Ganges during Kumbh Mela is considered to be sacred as it bestows longevity and spiritual

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upliftment. The preparations for the next Kumbh Mela scheduled to take place in 2004 has already started. There are innumerable temples and many sacred places in Haridwar.

Out of this , the most important ones are

1. **Hari-Ki-Pauri** – This is near Brahma Kundam. This is the place where Lord Vishnu's Thiruvadi are found and is the starting point of Ganges. The story of Ganges coming down to earth may be briefly recapitulated. Due to the severe penance of Bhagirathan, Ganges was brought down to earth and as the earth could not withstand the pressure, Parama Sivan caught hold of her in his matted lock and allowed it to split into several tributaries, namely, Alakananda, Bhagirathi, Nandakini, Garuda Ganga, Bhyur Ganga, Mandakini etc. All these tributaries traverse through the Himalayas in different routes , merge with Alakananda at different places which are known as "PRAYAGS" and finally join at Haridwar. Here she is known as Ganges and hence Haridwar is the starting point of Ganges. All of us had holy dip in Ganges . There are many small temples situated here and Ganga Aarathi is performed daily in the evening hours.
2. **BRAHMA KUNDAM**: This is the place where Brahma welcomed Ganges to earth and had his first holy dip in Ganges. It is believed that a dip in this Brahmakund brings salvation from all sins and a freedom from the bondages of the world. Therefore, pious people from all over the world come here to have bath in this sacred place. There are many temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Ganga Maatha, Durga Devi, Sri Ramar, Sri Krishnar etc. on the banks of the river. It is believed that any "dhaanam" (sacrifice) done here fetches multifold benefits, especially, pooja and dhaanam done to cows (Gomatha). Also, it is believed that if one performs "pithru kaaryam" at this place it is very beneficial.

All of us had holy bath at Brahma Kundam near Hari Ki Pauri on 3<sup>rd</sup> October,2003. We performed "GOPOOJA" (pooja to cow), offered some hay laddus specially made for these cows (You get 25 laddus for Rs.10/-) and left the place.

**MANASA DEVI TEMPLE**: This Goddess, daughter of Shiva and form of Shakti fulfills the desires of the true and sacred souls. This temple which is one km away from Haridwar is situated on top of Shivalik Hills on the western side. Usually, pilgrims pray to this Goddess for completing their yaatrai successfully. Trekking this hill would take about half an hour. There is also a rope way to this temple from Ratan Cinema Hall. The charge for the same is Rs.30/-

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**CHANDI DEVI TEMPLE**: This temple is situated on the eastern summit of Shivalik Hills on top of Neelkant Parvath. This temple is 6 km off the city on the other side of Ganges. It may take about an hour or so to climb this hill. There is a ropeway to this temple also and it is essential to carry water as there is no drinking water on top of the hill. The charge for the ropeway is Rs.60/-. One has to travel for about 15 minutes by vehicle to reach the foot of this hill and then start trekking.

The ropeway facility organised by Uttaranchal state is called as "**UDDANKOTLA**". They operate ropeway service to both Manasi Devi and Chandi Devi temples. The fare for this package tour is Rs.120/-. If the height of a child is above 3 feet, then full fare is charged. In this package tour, a drinking water bottle, a cap, pooja materials etc , a brochure giving the details about the temples are given. The visitors are taken by a van to the starting point of this Udaan Kotla service and from there the ropeway starts. It takes about 15 minutes to reach Chandi Devi temple by ropeway. Then , one has to climb few steep steps which may take about 10 minutes to reach Chandi Devi temple. We were welcomed by many monkeys as in Ayodhya and Brindavan. We could see devotees tying some piece of cloth as "praarthana" After having darshan of the Goddess, we went to Anjani Devi temple, mother of Hanuman. There are other temples dedicated to Durga, Maa Kali etc. Came back to the ropeway junction and returned to the original starting point. There is another ropeway in another direction to go to Manasi Devi temple. As we didn't have time, we didn't visit this temple. We visited these temples on 2<sup>nd</sup> (took package tour for Rs.120/-) and attended evening Ganga Aarthi at Hari Ki Pauri which is a feast to the eyes.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> morning, after having holy dip at Brahma Kundam ,we hired an auto for Rs.150/- to visit Saptarishi Ashram, Gayatri temple, Bharat Matha temple, Vaishnavo Devi temple.

**GAYATRI DEVI TEMPLE**:- First, we visited Gayatri Devi temple which is enroute to Rishikesh. After 20 minutes drive, we reached this temple. There are 3 entrances to this temple. Near the entrance, there are life-size idols of 7 rishis. There is a temple dedicated to Gayatri Matha. In a separate hall, continuous chanting of Gayatri Mantram goes on right from 5 in the morning to 7 in the evening. We could see many devotees including ladies doing japam without any disturbance. The temple committee provides free anna dhanam (food) to the visiting devotees daily.

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**SAPTARISHI ASHRAM:** (10 minutes drive from Gayatri Devi mandir). This place was known as "Kamandulu" . This place is also connected to the story of Ganges coming down to earth. When Ganges was following King Bhagirath in his chariot, it passed by an ashram where the sapta rishis were engrossed in deep penance and stopped its flow. When questioned by Bhagirath, Ganges replied that she was caught in the kamandalam (water pot) of the sapta rishis and was unable to move further. Bhaigrath prayed to the sapta rishis who then allowed her to flow in 7 streams. This place is very calm and serene. There are temples dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, Lord Srinivasar, Radha-Krishna, Sita-Ram along with Lakshmanan and Hanumar, Siva in the centre which are artistically built. This ashram was inaugurated by Late Rajendra Prasad during his Presidency. This was built and is being maintained by Sanatana Dharma Sabha of Punjab.

From Sapta rishi ashram, we went to Bharat Matha temple which is 4 kms away from the city.

**VAISHNAVO DEVI TEMPLE:** This temple is near Bharath Matha temple. This is a replica of the famous Vaishnavo Devi Temple at Jammu. The caves , sannidhis have been artistically built. In the entrance, you can find huge idols of Vinayaka and Hanumar. Apart from there, there are beautiful idols of other Gods and Goddesses – a model of Kailash mountains, Kedarnath, Ganges flowing from matted locks of Shiva are worth mentioning. There is also a replica of Amarnath temple in the same premises. You can find replica of lingams found in Srisailam, Kedarnath, Rameswaram etc. This temple is worth seeing. After visiting the above temples, we came back to Haridwar at 1 P.M and packed up to Rishikesh.

**RISHIKESH:-**We went to Rishikesh by seven-seater auto/tempo (Rs.20/- per head) from Haridwar. Rishikesh houses innumerable ashrams . It has a floating population of many pilgrims going to Badrinath and Kedarnath and many foreign tourists who are interested in mountaineering. The details about the important places to be visited are mentioned later .

We reached Rishikesh at 3.15 P.M. From Rishikesh, we had to take another tempo to go to JET .Jeeyar Mutt which is near to Lakshman Jhoola. We were told by our co-passengers that it was not possible to go to Badrinath due to transport strike . The Uttaranchal Government has passed a rule that vehicles which were more than 10 years old would not be allowed to travel in Ghat section. Hence, the vehicle owners were on strike. We were totally dejected on hearing

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this and prayed to Perumal. As we had planned to stay at Jeeyar Mutt, we asked the driver to stop in front of Jeeyar Mutt. But the driver stopped on the main road itself and said that we have to walk for 5 minutes in a lane to reach the Jeeyar Mutt. The day was really hot and we were hesitating to go by walk along with our luggage and children. On enquiry, we were told that Andhra Bhavan owned by TTD was on the main road itself. Hence, we decided to go to Andhra Bhavan directly. The moment we saw the divya mangala vigraham of Lord Srinivasar, all our hopes were revived and we were fully confident about our journey because we have ultimately reached Thiruvengadamudaiyan's Thiruvadigal. Luckily, accomodation was available and the room rent per day is Rs.30/-. As we opted for VIP room, we had to pay Rs.75/- as room rent. The advantage is you get a furnished room with geyser facility . There is a temple of Lord Srinivasar just beside the guest house and here all the sevas, aaradhanais are done exactly as in Tirumala. After refreshing ourselves, we went to temple to attend the evening pooja at 5 P.M. Divya Prabhandam was being recited. TTD also maintains a Saivaite temple which is beside Andhra Bhavan.

Every morning at 5 , the Lord is awakened with the recitation of Suprabhatham. This seva is followed by Thomala Seva at 6 A.M. During this seva, the utsava vigraham "Bhoga Srinivasar" is given Thirumanjanam (holy bath), flowers are adorned to the Moolavirat while reciting Thiruppavai; Sahasranaama Archana is performed to Lord and this seva is followed by Saatrumarai at 7 A.M. As in Tirumala, the Saivaite priest recites Suprabhatham and Archanai. This priest is also incharge of the Shiva temple which is maintained by TTD. Another priest aged about 60 who is exclusively employed for reciting Naalayira Divya Prabhandham recites Thiruppavai. After Suprabhatham, the Lord enjoys Annamacharya kirthanas played with the help of Naadaswaram(. The tickets for all the above sevas is Rs.5/- per head per seva. The second Saatrumarai is at 11 A.M. and after this, the temple is closed. The rate for bhogam (offering) starts from Rs.250/-) We were told that even the proportion of ingredients for cooking prasadam are followed exactly as in Tirumala.The temple re-opens at 4 P.M. Daily divya prabhandham is recited in the evenings. Ekantha Seva is the best seva and the last seva in the evening . Like in Tirumala, during this sevai, all the flower garments are removed and lullaby annamaya kirtanas are played by the troupe. I request the bhagavathas visiting Badrinath to spend atleast a day in this temple and attend all the sevas . The phone number is 0135-2430353.

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In the evening, we went to Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Chinna Jeeyar Mutt which is very near to Andhra Ashram. The advantage in staying in Chinna Jeeyar Mutt is you are provided with both boarding and Lodging, whereas in Andhra Bhavan, we don't have this facility. We went there to enquire about the stay facilities at Badrinath in Jeeyar Mutt. We were told that as winter was about to begin, the volunteers in Jeeyar Mutt were preparing to shift from Badrinath to Joshirmutt and hence no accomodation would be given . Usually soon after Vijayadasami, the mutt would be closed for winter. As only 3 days were left for Vijayadasami, accomodation would not be given. It may be mentioned here that in Haridwar and Rishikesh, there are innumerable tourist offices which offer you to take to Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri and other hill stations. So, if anyone is planning to go on own to Badrinath, we can very well go to Rishikesh and book either bus ticket or arrange a cab to go to Badrinath. The bus fare is Rs.225/- per head and car hire charges for 3 days and 2 nights costs about Rs.3,000/-.We went to one of the tourist offices situated right opposite to Andhra Bhavan and booked bus tickets to go to Badrinath. It takes about 12 hours to go to Jyothi Mutt locally known as Joshirmutt and after night stay at Jyothi Mutt , the bus would proceed to Badrinath the next day. The decision was taken as Elders advised it was wise to travel in a Bus as in case of any landslide etc the bus will return with the passengers from the opposite direction and the passengers proceeding will board the bus which will go back upwards saving time and ensuring continuity. As we were interested in covering all the prayags,(namely , Dev Prayag, Karna Prayag, Rudra Prayag, Nand Prayag and Vishnu Prayag), we enquired whether the bus would stop at the places already mentioned above for which the reply was in affirmative. We were told that the bus would leave at 8 A.M. We once again went to Srinivasar kovil, and prayed LORD for his grace. (attended Ekantha Seva at 9 P.M., paid for next day's dhadhiaaradhanai in the morning and after praying to Perumal for safe journey , we did a bit of last minute shopping and retired for the day.)

**A BRIEF INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE HIMALAYAS:**

The Himalayan mountains are divided into various mountain ranges, Garhwal Himalayas, Central Himalayas, Annapurna ranges and so on. They stretch from Jammu upto Nepal. The Himalayas are the abode of Gods and innumerable saints contemplate on the Lord at this place. There are 4 Vaishnava divya desams in the Himalayas itself. "**Kandam ennum Kadinagar**" **popularly known as Dev Prayag,**

**Thirupiridhi popularly known as Joshirmutt and Badrinath are located in the Garhwal Himalayas.**

"**Saaligramam**" is located in the Annapurna ranges. Other important places are Vaishnavo Devi Temple, Kedarnath, Mount Kailash, Amarnath temple to name a few.

There are many hill stations like Dehradun, Nainital, Mussourie etc.

A brief description of the route is mentioned below:

The routes to the 4 dhams are different. The routes to Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri closes by September whereas the route to Badrinath is accessible upto October.

**Gangotri** is the place where Ganges descended from Heavens. The rock on which Bhagirathan did penance is known as Bhagiratha Shila. Gaumukh from where the Ganges flows is of importance. There is a temple dedicated to Ganges. There is a motorable road to approach this place from Rishikesh. There are 2 routes to go to Kedarnath –via Uttar Khashi and via Rudra Prayag . A dip at Gaumukh absolves one of all the sins.

**Yamunotri** is the starting point of Yamuna. There are many hot water springs here. Can be approached from Gangotri but one has to walk for atleast 13 kms as there is no motorable road.

**Kedarnath** : The route to Kedarnath diverges at Rudra Prayag. One has to trek for 14 kms from Gauri Kund. This is at an higher altitude than Badrinath. The routes to the above 3 places closes by September.

**Badrinath:** There is motorable road upto the temple. From mid April to October, the temple is open for public. The route is given in detail:-

The route to Badrinath from Rishikesh is as follows:

Rishikesh-Dev Prayag (45miles )- Srinagar (19 miles from Dev Prayag)- Rudra Prayag (19 miles from Srinagar)- Karna Prayag (20 miles from Gauchar)-Nand Prayag (13 miles from Karna Prayag)- Chamoli-Pipal Kote-Garuda Ganga-Helang-Joshirmutt-Govind Ghat-Hanuman Chatti –Deva Darshani-Badrinath

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Legends connected with the characters in Ramayanam and Mahabharatam find place in the Himalayas as Lord Rama, Lakshmana, Hanumar, Pandavas resorted to Himalayas for their penance.

All the above places are enroute to Badrinath. A brief description of the above places is given below:

1. **DEV PRAYAG**: Situated at a height of 1700 feet, this is one of the Vaishnavite divya desams known as "Kandum Ennum Kadinagar". Here, **Alakananda** (after joining with other tributaries) joins with **Bhagirathi** to become Ganges. It takes about 2-3 hours to reach this place from Rishikesh. Lord Rama is the presiding deity here (there is no temple for Perumal described by Azhwars )- Banyan tree in front of the temple is of importance- Anna dhanam fetches manifold benefits- A detailed description of our visit to this divya desam is mentioned later)
2. **SRI NAGAR**: Previously this was the capital of the Garhwali kings- A small town at a height of 1800 feet - There is a temple for Kamaleshwar Mahadev who was worshipped by Lord Rama with 1008 flowers. Shiva who wanted to test Sri Rama's bhakti, removed one flower. When Lord Rama found that one flower was missing, unhesitatingly he removed his eyes (as He was Kamalakannan) and offered the same to the Lord. Shiva was pleased with this and appeared before Rama and blessed him. Hence, this Lord is known as Kamaleshwar Mahadev. To visit this temple, one must take diversion from the bus route. It is better to go by car as there is no other transport facility.
3. **RUDRA PRAYAG**: This is 19 miles away from Srinagar at an altitude of 2000 feet. The confluence of the rivers **Mandakini** emerge from Kedarnath and **Alakananda** takes place. There is a small temple dedicated to Rudra, one of the forms of Shiva. The routes to Kedarnath and Badrinath are the same upto this place and here the routes diverge. Narada Rishi did penance at this place and was blessed with the knowledge of sangeetham at this place.
4. **KARNA PRAYAG**: This is 20 miles from Gauchar and approx 40 miles from Rudra Prayag. This is a small town with boarding and lodging facilities. There is a Tourist guest house and some wayside hotels too. As Karna did penance here, this place has been named so. The confluence of **Alakananda** and **Pindar** river from Pindar glacier takes place. As there is no proper route, it is difficult to go and

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sprinkle water from this Prayag. One has to go by foot and the path is slippery.

5. **NAND PRAYAG**: 13 miles from Karna Prayag with some wayside hotels. River **Alakananda** mingles with **Nandakini** at this place. As there is no proper route, it is difficult to go and sprinkle water from this Prayag. One has to go by foot and the path is slippery. Mount Trisul can be seen from here.
6. **CHAMOLI**: This is the district headquarters and hence has all the facilities like hotels, lodges, phones etc. Here, **Birahi Ganga** meets with **Alakananda** . One can only watch the confluence.
7. **PIPAL KOTE**:-As pilgrims going to Badrinath usually stay at either Pipal Kote or Joshirmutt , it has many facilities. **Garuda Ganga** is near this place. As Garuda did penance here to atone for the sins committed by killing snakes, this place has come to be known thus. There are 2 small temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu along with Mahalakshmi and a separate temple for Garudazhwar. A narrow steep path way leads to the river which flows very silently . It is believed that the pebbles collected from this river wards off snakes and other evil spirits. Usually, these pebbles are carried by pregnant woman for a safe delivery. Nagadosham gets wiped off if one consumes the sacred waters of the river.
8. **HELANG**: A small town with minimum facilities. **Vruddha Badri** (one of the Pancha Badris) and **Kalpeshwar** (one of the Pancha Kedars) are near this place.
9. **JOSHIRMUTT**: Situated at a height of 6000 feet, this is a busy place. This is treated as "**TIRUPIRIDHI**" divya desam by some whereas others are of the opinion that Thirupiridhi is situated in the midst of Himalayas on the banks of Manasa sarovaram beyond Badrinath. It has many stay facilities. There is a temple dedicated to Lord Narasimhar worshipped by Adi Sankaracharyar who was bestowed jnanam (knowledge) to write a commentary on the Vedanta Sutras. A detailed description of this divya desam is given later. **Vishnu Prayag** (one of the Pancha Prayags), the confluence of **Dahuli Ganga** with **Alakananda** is below Joshirmutt off the normal route.
10. **GOVIND GHAT**: At this place, there is a gate to go to Badrinath . It is named after Sikh guru Sri Guru Govind, the 10<sup>th</sup> guru in their guru

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parampara ,as he visited this place. As already mentioned the way to Badrinath is one way. The gates open at specific timings (4 times ) starting from 8 A.M. and closes by 4 P.M. **Bhyunder Ganga** joins with **Hem ganga**. The world famous "**VALLEY OF FLOWERS**" is 20 miles away from this place. Here, flowers of the rarest varieties are grown here There is no motorable road and has to be approached by foot . Due to insufficient time, we didn't visit this place. Also, the lake of ice known as "HEM KUND" is near Govind Ghat at an altitude of 15000 feet. It is surrounded by seven snowy peaks known as "SAPTA SHRUNG" . If one is prepared to spare a day or two, one can visit these places. (We couldn't visit this place)

10. **PANDUKESHWAR** : This is one of the Pancha Badris known as "Yoga Badri" As Pandavas were born here, it has been named so. This is the winter abode of Lord Badrinarayanan. (But we were told by the priest at Joshirmutt that Joshirmutt is the winter abode of the Lord) (Adiyen requests for clarification).
11. **HANUMAN CHATTI**: A small temple on the roadside itself dedicated to Hanumar. Hanumar humbled Bheema who was filled with pride to shed his ego and Hanumar blessed Bheema that he would accompany them in the forthcoming Mahabharata war by sitting on Arjuna's flag.
12. **DEVADARSHINI**: Situated at a height of 10,000 feet, one can have a view of Badrinath.The wonderful snow capped Neelkant Parvath can be viewed right from Joshirmutt.

**BADRINATH :**

Badrinath, more popularly known as "**VISHAL BADRI**", is one of the four most important dhaams(pilgrim centres-mukti tharum kshetrams), a Vada naadu divya desam which every Srivaishnavite desires to visit atleast once . It is the final destination for any seeker aiming for salvation. The temple is surrounded by Nara and Narayana mountains on either sides and river Alakananda (the most beautiful) flows chanting the pious rhym Har-Har after touching Perumal's Thiruvadi. The temple which is at an altitude of app. 3583 metres from sea level is on Narayana parvatham. Guest houses and lodges are situated in Nara parvatham. The Himalayan range consisting of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath was known as Kedarkhand in Puranic age. The whole area is charged with spiritual aura and it is advised to continously chant Perumal's holy names in this place. Full details about this kshetram has been given later.

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Lord Narayana manifested Himself at this place to teach the world about penance. When He was asked by Narada as to on whom Perumal was meditating, Perumal replied that He was contemplating on Himself. Only at this divya desam, Perumal is seen as Acharya swaroopam. It was here Perumal expounded the Thirumantram to Naran. Also, Thayar is not seen along with Perumal. She has spread Herself as Badri vruksham to protect Perumal from nature. Hence, Perumal is known as BADRI NARAYANAN.

Perumal is residing Here since ages. In Satya yugam, Perumal was visible to everyone and devas and rishis offered prayers. In Treta yugam, He was visible through penance. In Dwapara yugam, it was becoming difficult even for sages to have His darshan. Perumal answered their request that in Kali yugam, He would not be visible to the mortal eyes and added that His vighram was under Narad Shila in Alakananda and ordered to perform pooja to the idol. If one sees that idol, one gets the same reward of seeing Perumal in visible form. Accordingly, the vighram was taken out and a temple was constructed by Viswakarma. Over a period of time, Buddhists captured this temple, threw away the idol in Narad Kund and installed their own idol. This idol was later recovered by Adi Sankaracharyar, the details of which has been given later .

There are pancha Badris, namely, Adi Badri(19 kms from Karna Prayag off the normal route), Yoga Badri(also known as Pandukeshwar at a distance of 8 miles from Joshirmutt), Vridha Baddri (on Joshirmutt-Animath route -off the main route),Bhavishya Badri ( entirely different route from Joshirmutt via Saldhar( 19 kms from Joshirmutt) and from there to go by walk (6 kms), also can be accessed from Badrinath) and Vishal Badri which is the main temple.

The temple has been named as "VISHAL BADRI" because the Lord answered the prayers of a king named "VISHAL" The Lord blessed the king that he would be remembered by everyone as his name would be attached to the Lord's name. Hereafter , Badrinath means "VISHAL BADRI".

There are many places of interest in and around Badrinath-Vyas Gufa, Ganesh Gufa, Vasundhara Falls, River Saraswathi, Swarg Dhar.

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**Bhavishya Badri** (future Badri) is near Badrinath in the thick Tapovan forests. When the present Badriaksramam becomes inaccessible , the Lord would be worshipped at Bhavishya Badri. We are told that it takes a full day to go there and come back as one has to walk the 16 kms (to and fro) path with the help of a guide.

Not only Srivaishnavites, even people belonging to other castes visit this place to offer "PINDA DHAANAM" to the departed souls. It is considered to be more sacred than Kashi and Gaya. Usually, after offering pinda dhaanam at Kashi and Gaya people visit this place.

At this juncture, I am briefly giving a checklist of luggage to be carried to Badrinath.

**Clothing:-** Thick woolen sweaters, woolen caps,gloves (if required), socks, shawls, an overcoat, 2 sets of clothes (depends on number of days of stay at Badri), cotton Some supari, mint chocolates, sour chocolates etc in case you suffer from giddiness while travelling (The route is full of 'U' turns), minimum medicines like Crocin, cough syrup, tablets for cold and regular medicines if you are a patient.

**Food:-** In case you are not that particular to have food prepared by only Srivaishnavar, you get all types of food , including South Indian food and coffee though it is a bit costly enroute . To digest rice in that weather is a bit difficult . Hence, one can have chapattis during the stay.

Though the temple is opened from mid-April to mid-November, the best time to visit the temple would be between May –June and Sep-Oct. It rains during July and August and hence one has to face land slides. It is snow-capped from Nov to April; May , June, Oct, Nov are cold.

Though we were advised to get inoculated against cholera (3 doses) before setting in for piligrimage, we didn't get vaccinated and by His grace, we didn't fall sick.

The local people speak Hindi, Garhwali and few speak English.

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**DETAILS OF OUR TRIP:-**

On 4/10/3, had holy dip in Triveni Ghat (the confluence of Ganges, Yamuna, Saraswathi-Triveni Sangamam) which is at Rishikesh and half a kilometer from Andhra bhavan we attended Suprabhata Seva at 5 A.M. and Thomala Seva at 6 A.M at ANDHRA BHAVAN TTD Temple at Rishikesh. It was Saraswathi Pooja, one day before Vijayadasami. After attending morning Saatrumarai seva at 7 A.M., we took leave and boarded bus (UA 07 C-9234) at 9 A.M along with another 15 pilgrims. Badrinath is 324 kms away from Haridwar and 298 kms from Rishikesh. It is situated at an altitude of 3110 metres or 10350 feet approximately. The road to Badri is so narrow that only one vehicle can travel at a time. We could see big mountain ranges on either sides and Alakananda flowing continuously. Greenery was at the best and the weather was splendid. Alakananda which starts beyond Badrinath at Alakapuri, the kingdom of Lord Kubera is the companion all through the way.

After travelling continuously for nearly 3 hours, the bus reached Dev Prayag. This place is 70 kms away from Rishikesh situated at an altitude of 472 metres. "PRAYAG" means confluence of 2 rivers. Here, Alakananda joins with Bhagirathi . This is the divya desam known as **"KANDAM ENNUM KADINAGAR as well as THIRUKADIGAI"** There is a temple dedicated to Lord Sri Ramar known as Raghunathji. The bus stopped for morning refreshments. We were deceived by the bus agent as were not taken to the Divya desa temple. We continued our journey to Jyothi Mutt via Srinagar (579 metres), Rudra Prayag (610 m) where we had lunch, Karna Prayag, Nand Prayag, Chamoli(1069 m), Pipalkote. On one side bluish water of Alakananda flows continuously. It looks as if the Lord has sent this river to accompany us. Like the joy of a person who visits his motherland after many years, we experienced similar feeling. This river mingles with Mandakini at Rudra Prayag, with Pindar river at Karna Prayag, with Nandakini at Nanda Prayag,with Birahi Ganga at Chamoli, with Garuda Ganga near Pipal kote. The confluence of the rivers (different colours) is a feast to the eyes.We were struck with wonder as to how the driver could drive in such a narrow lane. There are no proper roads and a peep through the window is sure to raise chills in a person. The "U" turns would make everyone recite Lord's names. Thirumangai Azhwar's pasurams on Lord Badrinarayanan advising us to visit the divya desam before we become old were on our lips. We were totally bewildered to see the beautiful nature. The scenic beauty is beyond the scope of my description. Only Thirumangai Azhwar and great poets can describe the beauty of the Himalayas. It is wonderful to see

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Lord's creation. While in Himalayas, one gets spiritually elevated and one can really experience God. The spirit soul in us really dances with joy. We can feel a sense of happiness, which is indescribable. We get a feeling that one experiences when one sees his/her relatives after a very long gap. This hilly area is developing and we could find rich vegetation of apple trees, pine trees, akroot, potatoes, tea, medicinal herbs etc. Added to this, road widening is in progress and we were told that by next year, the ghat road would be broadened and walls would be built. Though Uttaranchal is a newly formed small state, the developmental activities are going in a fast pace. We reached Jyothi Mutt at 8.30 P.M. For the first time, we experienced biting cold. As expected, the bus driver said that we wouldn't be visiting the divya desam temple. We prayed to the Lord to bless with His darshan on our return journey. As soon as we got down from the bus, we were thronged by the local people who were ready to let out their room. The room rent starts from Rs.150/-. All of them have both boarding and lodging facilities. We checked in one of the nameless hotels.

On 05/10/03, we left Joshimutt at 6.15 A.M. and reached Badrinath at 8.30 A.M. It was only due to our poorva janma sukutam and elders' blessings that we were in the holiest of all the places, the abode of the Supreme Lord, the Ashtakshara kshetram (Lord Narayanan initiated the Thirumanthram to Naran at this place). This is one of the four "mukti tharum kshetrams", the others being Rameswaram in the South, Dwaraka in the west, Puri in the east. This is the place where every Srivaishnavite longs to visit. Any punyam including chanting of holy names will fetch manifold benefit. We were advised by Sri.Somayajulu of TTD, Hyderabad to chant Vishnu Sahasranamam as reciting Sahasranamam once at Badrinath is equivalent to recitation of the same for 1000 times in other place. This is the place where innumerable sages have done penance and their presence and vibration could be felt.

The place where the bus stops is known as "Deva Darshan" as one can view the Nara, Narayana mountains from here. The sight of ice capped Neelkant Parvath was a feast to the eyes. We were at an altitude of 10,350 feet from the sea level. It was a sunny day with cold winds blowing. We were overexcited to see the place serene with only devotees around. The nights are extremely cold. My kids and especially my father was too delighted to look around the beautiful Nara Narayan Mountains and the Alakananda river. As soon as we got down from the bus, a Nepali coolie with dandie (a basket tied to his back) was prepared to carry our luggages for Rs.20/-. A young brahmin youth was prepared to guide us. He offered to take us to all

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the temples in and around Badri and make arrangements for poojas etc. We sincerely thank him for his guidance and the help he extended to us during our stay without expecting anything in return. The guide took us first to Andhra Ashram (the mutt maintained by Sri Sri Narayana Ramanuja Chinna Jeeyar of JET fame). As expected, we were told that it was not possible for us to stay there as they were preparing to leave Badrinath within a couple of days. But the volunteers offered us to have lunch. A good hospitality. Almost all the residents let out rooms for rent and in one such house, we checked in Baba Kamali Ashram for Rs.200/- as room rent. This is on the way to the temple. The owners were very very hospitable. They helped us by giving milk, chapatis, hot water etc. for which they didn't expect anything in return. Though the help they extended cannot be weighed in monetary terms, yet for our satisfaction we paid them before leaving.

The anxiety to visit the temple was expected and we quickly marched towards the temple. We left the room with a set of clothes to have bath in Tapta Kund. It is customary to have bath in Tupta Kund and then visit Badrinath temple.

**TAPTA KUND** is a hot water spring , the temperature of the water could be easily 55 to 60 degrees . Through out the day it was cold, (the night temperature was -2 degrees) the water was steaming hot. It is believed that a dip in this water instigates bhakthi and accept Lords creation. There are separate places for men and women to have bath. Nearly 4 bathing places have been built by the temple authorities to facilitate the crowd to have bath. There is a continuous flow of steaming hot water. The scientific aspect that the water is sulphur rich etc needs to be kept aside and accept the fact that we are at Lord Bhadrish abode and Lord has arranged for a bath as we have travelled a long distance in the cold.

The myth behind it is as follows : Agni was cursed by Bhrigu rishi that he would consume everything and continuously generate heat. Agni prayed to Perumal that no one was allowing him to come near as he was generating heat. At that time, Perumal blessed him saying that He has decided to manifest Himself at Badrinath and Agni could reside with him in the form of water. He also conferred a boon saying that devotees could have darshan of Perumal only after bathing in this hot water spring. This is one of the reasons for the water being so hot. We were told about this by one of the pujaris while doing Dampathi Pooja.

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In front of the temple, we could see the bluish Alakananda flowing . We were told that this river touches the Thiruvadigal of Perumal at this place. The water is ice cold and is not used for rituals etc.

After having bath in Tapta Kund, all of us went to temple around 11.30 A.M. First, we had darshan of Kedareshwar as it was He who vacated this place for Lord Narayanan to reside as per Puranas As in all the Saivaite temples, Siva is in lingam form which is very small. We were told an interesting story by the guide quoting from some Purana. which is as follows: This was the residence of Shiva and Parvathi . As Perumal had decided to manifest Himself at this place, He wanted Shiva to vacate this place and hence He disguised Himself as a small boy and came to Shiva's residence. Goddess Parvathi out of her motherly affection, took the child on her lap and asked what He wanted. The boy said that He wanted to relax in their house for some time. Shiva who knew with his divya drushti as to who the boy was prevented Parvathi from doing so. But as it was 's wish to stay here, Parvathi didn't agree with Shiva and let the child go inside and relax inside. The moment the child went inside, the doors got locked automatically . The efforts of Shiva in trying to open the doors became invain. At that time, Lord proclaimed from inside that to save the people from the grips of Kali , He has decided to stay Here and impart upadesam to the mortals to help them get rid of the cruel Kali. He also instructed Shiva to move to a nearby place and continue his penance. He also added that a piligrimage to Badrinath would be deemed to be completed only after one has darshan of Kedareshwar. In case it is not possible for the devotees to go to Kedarnath, they could worship this lingam and then obtain Lord Narayanan's blessings. Hence, we first went to this sannidhi and offered our prayers.

Lord Narayanan sat in Padamsana posture as a Tapaswi and was in deep meditation. As Lord is seen as Tapasvi, Aravindavalli Thayar is not seen in the garbagriham. However, there is a sannidhi in the temple premises. The devas headed by Narada rishi used to offer prayers daily. Naradar is the chief priest and hence only in this divya desam we can find his vighram.

There are some similarities between Badrinath and Thirukurungudi Perumals . Thirukurungudi is the Pandya Naadu divya desam situated near Tirunelveli. In this place, Perumal is seen as 5 Nambis. The Perumal who incarnated Himself as Nammazwar, gave moksham to Thirumangai Azhwar, Nampaduvan etc. got Thirumantra upadesam

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from our great Acharyar, Sri Ramanujar. And hence this place has come to be known as **DAKSHINA BADRI**.

In Badri, Lord Narayanan initiated Naran( a mortal) into Thirumanthram whereas in Thirukurungudi, Naran (Sri Ramanujar) gave Thirumantra upadesam to Perumal.

At Badrinath, one has to visit Kedareswar first before taking the blessings of Lord Badrinarayanan. Only then the yaatrai is deemed to be complete. At Thirukurungudi , there is a sannidhi for Shiva at the entrance and one has to first take his blessings before going to Nambi's sannidhi.

**ADI SANKARACHARYAR'S SANNIDHI** : After having darshan of Shiva, we went to Adi Sankaracharyar's sannidhi. It is due to the efforts of Shri Adi Sankaracharyar who was an amsam of Shiva, the temple of Badrinath is existing today. He has contributed to a great extent.

In order to revive Vaishnavism , Lord chose Sri Adi Sankaracharyar, who was an amsam of Shiva, to fulfill His mission. When Sri Adi Sankaracharyar was residing in Joshirmutt (the place has come to be known thus because it was here Sankaracharyar was enlightened and was instructed to write Bhasyam- a commentary based on Sri Veda Vyasar's 18 puranas) he had a dream in which Perumal gave him His whereabouts and instructed him to construct a temple. Accordingly, Sri Adi Sankaracharyar went to Badrinath and followed Perumal's instructions. When he had a dip in Narad Kund, he emerged with a vigraham. He heard an asareeri say that Lord has decided to manifest in the same form and people could offer their prayers to this vigraham. With the help of the native king, Sri Sankaracharyar got a temple built, appointed priests for daily Thiruvaradhanam and laid out rules and regulations to be followed in worship. As this place is in the cold region, he instructed that on Deepavali day (Aippasi maasam), the temple would be closed and would be re-opened in mid April-May (Chithirai maasam). He also ordered that the priest who performs Thiruvaaradhanai should be a strict bachelor. He chose one of his disciples who was a Kerala Namboodri to continue worship. Hence even to this day, only Kerala Namboodri bachelor does Thiruvaaradhanai. He is known as REWAL. He presides over all the temple activities . We happened to see him during our poojas . He wears a woolen coat, turban etc . His face shines with Thejas. Other priests help him in passing on the offerings, reciting Bhagavath

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Geetha, Vishnu Sahasranaamam etc. but they are not allowed to go very near to the Lord.

We then entered the temple premises which is divided into three. The outer most prakaram is known as Singh Dwar where there is an idol of Garuda. After crossing the Singh Dwar, we enter Sabha Mandap. Pilgrims do pradakshinam around the Sabha Mandap. We were told that this was renovated some few years ago. The third section is the Garba griham which houses Perumal and other dieties.

SRI ARAVINDAVALLI NAYIKA SAMETHA SRI BADRI NARAYANA  
PARABRAHMANE NAMAH

MOOLAVAR : SRI BADRI NARAYANAN IN PADMASANAM  
POSTURE (MEDITATING)  
THAYAR : ARAVINDAVALLI THAYAR )SEPARATE TEMPLE  
VIMANAM : TAPTA KANCHANA VIMANAM  
THEERTHAM : TAPTA KUND, NARADA KUND  
**PRATHYEKSHAM : GARUDA, KUBERA, NARAN, NARAYANAN,  
UDDHAVAR AND NARADAR**  
MANGALASAASANAM: THIRUMANGAI AZWAR (968-987)  
PERIAZHVAR 1 PASURAM  
STHALA VRUKSHAM : BADRI TREE (ILANDHI MARAM INVISIBLE TO  
THE MORTAL EYES)

Being Vijayadasami there was a huge rush in the temple. It took about 10 minutes for us to have darshanam. Here, the Lord is seen in Padmasanam (veetruirundha Thirukkolam)-sitting posture in the middle. To Perumal's right, Vinayaka, Garuda, Kubera are seen. To Perumal's left, Uddhavar, Naradar, Naran and Narayanan are seen. Kubera who is on the right side in front covered with golden kavacham attracts everyone as it is he who bestows prosperity. It is the practice of the devotees to carry some new coins with them, place it in front of Kubera, take them back and keep in their pooja room or cash box for their prosperity. The moment one has darshan of the Lord, one forgets the hardships, if any, he faced during the journey and the biting cold. The heart is filled with inexplicable joy and one can indeed feel the atma within us dancing with joy and contentment. One can have darsanam of Perumal peacefully as many times as one wants to.

A brief note about the presiding deities :-

**BADRI NARAYANAN:** This vigraham engraved on a white Saligramam is in the middle of the sannidhi. It is swayambhu (not

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sculpted by any mortal)-seen in Padmasanam (meditative posture)-Perumal has chathurbhujam (4 hands) holding the divine conch, sudarshana chakram in the two upper hands and the two in meditation. He is adorned with diamond Thiruman kaapu and Navaratna necklace apart from other jewellery. The divya mangala swaroopam of Perumal can be seen only during Nirmalaya darshan at 8 P.M. when all the floral decorations and ornaments are removed. He is an embodiment of peace. A silver replica of the Moolavar is kept in a separate sannidhi and when the temple is closed for 6 months during winter, this utsavar is taken to Joshirmutt for performing nityaaaradhanai by mortals. During day time, we cannot make out anything as all the vigrahams are fully bedecked with flowers. Plates containing sweets, dry fruits of varying rates are sold outside the temple. After offering the same to the Lord, half of it is seen taken by the temple authorities for distribution and the remaining part is given to us as prashad.

Lord Narayanan left His celestial abode Sri Vaikuntam and has chosen the Himalayas as His permanent abode to release all the souls from affliction,sorrow, ego etc . When Lord Narayanan started doing penance in Himalayas, Goddess Mahalakshmi who is an embodiment of compassion wanted to protect Perumal from the harsh weather conditions and so she spread Herself as a Badri Tree (Ilandhai Maram). As Perumal is seated under this Badri tree, He is known as "Badri" Narayanan. In Kali yugam, this Badri tree will not be visible to the mortal eyes. (This reminds me of Ananda nilaya vimanam in Tirumala which is also not visible to the mortal eyes. The gold plated vimanam what we see today is man-made)

**PERIATHIRUVADI** : When Garuda was encountered by Perumal while he was taking Amrutham to save his mother from his aunt's clutches, he was defeated by Perumal. When Perumal conferred boons, he prayed to Perumal that he should always be (1) Perumal's vaahanam and (2) he should be on the kodi (flag) on Perumal's chariot. Hence, Peria Thiruvadi is seen in the Garbagriham itself. The other place where he is seen in the Garbagriham is at Srivilliputtur(Samaasaanam) as Andal had promised Garuda that if he brought Perumal to her for marriage within the stipulated time, she would offer him Samaasaanam (place on par with Perumal). In all other places, he is in his usual place ,outside the garbagriham, to carry out Perumal's orders.

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**KUBERA** :- As Kubera , the Lord of wealth, does aaradhanai to Perumal , he is seen here. Also, Kubera's residence Alakapuri is near Badrinath. It is from Alakapuri that Alakananda river originates.

**NARAN AND NARAYANAN** : There are 2 stories connected with this :

1) They were the grandchildren of Brahma and children of Dharma devathai and his wife, Moorthi. At a very young age, they left their parents, came to Himalayas and started meditating. To withstand their parental pressure, they transformed into 2 mountains. Perumal who was pleased with their devotion asked them to choose a boon for which they prayed that Perumal should always reside with them. Perumal conceded their request and said that He would reside there as a Tapasvi and meditate. He also initiated the Thirumantram to them. Lord Narayanan also bestowed a boon upon Naran saying that though Naran was younger to Him, he would be addressed first. Hence , they are known as Nara-Narayanan.

To the dejected parents of Naran and Narayanan, Lord assured that every year Puratasi Dwadasi (Balabhadra Dwadashi), Perumal would come to their temple and spend a day with them. Mela is conducted here . This festival is known as "Maata Moorthi Ka Mela" . It is believed that when the Nara and Narayana mountains collide with each other probably due to landslide, Badrinath would become inaccessible.

One who visits Badrinath must definitely go to Maata Moorthi temple which is situated about 4 kms away from the main temple on the way to Mana village. There is a rock near the temple known as "Dharma Shila"

2) Perumal manifested Himself as both Naran and Narayanan and killed an asura named Sahasrakavacha. In tune with the vedic tradition of "Guru-sishya parampara, Perumal incarnated Himself as Narayanan, the preceptor and Naran, the perceiver to propagate the most powerful and the ultimate "Ashtakshari Manthram" which is the quintessence of the Vedas. In Bhagavad Geeta, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, that both of them took several births together and informs this incident to Arjuna while imparting Geethopadesam in Kurukshetra.

The Naran and Narayana mountains have an overpowering presence at Badrinath. Nara Parvath is on the eastern bank of the river Alakananda whereas Narayana Parvath is on the western bank. Nara Parvat also known as Kubera Bandar bestows prosperity and

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Narayana Parvat bestows spiritual upliftment. Behind Narayana Parvath is the Neelkant Parvat at an altitude of 21,600 feet fully snow capped. When sunlight falls on it, it glitters like silver.

The temple is on the banks of Alakananda river between Nara and Narayanan mountains on Urvashi Peetam. **Urvashi Peetam is a small hillock on which Perumal is seated.** There is an interesting incident connected with this. Indra was unaware that Perumal was meditating here. As usual, he was worried about his kingdom and sent damsels headed by Ramba, Menaka to distract the penance of the Lord. At that time, Lord Narayanan who was in deep meditation opened His eyes, created a beautiful lady from His thigh. As she emerged from Perumal's thigh, she came to be known as URVASHI. Looking at her beauty, they were mesmerised and ashamed of themselves. Perumal ordered the damsels to present Urvashi to Indra. The damsels were so captivated with Perumal's roopam that they requested Him to marry them. The Lord refused saying that in this avataar, He is in tapasvi form but promised to fulfill their desire in Krishna avataram. These damsels were born as Gopikas during Krishna avataram and how they attained Supreme bliss by enacting Rasa leela is too well known to bear repetition.

**NARADAR:** This deva rishi who always meditates on the Lord is the chief priest. When the temple is closed for 6 months in winter, the devas headed by Naradar perform worship to Perumal.

**UDDHAVAR :** This great devotee of Lord Krishna to whom Krishna preached Gita finds a place in the garbagriham.

It was decided that human beings could perform pooja to Perumal for 6 months during summer, rainy seasons starting from May upto Deepavali (Oct-Nov) and devas for another 6 months during winter from Deepavali upto Apr-May. The dates of opening and closing the temple are decided by Rewal and the temple authorities.

An evidence to prove that bhagavath aaradhanam is done to Perumal by devas is seen even today.

- 1) The ghee lamp which is lit while closing the temple continues to glow brightly. Hence on the opening day, there is usually heavy rush to watch the Akandajyothi burning.
- 2) Fresh smelling flowers are seen in the garbagriham proving that devas have worshipped the Lord during these 6 months.

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After having a wonderful darshan of Perumal and theertha prasadam, we went to Thayar sannidhi. The sannidhi is very small. We offered some bangles, kumkum, a piece of cloth and some sweets a north Indian tradition . . These were kept near the garbagriham and given back to us. It is considered to be very auspicious to wear the bangles which have been kept near Thayar. We had theertha prasadam and proceeded to Hanumar sannidhi. Here, Siria Thirivadi is seen carrying Sanjeevani Parvatham. From there, we went to utsavar sannidhi and there we recited Vishnu Sahasranaamam.

While doing pradakshinam, we came across the sannidhi of Ghantakarnan, a staunch Siva devotee and an enemy of Vishnu. We were told that he used to hang bells around his neck to avoid hearing the name of Vishnu. But when he did propitiated Shiva to give him moksham, Shiva advised him to pray to Perumal as He alone can give moksham. Shiva advised him to go to Dwaraka and meet Sri Krishna. But on reaching Dwaraka, he learnt that Krishna has gone to Badrikasramam and hence he went there and offered prayers. Pleased with his single minded devotion, Krishna granted the boon that Ghantakarna could reside there as "Kshetra paalakar."

As it was an auspicious day, there was some gathering and special discourse headed by Rewal. We were told that on Vijayadasami, they decide the date for closure of the temple for the calender year. Very near to utsavar's sannidhi, there are five life-size idols of Sri Adi Sankaracharyar and his four disciples.

There is a separate shrine for Srivaishnavite acharyars. In the sannidhi, there are vigrahams of Manavala Maamuni (seen in the center) and Arjunan (left of Manavala Maamuni). To the right of Manavala Maamuni, Sri Ramanujar is seen. We were later told that His Holiness Shri Tridandi Jeeyar Swami had brought Udaivar and Manavalamamunis vigraham with austerities and installed at this holy place.

We booked tickets for Sahasranaamavali seva (Rs.301/- for 2 persons) and Geet Govind Paat also known as Nirmalaya darshanam (Rs.501/- for 2 persons)

At 1 P.M., all of us went to Andhra Ashram (Chinna Jeeyar Mutt) to have prasadam . Though there are several mutts established at various divya desams by Sri Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami, it has gained wide reputation at this kshetram. At Badrinath being Ashtakshari

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kshetram, nitya anna dhanam (free food) is offered to all the devotees. Annam (food) is para brahma swaroopam and anna dhanam done at Badrinath is a rare virtue and privilege. This anna dhanam is being done by this mutt since late 1950s . We were told by the volunteers that Jeeyar Swami has ordered to perform Anna dhaanam till the last day of closure. The services done by the volunteers cannot be mentioned in words. Hot water is served for drinking and even for washing hands.

We were told that Pedda Jeeyar Swami when he was in Poorvasram (before taking sanyasam) came to this holy place in 1940, performed penance for 3 months and attained manthra siddhi. After taking sanyasam in 1954, he once again came to this divya desam and performed Koti Havana Maha Krathu yagam when Ashtakshara manthram was chanted for 10 crore times. He also installed vigrahams of Lord Srinivasar and Udayavar for nitya Thiruvaaradhanai and made arrangements for anna dhanam to devotees which is being continued even today.

There are also stay facilities here. There are 2 buildings, one constructed by Pedda Jeeyar Swami and the other by Chinna Jeeyar Swami which has 36 rooms and was built at a cost of Rs.70 lakhs.

Around 3 P.m. , we arranged a van to visit Mana village for Rs.200/-. Mana village is the last Indian village on the Indo-China border which is again at an altitude. This is approximately 4 kms away from Badrinath. This place has some historical significance because Vyas Gufa, Ganesh Gufa are found here. Also, this is the starting point of River Saraswati . Previously, trade between India and China used to be in full swing. But now there is no trading at this place. We saw some vegetation of cabbage, apples, akroot etc. We also saw sign boards showing that Vasundhara falls was just few kilometres away. As my father didn't accompany us and was taking rest in the car itself, we didn't visit this place. On the way to Mana village, we saw Maatha Moorthi temple which is very very small.

We first went to Ganesh Gufa. "Gufa" in Hindi means "cave". There is a small shrine of Vinayakar/Ganesh. It was here that Vinayakar wrote Mahabharatham by using his tusk which was dictated by Veda Vyasar. We did pradakshinam around the cave, took few photographs and left the place. Bought a soft drink bottle from the nearby last Indian Tea shop with the intention of filling the bottle with Saraswathi river.

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After 10 minutes of trekking, we reached Vyas Gufa. There is a life-size image of Veda Vyas. Veda Vyas was an amsam of Lord Vishnu and it was he who compiled the Vedas and 18 puranas at this place. A pujari offered us some theetha prasadam. We were prohibited from using Camcorder . He narrated the following incident to a group of devotees who had assembled there.

Veda Vyas wanted a person who could write Mahabharatham to which Vinayakar agreed. Ganesh laid down the condition that the sage should uninterruptedly recite the Mahabharatham and Veda Vyas laid down the condition that he wouldn't repeat anything and Ganesh was supposed to repeat and write. This cave is situated near the starting point of River Saraswathi. This river was flowing with a roaring sound which was disturbing the sage. Hence, he cursed Saraswathi that she has to disappear from that place. River Saraswathi repented for her folly and begged the sage to revoke the curse. Veda Vyas said that she would become invisible in the nearby surrounding areas and flow as underground river by mingling with other rivers. At this place, River Saraswathi mingles with Alakananda and this place is known as "KESHAV PRAYAG ". From there, after 5 minutes of trekking, we reached the place from which River Saraswathi originates. The sight of this river originating from the mountains is spectacular. The gushing water sound is deafening .The water flows down ferociously and tremendously with full force. There is a small shrine for Goddess Saraswathi. We could neither sprinkle any water nor collect water which is usually sold there as the vendor was not available.

From there, on our way back, we saw "SWARG DHWAR " a mountain which is the way to go to Heavens. We were told by our guide that when Pancha Pandavas along with Draupadi were going to Heaven, they had to cross River Saraswathi who was then flowing ferociously and uninterruptedly. (before she was cursed by Veda Vyas) As she didn't give way for them, (it seems she envied Draupadi) Bhima who was known for his strength made a bridge by throwing a hillock from a nearby place on the river and thus helped the Pandavas in crossing the river. Hence, this place is known as "Bheem Koop"

On the way, we saw local people selling sweaters, caps etc., many soldiers patrolling. We came back to Badrinath at 5 P.M. and after giving refreshments to Father who was already tired as he couldn't withstand the cold, we left for shopping.

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It is worth mentioning here that in Himalayas, you get original Rudrakshams (as the tree grows only in cold areas), Spatikams etc. We bought some Navratna maalais, Eka Rudraksham(not found in rest of India), Srichakram made of spatikam , Vishnu Paadam , photos etc for all our friends who had made a plea to bring them from the holy place.

As my father was engrossed in reciting Divya Prabhandham(during his stay here, my father completed prabhandham paarayanam and was continuously doing japam of Ashtaksharam), and as the temperature was 2 degrees ,I left with my wife and children to attend Sahasranaamavali Sevai. When we went to the temple, Vishnu Sahasranaamam was being recited . We also joined them and were continuously reciting Sahasranamam. There were few more people standing along with us in the queue to attend this seva. We were the ones to come first and hence had the opportunity to sit right in front of the Kulasekhara padi and watch the seva.

**SAHASRANAMAVALI** :- (Charge Rs.301/- for 2 persons)

The Rewal who was sitting inside the garbagriham was offering flowers to the Lord while four priests sitting outside the garbagriham very near to us were reciting the 1000 names of the Lord. It took some time for us to understand their pronunciation. For nearly 20 minutes, we were in front of the Lord experiencing spiritual ecstasy.

After this, all of us were asked to leave the place as bhogam for the night was being offered to Perumal. Since we booked for Geet Govind Paat also, we were waiting outside. For this seva, the tickets are numbered and as per the numbers the devotees are allowed to enter inside. Anyway , our guide who is also one of the priests played a vital role in making us sit in front.

The offering of bhogam was a peaceful affair . After this, we were allowed to get inside.

**GEET GOVIND PAAT/NIRMALYA DARSHAN:** This is the most important seva in this temple. During this seva which takes place around 8 in the night, Geet Govindham sung by Jayadevar is recited and some slokas from Bhagavath Geeta are recited by the four priests who were sitting outside the garbagriham. Amidst the chanting of the slokas, the Rewal started removing the flower garlands which adorned the Lord the whole day. Diamond Thiruman kaapu, navaratna haaram presented by one of the Nepalese kings, and other ornaments were removed. These were shown to us before putting them in the

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box. Chandan was applied to the Lord's forehead . At this time, the Lord is seen in His pristine glory which is a feast to the eyes. Only due to poorvajanma punyam , one can have this darshan. This vigraham engraved on a white Saligramam is in the middle of the sannidhi. He is swayambhu (not sculpted by any mortal)-seen in Padmasanam (meditative posture)- Perumal has chathurbhujam (4 hands) holding the divine conch, sudarshana chakram in the two upper hands and the two in meditation. We also saw the idols of Naran,Narayanan, Garuda, Udhavar, Naradar . Perumal along with others was covered with a thick woolen blanket. We were indeed blessed to watch this vaibhavam for 20 minutes without any disatraction. The chandan which is applied on the Lord's forehead is distributed as prasadam the next morning. (Please remember one has to ask for it)

After thanking Perumal , all of us left the temple. It was pitch dark and the temperature must have fallen further ,all the shops etc were closed. Apart from the shops which sell pooja items, there is a medical shop near the temple . There are very few roadside hotels selling chapatis but these were already closed.

On 06/10/03, being Ekadasi, all of us directly went to Tapta Kund. My father stayed back to perform pithru kaaryam . The charge for the same is Rs.350/-. Only at Badrinath, pinda dhaanam to the departed souls is done by using Perumal's prasadam. Hence, after neivedyam is done to Perumal, this kaaryam takes place around 9 A.M. The guide who had accompanied us made all the arrangements for this programme. He was made to do for all the departed souls whom he knew. This lasted for an hour or so. My father was fully contended and was full of appreciation.

Meantime, myself and my wife did Dampathi pooja near Tapta Kund, the rate for which is Rs.250/-. First, Vinayakar is invoked followed by invocations to Himalayas and Tapta Kund. During this pooja, we were given the reason for the hot waters in the Tapta Kund which has already been mentioned. This was followed by pooja to Mahalakshmi, Nara-Narayanan and Badri Narayanan. A dhoti and a small piece of saree as an offering to the Divya Dampadhigal was given to the brahmin who did the pooja. This lasted for about half an hour or so.

After finished the pooja, we went to the temple and had a wonderful darshan. There was no rush and we were allowed to stand in front of the Perumal. As we were advised by my brother in law to visit Thirunaamam as many times as possible, we sat in front of utsavar sannidhi,recited Vishnu Sahasranamam (we could complete only 5

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rounds), and recited pasurams sung by Thirumangai Azwar. Thirumangai Azhwar has composed 20 pasurams on this Lord. IN the first set of 10 pasurams starting with "Mutru Moothu Kol Thuniya...", he advises us to visit Badrikasramam before we become old adding that young girls would tease by commenting whether it is necessary for the old man to visit this kshetram at this ripe age when he is unable to withstand the biting cold. Usually, Azhwar's pasurams reflects on people like me who wander aimlessly, running behind materialistic pleasures, and who finally repent for having forgotten the Lotus feet of the Lord. These pasurams fill our hearts with repentance. In the next set of 10 pasurams, Azhwar glorifies the Lord at Badrikasramam who resides on the banks of Ganges (each pasuram ends with "Gangaiyin karai mel Badrikasramathullane")and is worshipped by all the devas and mortals.

My father who completed his rituals at Brahmakapalam which is at the northern side of the temple ( few minutes walk from the temple )joined us and once again went to the temple. As were supposed to leave this holy place in the afternoon, we prayed to Perumal to bless by giving us another chance to visit this temple.

Luckily, we could get sandal paste which was applied on Perumal's Thirumeni on the previous night and some Thirumanjana Theertham .

We signed off at Andhra bhavan and thanked all the volunteers for their service and left back. The same coolie who had earlier carried our luggage was once again ready with his dandie. Went to the bus stop where we learnt that the next bus would be at 4 P.M. only. As it was getting dark and we wanted to visit **Thiurpiridhi divya desam** we decided to hire a taxi for Rs.800/- to go to Joshirmutt. Left Badrinath at 2 P.M. after thanking whole heartedly the guide for all the help he had extended to us.

After visiting Hanuman Chatti, we reached Joshirmutt around 4.30 P.M. Joshirmutt is a small town with a continuous flow of pilgrims. As mentioned already, there are many lodges in Upper Bazar and few hotels and lodges in lower bazar. When we were proceeding to Badrinath, we took room in one of the hotels in Upper Bazar (this is like the main road) but now we decided to go directly to Lower Bazar where Lord Narasimhar's temple is located. It takes about 10 minutes drive to reach this place. Luckily, we checked in Yatri Nivas, a Tourist Guest House in Lower Bazar which is situated right in front of the temple. (Room rent Rs.200/- ).

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We left for the temple at 5 P.M. We learnt from some book that we have to walk for 3 quarters a mile to reach the place and hence hurriedly left the temple. We started getting down the steps which aren't that steep. There are **only 40 steps** to go to the temple. After passing by various sannidhis, we reached the main sannidhi of Lord Narasimhar.

## **TIRUPIRIDHI**

DIVYA DESAM : TIRUPIRIDHI (Joshirmutt is considered by some as Tirupiridhi divya desam)

MOOLAVAR : PARAMAPURUSHA  
NARASIMHAR

THAYAR : PARIMALAVALLI

THEERTHAM : GANGES

VIMANAM :

MANGALAASAASANAM : THIRUMANGAI AZHWAR -10 pasurams

The Perumal and the kovil as described in our Prabhandham are not in existence. Lord Narasimhar is treated as the main deity.

**VAIBHAVAM**: Adi Sankaracharyar who stayed here for more than 4 months was enlightened by this Perumal and was instructed to write a commentary based on Vedanta Sutrams. It is believed that Sage Veda Vyasara Himself taught Sri Sankaracharyar the vedanta Sutras. Also, in his dream, Lord Badri Narayanan appeared and advised the saint to retrieve Him from Tapta Kund and build a temple for him. This incident has already been mentioned earlier. As the saint was enlightened, this place came to be known as JYOTHIR MUTT which later got corrupted as Joshirmutt and Joshimutt. Sankaracharyar established 4 mutts, in the extreme north at Joshirmutt to prevent infiltration by non-Hindus.

**GARBAGRIHAM**: The garbagriham houses various deities apart from Lord Narasimhar. Though the garbagriham is closed, the deities can be viewed through the iron gates. Lord Narasimhar who is a Swayambhu is seen in the centre. To the Lord's right, there are vigrahams of Lord Badri Narayanan, Udhavar, Kubera, Chandidevi (local goddess). To the Lord's left, Garuda, Lakshmanar, Ramar, Sita are seen. The idol of Lakshmanar is made of white marble whereas Lord Rama's idol is in dark blue/black colour (On enquiry, we were told that these vigrahams were installed at a later date and as Ramar has dark complexion, the vigraham has been carved so.)

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**MOOLAVAR:** Lord Narasimhar is seen in yogasanam posture . He is a swayambhu black saalagrama murthi. We approached the priest to open the sannidhi and do karpooara aarthi for which the priest said that the sannidhi would be open only in the mornings and all the poojas would be done in the morning only. However, he asked us to attend abhishekam (Thirumanjana seva ) at 7 A.M. on the next day to have a glimpse of the Lord.

When we asked him to tell us more about the Perumal, he told us about Adi Sankaracharyar's enlightenment and an interesting feature about Perumal's Thirumeni. He said that the Lord's left wrist is thinning and when it falls down, the way to Badrinath would be closed.

All of us recited Sri Vishnu Sahasranaamam and the 10 pasurams sung by Thirumangai Azhwar on "Thirupiridhi" divya desam. In the set of 10 pasurams each ending with "THIRUPIRIDHI ADAI NENJHE", Azhwar describes the location of the divya desam and advises to go to the divya desam when one is still young. Azhwar's pasurams describing the location forms the basis for argument as to where the divya desam is located. According to the pasurams, this divya desam is located amidst the Himalayas in thick forests near Manasa Sarovaram .

Adiyen is not even sure whether any temple is in existence near Manasa Sarovaram. Due to the difficulty in travelling to such a far place and based on some Srivaishnavites' advise that Jothirmutt can be considered as the Thirupiridhi divya desam, Adiyen satisfied myself as having visited this divya desam located at Jothirmutt.

After having darshanam of Perumal to heart's contentment and doing some pradakshinas, Adiyen with family left the temple after spending an hour or so. We had a wonderful view of the temple from our room which we captured in our camcorder.

On 07/10/03, we went to the temple. Ekantha Thirumanjanam was just over. But the kind priest removed the yellow vastram of Perumal and showed us the left hand. He also gave us some milk which was used for Lord's Thirumanjanam, some sandal paste and theertha prasadam. Went to Vasudevar's sannidhi. Here Lord is seen in Nindra Thirukkalam with chathurbhujam. He is seen with Subhadra and Balaramar. Thanking Lord for his grace we left the place and hired a jeep for Rs.2,700/-at 8.30 A.M. to go to Rishikesh.

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On the way, we visited Vridha Badri, a small temple which was closed and reached Helang at 9.20 A.M. From there, we proceeded to Garuda Ganga as we were very particular to collect the sacred waters and pebbles. Worshipped Lord Lakshmi Narayanan and Garuda at this place and from there via Nanda Prayag we reached Karna Prayag at 1.30 P.M. We couldn't sprinkle waters at both these places because there of improper route Via Rudra Prayag, Srinagar, we reached Dev Prayag at 5.30 P.M. We didn't visit Kamaleshwar Mahadev mandir at Srinagar as the route was completely different and we were told that the temple would be closed at that time. From Srinagar, we rang up to TTD, Rishikesh for confirming our room booking.

### **DEV PRAYAG :**

This divya desam is known as "THIRUKADIGAI"and "KANDUM ENNUM KADINAGAR"

LOCATION: 1700 feet above sea level on Rishikesh-Badri route  
MOOLAVAR:NEELAMEGA PERUMAL/ PURUSHOTHAMAN/ VENU  
MADHAVAN BUT POPULAR AS RAGHUNATHJI -CHATHURBHUJAM  
THAYAR : PUNDARIKAVALLI THAYAR/VIMALA  
VIMANAM : MANGALA  
THEERTHAM: MANGALA THEERTHAM, GANGA  
PRATHYEKSHAM : BHARADWAJA, BRAHMA

The deities as described in the Prabhandham are not found.

We parked the jeep on the roadside and had to walk down for nearly 15 minutes. The steps were steep . We crossed over a bridge (a concrete swing similar to Lakshman Jhoola) and had to climb 106 steps to reach the temple.

#### **VAIBHAVAM:**

- 1) To atone for the Brahma hathi dosham committed by killing Ravana, Lord Rama came to this place for doing penance. He selected this place because this was the starting point of Ganges and hence is sacred. The place where Lord Rama did penance is in the temple premises and is known as "RAM GADDI"(the place where Ram sat). We were told by the priests that on important occasions like Vijayadasami, Basant Panchami, Sriramanavami etc., the utsavar is brought outside and is placed on this Ram gaddi for the public to have darshan. As the place is thus associated with Rama, the deity is also addressed as Raghunathji.

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- 2) We have read that during Pralayam (when the mass devastation takes place at Lord's will), the Lord rests on banyan leaf ("AALAMAA MARATHINMEL ORU BALAGANAAYE... sung by Thiruppanazwar. The banyan tree on which the Lord rests is at Dev Prayag. It is believed that the Trinities-Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva reside in this tree and hence it is considered to be very sacred. (There are 2 banyan trees in front of the temple. When we enquired about the particular banyan tree, the residents were unable to guide us as they themselves were not aware about this.) We offered our obeisance to both the trees.
- 3) Anna dhanam is of great significance.
- 4) The temple is located in a serene surrounding. This temple was renovated by Adi Sankaracharyar. As a brahmin named Deva Sarma did penance here and attained Lord's blessings, this place has come to be known as Dev Prayag.
- 5) This temple is surrounded by hills on three sides. The hill in front is known as Dasaratanchal, right side is known as Narasimacahl, the temple itself is located on Giridhachal.

OUR EXPERIENCE: After trekking 106 steps ,we reached the temple. When we went inside there was no illumination due to power failure . We requested a priest who was sitting in the garbagriham and reciting Sahasranaamam to show us Karpooara Aarthi to which he said that only after evening Thiruvaaradhanai scheduled to take place at 6.30 P.M., he would give Aarthi. He said that every evening , the Lord's Thiruvadi are washed with Ganga water (there is another priest who is entrusted with this job), archanai is performed to the Lord and only then Aarthi is given to the Lord. However, he advised us to lit a small deepam and have darshan of the Lord. The moment the deepam was lit, the current was restored and we had darshan to our heart's contentment.

The Moolavar is in Nindra Thirukkolam with chathurbhujam . He is the Perumal described by Periazwar in his pasurams but locally He is known as "Raghunathji". He is seen holding Panchayudhams and his height is more than 6 and a half feet. A bow and arrow which doesn't form part of the Moolavar is kept near the Lord. To His right, Thayar who is addressed as Goddess Sita is seen. There is no vigraham for Lakshmanan. As per the priest, this is the tallest vigraham of Sri Rama in India (the vigraham in Ramaswamy's temple at Kumbakonam is also gigantic . This vigraham is in veetruirundha Thirukkolam (sitting posture)) The garbagriham also houses vighrams of Badri Narayanan. Perumal's Thirumukham reminded us of Dwaraka

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Krishnar. Everyday Thirumanjanam with sacred Ganges and milk is performed to the Lord at 6 in the morning. The priest told that this seva is worth seeing . Unfortunately, we didn't have the bhaagyam as we had hired a van to go upto Rishikesh. The priest comforted us saying that we could have this darshan during our next trip.

The priest informed us that the Lord is adorned with new clothes everyday. He also gave us the details of the colour of vastrams which adorn the Lord.

DAYS OF THE WEEK	COLOUR OF VASTRAM
SUNDAY	RED
MONDAY	WHITE
TUESDAY	RED
WEDNESDAY	GREEN
THURSDAY	YELLOW
FRIDAY	WHITE
SATURDAY	BLACK

The utsava murthi is Sri Rama accompanied by Sita, Lakshmana, Hanumar. There is also a utsava vigraham of Badri Narayanan. The utsava murthis are kept in Ram Gaddi during important festive days.

Just outside the garbagriham on the right side there are idols of Vinayaka and Bhuvaneswari. On the left side, there is an idol of Hanuman holding Sanjeevani Parvatham. Opposite to Hanumar, there is a small idol of Vamana. He is seen placing His feet on Bali's head. On the outer side of the Prakaaram, there are idols of Lord Narasimhar and Annapurna. We were told that devotees who are not able to have darshanam of Raghunathji satisfy themselves by having darshan of Narasimhar who can be viewed through the iron gates. There are shrines for Hanumar, Adi Sankaracharyar (near Ram gaddi), Sivalingam (as Rama was Shiva's devotee)

After doing pradakshinam and after offering rice and jaggery for next day's bhogam, we left the place with a prayer to the Lord that He should give us another chance to visit Badrikasramam and other divya desams.

The temple timings are as follows:

Summer – 6 A.M.-12 noon; 5 P.M. to 9 P.M.

Winter - 7 A.M.-12 noon; 4 P.M. to 8 P.M.

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Resumed our journey at 6.15 P.M. and reached Rishikesh at 8.15 P.M. Checked in the same room (Room No. 11) where we had stayed earlier at Andhra Ashram. Attended Ekantha Seva, thanked Perumal for the comfortable journey which we had without any hurdle anywhere and retired for the day.

On 08/10/03, we attended Suprabhatam, Thomala, Archana and Saatrumarai sevas and spent the morning in the temple itself.

## **RISHIKESH:**

Situated at a distance of 24 kms from Haridwar, this is a busy town with floating population of pilgrims and tourists as this is the starting point to go to Char dhams (4 holy places-namely, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri) and other nearby hill stations. It is world famous as the abode of saints and rishis. As Raibhya rishi did penance here, this place has come to be known as "RISHIKESH". This forms part of Dehradun district. Muni Ki Reeti where many ashrams are found forms part of Rishikesh. This comes under their Garhwal Administration. Few areas come under Pauri Garhwal Administration.

There are many places of interest in Rishikesh-Triveni ghat , Gita Bhavan, Kanva rishi Ashram, Neelkant Parvath, Kunja Puri, Vashista guha, Swarg Ashram, Pushkar temple, Bharat Temple, Lakshman Jhoola and temple of Lakshman attached to it, Ram Jhoola, Baba Kambilivaala Ashram, Bhairav temple, Kali temple etc and many ashrams like Hare Krishna Ashram, Swami Chinmayananda Ashram, Sivananda Ashram etc.

We visited the following places on the way:

1. MAKAR VAAHINI GANGA MAIYA TEMPLE: This is a temple dedicated to Ganga river. At Haridwar and Rishikesh, it is Ganga who is worshipped by everyone. Makaram (crocodile) is the vaahanam of Ganges and hence she is known by this name. Other temples for Lord Radha-Krishna, Sita-Rama, Shiv-Parvathi etc. is being constructed.
2. RADHA KRISHNA TEMPLE: Here, apart from the main idol, there are idols of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda, Ganesh,

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Durga, Vishnu-Lakshmi, Brahma- Saraswathi, Ram, Sita, Hanumar, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Kabirdas, Shiv-Parvathi, Buddha, Guru Nanak, Garib Acharya, Adi Sankaracharya, Sant Gneya Acharya, Ramadas. Outside the temple on either sides there are idols of Shiv-Ganga, Vishnu-Lakshmi, Meera-Krishna, Hanumar etc. This temple is situated on the way to Lakshman Jhoola.

3. LAKSHMAN TEMPLE: To atone for the Brahma hathi dosham by killing Indrajit during war, Lakshmana, brother of Rama, did penance at this place. Hence, there is a temple dedicated to him and the swing is named after him.
4. SACHA AKILESHWAR MAHADEV TEMPLE: Temple dedicated to Shiva built by Sage Sacha. Hence, named so. The height of the gigantic lingam is 11 ft 11 inch tall and its breadth is 6 feet. Around the lingam, there are idols of Sita Ram, Radha Krishna, Karthikeyan (Murugan), Durga, Shiv Parvathi, Vinayaka. Outside there are idols of Lakshmi Narayana and Shiva Parvathi. Donated some money and left the temple. The sculptures at all these places are beautifully carved which needs to be appreciated.
5. RUDRAKSH MUSEUM: This is a state owned museum. Here, all types of rudraksham, spatikam, nava ratna gems etc are sold. Above all, they give us good guidance, guarantee and explain as to how to identify original ones.

LAKSHMAN JHOOLA: This is at a distance of 3 kms from Rishikesh. Previously, this way was used by pilgrims going by foot to cross the bridge. This hanging bridge made of jute ropes was built by British in 1889 to help the pilgrims cross over Ganges. It was rebuilt later with iron ropes and concrete. The artistic construction of this bridge by engineers needs appreciation. Though there are other bridges like the ones in Ram Jhoola, and at Prayags, the engineering skill needs to be appreciated. We can find vendors selling Machali "Pori" for a rupee which is thrown in the river for fishes to swallow. Now, pedestrians, 2 wheelers, horses etc use their bridge. Near this there are temples for Lord Rama and a recently built 13 storey temple which houses various Gods and Goddesses. It also has a big shopping complex. This is the main way for people going up the hill and to go to Geeta Ashram and Swarg Ashram.

Geeta Ashram run by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur the publishers of spiritual magazines like Kalyana Kalpataaru, is worth seeing. There are lovely inscriptions from Ramayanam and Mahabharatham. Also, it has a reliable shop attached to it which sells woollen sweaters, blankets, shawls etc. Of course, you can't bargain. But nearby there are other shops which sell the same material for a bit competitive price.

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After crossing Lakshman Jhoola, we hired an auto for Rs.4/- per person to go to Ram Jhoola. On the way, we visited Swarg Ashram built by a saint named Baba Kaali Kambiliwaala . Since this place was serene and rishis did penance here, it has been named as Swarg Ashram. Photography is strictly prohibited. Outside this temple there are 2 sculptures which is worth mentioning. One is that of Lord Rama giving His paduka to Bharath and the other one is of Ganga seated on a crocodile.

Ram Jhoola is also known as Sivananda Jhoola .It has been named after Saint Sivananda who was responsible in its construction. This is bigger than Lakshman Jhoola. There are many shops here. After doing a bit of shopping , we took 7-seater auto to go back to Andhra Ashram. It took only 2 hours for us to visit all these places.

We couldn't visit Neelkant Parvath as it was far away. A small hillock which houses Shiva's temple. It has been named so as Shiva after drinking Halahala poison came to this place. Usually, the car driver charges about Rs.300/- to go to this place. As the temple would be closed in the afternoon, we didn't visit this place.

Another place of interest is Kunja Puri where the sunset is worth seeing. As this is in the other end, we didn't visit this place.

In the evening, we went to Rishikesh station to book our tickets to Haridwar. We had booked the tickets to Delhi from Haridwar whereas our father booked it from Rishikesh itself.

On 09/10/03, we spent the day peacefully in the temple. Adiyen's daughters were blessed to sing His glories (Annamacharya kirtanas) on the dias in front of the Lord). In the evening we left Haridwar. The train in which we had booked the tickets to go to Haridwar was supposed to leave Rishikesh at 6.30 P.M. But the train didn't arrive and at 8 P.M. we were advised to board another passenger train to Rishikesh. At 11 P.M., we boarded Train NO. 4042 Mussourie Express (luckily our RAC tickets got confirmed in the last minute) and reached Delhi at 7 A.M. on 10/10/03. (The train was delayed by an hour or so)

On 10/10/03, after reaching Delhi at 7 in the morning, we hired an auto to go to Hazrat Nizamuddin (usually trains towards South India leave from this station) . As we were supposed to leave for Secunderabad from Delhi by Bangalore-Rajdhani Express scheduled to leave at 8.50 P.M. , we decided to go to the station directly.

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Since we had the whole day left, we decided to visit Kurukshetra. It takes about 3 hours from Delhi to go to Kurukshetra. The auto driver took us to one of the tourist office . We hired a car (TATA INDICA) for Rs.2,000/- to go to Kurukshetra and come back to Delhi.

We didn't know that Kurukshetra is very near from Haridwar . We were told that it takes about 1 and a half hours from Haridwar.

**KURUKSHETRA:-**

Kurukshetra is the place where the great Mahabharata war took place. If one dies at Kurukshetra, he is sure to attain salvation. The area extends for 18 yojanas over 96 kms. This place was prominent even before the war. Lord Krishna along with His parents , Nanda Maharaja and Yasodha Devi visited this place to have holy dip in Suryakund after an eclipse. In this place Kuru, the founder of Kuru dynasty , the forefather of Pandavas and Kauravas did penance here. When he was blessed with a boon, he said that whoever leaves his mortals here must get rid of the cycle of births and deaths and should directly attain moksham . Lord conceded this request and hence Lord Krishna selected this place .Also, Kaal (Time) resides here. Kurukshetra is now a major centre of learning with many colleges and world famous Kurukshetra University. The whole yuddha bhoomi is now flooded with educational institutions.

First, we went to Surya Kund. The significance of this place is mentioned on a board. The first sunrays fell at this place. A dip in Surya kund after an eclipse , especially, solar eclipse is considered to be very sacred . Lord Krishna visited this place before Mahabharata war. He brought His parents to this holy place to have sacred dip in the waters. At that time, He met the gopis. This incident is mentioned in Srimad Bhagavatham. Atleast once in a lifetime, one has to have a dip in this holy waters. This has been proclaimed by the Lord Himself. All of us sprinkled some waters and filled a bottle with the sacred waters. We then went to a nearby Shiva temple which was worshipped by Arjuna. Everyday, before going to the war, Arjuna used to worship Shiva in this temple. Every evening, after war, Kauravas and Pandavas used to meet here . The priest said that the other important places of interest are as follows:

PLACE	LOCATION	IMPORTANCE
JYOTISHWAR	6 kms from Surya Kund	Lord Krishna imparted Bhagavath Geetha

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BAN GANGA	Near Jyotishwar	Arjuna quenched Bhisma's thirst -arrow pierced the ground and Ganges emerged
BADRAKALI TEMPLE, THAAN THEERTH		Local deity-didn't visit
NAAB KAMAL MUSEUM		VAMANA DWADASI IS IMP. WORTH SEEING
BRAHMA SAROVAR	Near Surya Kund	Brahma's penance
GEETA BHAVAN		GEETA DEPICTED

The local guides charge around Rs.200/- to visit these places but the rates are negotiable. As we were interested in covering only important places, we didn't take any help and went on our own.

After sprinkling waters from Surya Kund , we visited Suryanarayana Swamy and Radha Krishna temples situated on the banks of the Kund. Opposite to this, there is a temple for Sita-Ram. From there, we directly went to Brahma Sarovar.

This sarovaram is there since many yugas and Brahma did yaagam on the banks of this lake and acquired special powers to create the world. He started His creation here. Now, this lake is filled with the waters of Chandrabhaga river. In Treta yugam, sri Rama visited this places, Sravan who was very dedicated to his parents performed Pithru Kaaryam here. Hence, people perform Pithru Kaaryam at this place. The steps near the sarovar are slippery and one has to get down carefully. We wanted to visit Geeta Bhawan which was closed. On the way, we visited a Science Panorama and Museum which is worth seeing. The ticket for the same is Rs.20/- per head. The ground floor is full of science exhibition-details about inventions, physics, chemistry, evolution of man right from old stone age , latest inventions etc. are there. This is very informative to science students.

In the first floor, one can view sound and light show of the Mahabharata war. The life size images of the warriors, stalwarts from both the sides (Kauravas and Pandavas), horses, elephants,soldiers etc., the vultures eating their prey (the dead warriors) is fantastically sculpted . The sound effect and the life size images of the warriors makes one think that he is in the battle field. Abhimanyu being killed by Kauravas, Arjuna killing Jayadrathan, Krishna attacking Bheeshma

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with His chakrayudham, Bheeshma lying on a bed of arrows, Ghatothkahan destructing the Kauravas even while dying to name a few are very very interesting. Notes containing important incidents along with references from Mahabharatham are kept and against it the incident on the big screen is visible.

One who visits Kurukshetra must definitely visit this place.

We were told that in Geeta Bhawan, images of incidents from Krishna leelas are kept. Unfortunately, as it was closed, we didn't visit this place. From there, we went to Jyotishwar. 10 minutes drive took us to the temple. We were running short of time and had to hurry.

**JYOTISHWAR:** This is the place where the Lord gave Geetopadesam to Arjuna and through him to the whole world. When Arjuna was not convinced, Lord showed His Viswaroopam to Arjuna and advised Arjuna to carry out action without expecting result. Hence, this is considered to be the MOST SACRED PLACE . The banyan tree under which Lord Krishna gave upadesam to Arjuna is still existing. We were told by the priest that since that day, the tree has neither grown nor withered. It is remaining as it is. He said that they don't even allow the leaves to fall down and hence the entire tree is covered with net. He also added that only the most fortunate people get a chance to see this tree. Thanking Perumal for bestowing His grace on us , we did pradakshinam around the tree. Luckily, we picked 2 leaves and took some holy earth which is equally sacred. It was on this part of the earth the Lord gave Viswaroopa darsanam and as it has come into contact with Perumal's Thiruvadi, it is the most sacred soil. Picked up some soil to keep in our Kovilazhwar. The Geetopadesam is beautifully depicted and the image of Geetacharyar and Arjuna sitting in the chariot made of marble is carved fantastically. Took some photos and video. Near this place, there is a pond which is known as "BAN GANGA" These are the sacred waters of Ganges which emerged from the ground when Arjuna quenched Bheeshma's thirst.

We considered ourselves lucky and blessed as our dream to visit this punya kshetram was fulfilled. With heart full of contentment and reverence, we left the place.

Adiyen who is entangled in this material world is definitely not as pious as Arjuna but feels that I am priveleged to have Perumal's grace which made us visit these places.

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With a prayer to Perumal to bestow the gnanam to understand His Geetopodesam and to implement the same in my life, we left the place with sweet memories with us.

As it was already 5 P.M., we didn't have time to visit Birla Mandir and rushed back to Delhi. Reached Delhi at 8 P.m. and boarded Bangalore-Rajdhani Express at 8.50 P.M.

Reached Secunderabad on 11/11/03 at 7.40 P.M. and after spending 3 days with our elders, we took their blessings and left for Tirumala to thank our Thiruvengadamudaiyan for His abundant grace. As we had paid for Vimsathi Darshanam scheme, we had good darshan of Perumal. We spent 4 days in His holy abode and returned to our place on 20/10/03.

IT WAS ONLY DUE TO THE ABUNDANT GRACE OF PERUMAL, WE COULD VISIT THE HOLY PLACES WITHOUT ANY HINDRANCE.

WE FELL AT THE LOTUS FEET OF THE DIVYA DAMPADHIGAL FOR GRACING US AND GIVE US OPPORTUNITIES TO VISIT SAALAGRAMAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

SARVAM SRI NARAYANAYETHE SAMARPAYAAMI

DASAN VARADAN