

## **In remembrance and honour of our beloved Didima, who bore Bhagawati in her womb**

**MA Herself said of Her mother, “What Didima is cannot be explained completely by words of the mouth.”**

As 1958 began, MA was staying in Anandakashi. The Rajmata of Tehri Garhwal had built a beautiful cottage for Her on her spacious country estate. But, on 13th January, upon receiving news that Didima was in ill health, MA left that evening, to go immediately to Didima, who was in Varanasi at that time.

Didima was MA’s mother. Born in Sultanpur in East Bengal, in 1877, as Mokshada Sundari Devi, she was the eighth child in a pious and highly esteemed Brahmin family. Her father was well-known in the village and beyond; he was widely respected for his character, erudition, and good deeds. The family was also financially well off. Nonetheless, tragedy came early to Mokshada as both of her parents died when she was very young.

By age 12, Mokshada was married. Her husband, Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya, of Vidyakut in East Bengal, also came from a highly respected family. He’d been born in the Kashyap gotra in a lineage of gurus; some of his ancestors had achieved siddhi (attainment). Bipin Bihari’s nature too was far more inclined in the spiritual direction; he had little interest in either domestic and financial matters, preferring to wander the countryside, disappearing for long stretches of time, joyfully and melodiously singing bhajans to God. When it came to earning money, he was unenthusiastic and disinterested. Mokshada accepted her husband’s character with great equanimity, never uttering a word of complaint, though often the family situation was one of dire poverty.

The young couple had their first child, a daughter, and shortly after her birth, Bipin Bihari, or Dadamoshai as he came to known in the ashram, again left on a long roam. He didn’t even know that his daughter died at the tender age of 9 months. MA was to be their second child, manifesting in Didima’s womb, when Didima was around 18/19 years old. It was during this time, again during another long absence of Bipin Bihari, that Mokshada Devi began to have dreams and get visitations from various Gods and Goddesses.

Somesh Banerjee, who, many years later, married one of MA’s nieces and dedicated his life to MA’s sangha, reported what Didima had told him of those days. He reported that “one day, as Mother Mokshada was sitting in her room wide-awake, she saw a divine woman wearing a sari with a red border and a veil on her face. The divine woman offered her a varankula, a hand-woven winnowing platter, used for grains, but also, ritualistic purposes. This particular varankula was decorated and included the requisite articles for the ceremonial welcoming of Deities. The divine woman offered it and disappeared.

“Mokshada said that, thereafter, she used that varankula whenever she had the visions of the Deities, Avatars, Rishis, Munis or Mahatmas. They would often appear before her, manifesting in divine light.”

Chandandi, in *Svakriya Svarasamrita*, also wrote about these revelations of Didima. People always wanted to know more. One day a devotee asked MA, “What does it mean, MA, when someone gets something quite substantial, and no one else

is aware of it, and then the same disappears as well. How does this happen?"

MA replied, "There is a stithi and sthor (state and stage) for this too. With that particular stage becoming manifest, such kind of revelation will surely take place. But in the ordinary course, all this cannot happen. The revelation of all this is an extraordinary and profound kriya, which takes place through an appropriate touch at the moment when it is Svakriya.

"When somebody gets something, then this takes place in ignorance – a material object being received in an outwardly perceivable way. On the other hand, your question about receiving of an object; a manifestation that no one else is aware of? From what Mool-Sutra within the light from an inaccessible region, does this revelation take place? No word about this is forthcoming – indeed it is beyond your grasp. Only in that concurrence – know that this revelation can take place. But, he, who was the recipient, his state has also to be taken into account. Where there is the appropriate place for receiving all these things, only there such a revelation takes place.

"Immediately that object reveals in material (form), it remains stationary for just that little while as required and then disappears too. Therefore, what is visible is invisible, invisible is visible, how are you going to grasp it? All this does not belong to Srishti-Drishti (the ordinary world of creation-perception) in the domain of the mind. Everything in its entirety is beautiful at each particular stage – all these come to light only when the right time arrives."

MA further added, "This is not really not a matter of the inner world. The environment in which this takes place, who is it that is there – do you know? It is difficult to understand through intellectual enquiry and the like. In this vision there is no question of dream or no dream – it is a sahad (effortless) movement in the midst of all moments. On the arrival of a specific time, Bhagavan's kriya as Itself takes place. When that specific moment arrives, then, at that very moment, in material form, the articles appear in their entirety, in order that Swarupa-Kriya may be completed at that glorious moment pertaining to the Supreme – this too really happens. In that Supreme, that form is visible when invisible; invisible when visible. Absence of vision in vision, vision in absence of vision."

Sometime earlier, in this regard, MA had said, "One may have some experience at a certain stage in sadhana – all this cannot be said in any way regarding Giriji, At any muhurtha (moment) in which something takes place concerning Giriji, is that muhurtha which is permeated by THAT only (action in the One only)."

Chandandi opined that these – the visions, the welcome and ceremonial reception which were revealed at that muhurtha in Giriji – this mahasutra (supreme cause) was in Giriji herself. In Giriji all these kriyas would take place in such an effortless, real and direct manner that nothing could be said with pin-pointed accuracy about the length of period which had elapsed or the particular moment of occurrence. These had been revealed after a lapse of a very long period on the earnest queries of her disciples.

Somesh Banerjee continued, quoting Didima, "The visions of the Avatars which used to take place – it was your MA only in each of those forms. They would all disappear at the very place of their appearance." Didima's visions continued for some time even after the Prakash (Revelation) of MA. Someshda wrote, "In those days, Mother Mokshada radiated great beauty and light. This was apparent to all

around her; people would exclaim, 'Great God! What a beautiful glow is bursting forth.'

Didima would sometimes talk about these events, but rarely, and only out of earshot of MA. One time, some devotees noticed that Didima was turning around to check and verify that MA wasn't there. Seeing this, they laughed and teased her, "You're afraid of your own Daughter." Giriji laughed softly in reply. But in actuality, the closest of the devotees would take genuine care, as there was a fear that, if these discussions took place in MA's presence, something untoward might happen to Her Body.

In fact, this did happen once, but only once. Giriji was saying, "At that time what came in my vision – all those vigrahas and the like, were seen glistening. Whatever happened at that time is still before my eyes. Of course, I had heard before about rishis and munis too. They were also there." Pausing to look at the devotees listening to her, she said, "Even some of you were there."

Someone asked, "In the vision of the vigrahas, was there any conversation or was it a silent darshan?" Now Giriji shook her head signifying that she did not want to disclose everything fully, but added, "All those various forms manifested with full brightness. I generally remained unconcerned about the identification of all of them. The avatars as well as many vigrahas that are familiarly known and heard of were there, such as Rama, Krishna, Buddha – what inspiring glory! Also, Vishnu, Narayan, Mahaprabhu, Shiva, Durga, Kali, Jagadhatri, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Karthik, Ganesh, in fact, all others. In the joy engendered by the brilliance and majesty of these Deities – what an experience of an overwhelming nature, beyond explanation, beyond expression. The power of the vision, and the effect – it gave such a blissful, ecstatic bhav – impossible to describe."

Uncharacteristically, some days later, Giriji continued on this topic, speaking in her innately gentle and sweet voice, "Look, listen! What else did I see, do you know? In everything, it was your MA! It was only your MA. Simultaneously, in your MA Herself, everyone was in Her. All of them, the numerous avatars with their mudras and the like!

"Also Durga Ma, in whose hands, what all is always there, you know, all that was certainly there. The complexion of Her Body was a muted gold colour. There were saints and sages, rishis, munis and Gods and Goddesses. All these were very many, such a very large number that I can hardly speak of it. On that occasion, all of them were seen with their respective hand mudras. Holding their mudra, they had their hands folded in the gesture of pranam."

The moment Giriji mentioned the folding of hands by all of them, MA at once rose from Her lying position and sat up. As She did so, She stretched both Her arms up, open palms facing outward, in a strong gesture of prohibiting something. The expression on Her face and the look in Her eyes was extraordinary and terrifying. With extreme disapproval, She emphatically exclaimed, "Such talk in the presence of This Body? Avatar and such others – before whom would they be with folded hands?"

Giriji and the others became panic-stricken, lest She might cause something unpropitious to Her physical Body. A reply was immediate, "Self to the Self." Hearing this, but still maintaining Her palms in that posture, MA transformed Her expression to one like that of a child, yet Her voice was strained, as She said, "Yes, Bhagwan Himself is in Himself – vishva-jagat (universe), as well as what transcends it, are indeed in Him alone – certainly in Himself only."

MA's speaking was not normal. Her eyes were closed and She was motionless, stationary like a rock, followed by a flow of tears. The fingers of both hands continued to remain open and spread out as before. When touched, MA's fingers were found to be stiff and hard like iron. They had been kept open with such firmness that the veins were protruding on the back of the hands and the bones were distinctly visible. No one had ever seen such from MA.

Didi urgently began to massage both Her hands and rub along Her spine. MA's raised, stretched arms gradually relaxed and then suddenly the hands dropped into Her lap. But immediately after this, Her fists clenched with a steel-grip firmness as the Body continued to remain motionless, MA's eyes still closed. After sometime, MA finally opened Her eyes.

Later, when questioned regarding the nature of such mudras, MA replied, "Indeed there is Atma-gopon-mudra (a secretive mudra of the Self) too, which takes shape by itself in the Self. The pattern in which the fingers had fashioned themselves, while spreading out to their fullest extent, was accompanied from foot to head by sensation and pulsation. Indeed, something inexplicable – that occurred by itself."

Chandandi, later commenting on what had occurred, said that she surmised, from what MA had said, that the extended open hand was a form of kriya (action) conveying forbidding. The clenched fist with the steel-grip firmness signified Mool-Swaroopa-Spanda (the vibration at the root of True Nature); what is forbidden cannot be contravened.

Anil Ganguly wrote, "April 30, 1896, was a red-letter day in Didima's life, the birth of her second daughter, angel-like Nirmala Sundari (Immaculate Beauty), destined to become Anandamayee Ma. The Baby illumined Didima's cottage by the extraordinary lustre of Her body. Everybody was happy. But there was a shadow of anxiety as the new-born child did not cry nor utter any sound.

"How is it, MA,' I once asked Her in the quiet surroundings in Kankhal in 1975, 'that you did not cry at birth?' She said with a smile, 'Why should I have cried?' She added that She had been looking through the window at the mango and neem tree growing together."

Meanwhile, the topic of Didima's visions would come up periodically, but never again taking such a frightening turn. Chandandi reported a conversation in which someone asked, "Didima, have you had any darshan (witnessing) of any Dev-Devi (Gods-Goddesses) in MA?"

Didima replied, "I have had many divine darshans since the time your MA manifested in my body. The birth was also not what normally occurs, these you all are aware of." She continued, "As I would hear about the many and different darshans that devotees have had in MA, one day I asked, 'Nirmala, so many people have Dev-Devi darshans in You, but You have not shown me anything.'"

MA smiled sweetly and She responded to Her mother, "Do you want to see? But then (remember) you will not be able to see This Body in this form and in this way anymore."

Didima immediately replied, "No, no, I do not want that."

Didima had not always felt such absolute reverence for her Daughter. During MA's childhood, she admittedly did not recognise MA's real roop (form). Nor did anyone else, except in rare cases. Nirmala's innocence and delight was pure to such an extent that she was considered simple and perhaps below par. No one believed

that a normal child could be so uniformly joyous and good. Then too, Her behaviour could also be incomprehensible. Sometimes, in the midst of play, the young Nirmala would suddenly stop and remain motionless like a statue staring into space.

One time of note, this happened while Mokshada was feeding Nirmala. Mokshada got annoyed and gave Nirmala a shake and reproach, saying, "Even at your meals you are absent-minded, always gazing upwards." Little Nirmala would remain silent, remote. Such incidents did concern Her family, some even suspecting a mental malady. Her own mother would at times call Her Teli or Bidisha (names generally used for dim-witted people). It was many years later when MA disclosed that, at least in the incident above, She was watching the coming and going of Gods and Goddesses.

MA revealed Herself to her mother very gradually. After Her marriage, when Bholanath, MA's husband, started witnessing different kriyas (spiritual movements) manifesting in MA's body, he spoke to Didima about it, seeking her advice. Didima did not deem it fit to interfere, as she had understood that it would not be right to create any obstacle in her Daughter's spiritual revelation.

Over time, Didima came to have ultimate faith in her Daughter and to depend upon Her for everything. While she may not have understood the Swaroop of the young Nirmala, she had no doubt whatsoever later on. When someone asked her, "What is MA's Swaroop?" Didima replied, "I have told Her to let me know when my end comes."

When Dadamoshai passed away, Didima took sanyas in order to spend the remainder of her days as close to her Daughter as possible, and in service to Her. Devotees would watch her sit quietly for hours, during Matri Satsangs or other functions, beside MA's seat. On rostrums all over India, she occupied her place near MA with quiet dignity. Even during the last years of her life, she would sit contentedly for many hours without any sign of tiredness or restlessness.

Throughout her life, Didima was known for her sincerity and warmth, her gentleness and empathy, as well as for her fortitude and resilience. She was welcoming to all, with no thought of her own interests or well-being. She was never annoyed with anyone nor would she do anything that would annoy or upset another. Even when there was a situation where it would be natural to be displeased, she would remain unperturbed - she was calm, patient, serene, and neither disturbed by sorrow nor affected by joy.

Didima had one and only one desire – to be in the presence of MA's physical body at all times, for which she was willing to sacrifice her food, rest, sleep, and comfort, with a smiling face.

Regarding Didima, MA said, "Giriji (Didima's name after taking sanyas) was an extraordinary woman. She had no formal education but was born in the lineage of pandits. Throughout the year, as spiritual activities would take place, she was aware of a lot of things. She had a family life, but her conduct and behaviour was like that of the rishi-munis. She knew a lot of mantra-tantras – what Giriji was, cannot be explained completely by words of the mouth."

Chaitra Sankranti and Didima's Sanyas Utsav were celebrated at the ashram in MA's presence on 13th April, 1958 at Agarpara. Chaitra Sankranti is an important day in the Bengali calendar and as one of the few solar festivals, it's celebrated on that day every year. It's considered an extremely fortuitous day and it was on this auspicious day that Didima received sanyas.

After more than 50 years in grihasthashrama (householder's life), Didima, with all her responsibilities complete, requested of MA that she be allowed to take sanyas in order to remain near her Daughter's holy presence. It was Didima's wish to take sanyas from Nirvani Akhara's Shri Shri 108 Mangal Anand Giri Ji Maharaj, who was considered to be the greatest of the Mahatmas in Uttarakhand at that time. But there was a problem in that, Maharajji did not give sanyas diksha to women. This impossibility was quickly resolved when Maharajji found out that not only was Didima the mother of Shree Anandamayee Ma, but that, in regard to Didima, the concept of gender designation was inconsequential and irrelevant.

Subsequently on 13th April, 1938, at about 3 a.m., Didima was initiated into sanyas by Shri Mangal Anand Giri Ji Maharaj. On completion of the ceremony, he said, "Beti (daughter), whatever is to be given for sanyas, I have given you everything." Didima became Muktananda Giri Maharaj.

MA said to her, "All the time you would say, 'You say so many things to so many people, but You don't tell me anything, why?' Now This Body is saying. Whatever is true – that is being said. Day by day people are becoming (more) enmeshed in sansar (worldly life). In how many people's destiny, can one come out of it? Now, try to be only in the Atma-chinta (Self-contemplation) of that One. If Gyan (Wisdom) and Swaroop (Self-realization) do not happen, nothing happens."

Didima's disciples had been arriving since early morning for the Sanyas Utsav. The Usha kirtan was performed at 5 a.m. Guru Puja commenced after 10 a.m. after which Aarti was performed on Didima and bhog was offered. Different rituals and functions, such as kirtan, religious discourses by sadhus, sadhu bhandara, and so on, were observed throughout the day. More than a few thousand people attended the celebrations and took prasad.

On the way back to the Agarpara ashram, on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1958, MA stopped for quite a while at Sri Nirmal Mitra's house. He'd taken diksha (initiation) from Didima and this was his anniversary day of diksha. MA Herself did not give diksha though She would often be in the room participating as it was happening. In the early days, this important responsibility was handled by Bholanathji or Swami Akhandanandji, Didi's father.

When they both were no longer in the body, a question arose as to who would impart diksha to the brahmacharinis of the ashram. Swami Saswatanandji recommended somebody but that person was not Didima. MA immediately said, "Besh toe (very well)." In Her response, She gave respect to both the nominated person and to the person nominating, but it was not clear from Her answer whether Her kheyal was for Didima in Guru-roop (the form of Guru) or not.

MA had also mentioned a name to Paramanand Swamiji but Swamiji had replied, "It would not be proper to involve such a person for imparting diksha to the girls, rather Didima should be given the responsibility. If that happens, then there would be no cause for any misgiving or fear from either side." Didi had also enthusiastically supported Swamiji's proposal but even in this regard it was not clear whether MA's kheyal was favourable or not.

Unexpectedly, MA said to Didi, "Now see what you have started – in this regard, I will not say anything, not yes, not no. You already see – if one takes diksha from some other place, This Body does not have any opinion. In this regard, it is the same. Just because she is This Body's mother – there is nothing different to This Body. Everybody is the same for This Body. Devotees have taken diksha from

Bholanath or Akhandanand as per their choice. This Body did not have any opinion in that regard.

“When there is a perception of difference – then opinions occur. Therefore, in the matter of diksha, do as you all wish. This Body does not have any opinion.”

After such a serious discussion, MA became jocular and said, “Again see, even if something is said by This Body in this regard, then it could be a matter of thatta-tamasha (mockery and jest). If it is said to take diksha from there, then some would say, ‘She does not give diksha Herself but is making us take diksha from Her mother. Again if ‘no’ is said, then some may also say, ‘MA does not object to take diksha from someone else, rather encourages taking diksha – but here, since it is Her mother, that is why she is objecting. Neither will She give diksha, neither will She allow her mother to give diksha.’”

Didi said that many times it could be noticed that though MA’s kheyal seemed to be unfavourable, in actuality, it was favourable, and such was this case. MA said, “This Body says Ja ho jaye (whatever happens). This Body’s activity is not ascertained by what anyone says or thinks. However, the ‘yes’ or ‘no’, whatever has been said earlier, was said only for joking bantering with all of you. HERE there are no contradictions or confusion, Ja ho jaye.”

With that, MA had said what the devotees needed to hear, while Her kheyal, automatically and unspoken, prevailed. Didima started giving diksha to the brahmacharinis of the ashram and then to whomever sincerely requested it. For the next 30 years, in Guru-roop (the form of a Guru) she willingly took the responsibility of showing the path of mukti, of salvation, of liberation, to thousands of disciples.

On the day of Dashami on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1958 at Allahabad, during the Durga Puja celebrations, MA was dressed in a beautiful, wide, red-bordered silk sari and was sitting in the mandap (a stage or enclosed area) after Visarjan (immersion of the Durga murti). Suddenly, She started taking, with both hands, fistfuls of flowers and belpatra, which had been given as Pushpanjali, and MA began to shower everyone there with them, beginning with Kusum Brahmachari, who had performed the puja. At the end, She showered flowers on Didima, and then embraced her, and put Her head on Didima’s lap, as if performing pranam. Later, MA said, “Pushpanjali does not happen to This Body (as it does to others). That is why all this happened.”

Many times, MA would have the kheyal to rest Her head on Her mother’s lap. In 1928, on 2nd May, MA’s Janmotsav (birthday) was celebrated in Siddheshwari in Dacca. Kirtan was being performed in a large room and MA was lying with Her head on Didima’s lap. In the middle of the night, as the time of MA’s Abirbhav (Appearance) was approaching, MA took a flower from the mala that had been put around Her and held it in Her hand.

Bholanath began to perform the puja. MA was still lying motionless on Didima’s lap with the flower in Her hand. Gradually, it was noticed that MA’s hands, with the flower, were slowly, slowly moving towards Didima’s feet. There was no other external sign of life in Her Body, but the hand was moving mechanically, automatically, and the flower was offered to Didima’s charan (holy feet).

After the puja, Dadamoshai was leading the kirtan. When MA came out of samadhi, with a lot of effort on part of the devotees, MA went to Her father and took the garland from around Her neck, put it on Dadamoshai and performed dandavat pranam (lying flat on the ground).

It was in Kanpur, on 19th November, 1958, that MA said, "Let This Body say something that I remember from childhood. When This Body was a child, This Body's mother had said to never touch anything in another person's house without their permission, even if it lies right in front of you. And to make this Little Girl understand, she told a story.

"She (Didima) said that once a bhakta came to realise Shri Krishna after performing sadhan-bhajan (worship and contemplation) of Shri Krishna. But while doing this, he'd incurred a debt – he owed one paisa to someone. His sadhan-bhajan had reached such a level that Bhagawan Himself repaid his debt. Shri Krishna had shown him the way and ensured his sthiti-labh (attainment of the highest level).

"Regarding debt or taking loans, This Body's mother used to say, 'Don't borrow money from anyone. Don't touch someone else's belongings.' Once someone had sent a thali (plate) filled with delicious things. The thali was emptied and cleaned so as to be returned in a proper time. Meanwhile, somebody suggested, 'Why not make use of the thali? It can be replaced by another household thali.' This Body said, 'The thali was sent filled with things, to use it would be tantamount to theft. It's not right to use any article belonging to another person without his permission.'"

Didima's annual Sanyas Utsav was celebrated with programmes throughout the day and night on 14th April, 1959, Ramnagar. Amongst MA's many great devotees, there were no other Sanyas Utsavs celebrated, only the quiet and humble Didima was so honoured. It was not based on her being MA's mother; it was due to her own bhav and sthiti, and the exemplary way she lived her life.

Regarding Didima's Guru-stithi, MA said, "Absolutely plain, simple, honest and innocent. Whatever wisdom and knowledge she has, is in the form of bhav – through her conversation you can see that sparkle of satya (truth)."

Certainly, this was felt by Didima's disciples. Over time, hundreds of people would flock to her room, to sit with her, to listen to her words of solace, or just to receive a touch of her soft fingers on their head. What Didima had to offer, she offered freely. She never demanded anything from anyone and she didn't expect anything from anybody in exchange for her genuine, sincere, and abundant affection. If someone needed help, she was there to help. Didima never forgot any of her disciples; she would keep in touch with them, writing letters herself whenever possible. When they became too numerous for her to handle alone, she accepted the willing services of anyone who would help her out.

Bithika Mukerji wrote, "Didima was very scrupulous regarding her correspondence, as in everything else. My most endearing memory of her is seeing her with a Hindi Primer. She was perhaps 86 or 87 at the time. She'd had very little formal education and anything she had been taught was only in Bengali. Surprised, I asked her, 'Didima, what are you studying so intently?' She laughed a little self-consciously and answered, 'You see, many people write in Hindi nowadays. Although they (other Hindi speaking disciples) read the letters out to me, it's never the same as reading them myself. The alphabet is not too dissimilar.' Blessed, indeed are all her disciples, with such a caring Guru."

Guru Purnima was celebrated in MA and Didima's presence in Kishenpur on 21st July, 1959. There were many times that Didima was shown the same respect as was shown to MA. Many times, Aarti would be performed on them both together. MA Herself was always the dutiful Daughter, obeying Didima's suggestions, but, of



course, as per Her kheyal. Bithika Mukerji reported on one very happy instance in which Didima influenced MA.

“In the last years that Didima was with us, MA, very uncharacteristically, began to reach Her arm out to touch the heads of the people bowing in front of Her. One time, looking at my surprised expression, MA smiled and said, ‘Ma says to Me, “So many people bow in front of You – You could at least touch their heads in acknowledgement.” So I now do her bidding, whenever it comes to My kheyal.’” Bithika added, “Thousands can be grateful to Didima for this particular kripa of the magic touch.”

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 1960 the second storey of Mamu’s house was inaugurated in MA’s presence. Mamu was MA’s younger brother; Her only sibling still alive.

Didima had borne eight children. The first child, a daughter, died at nine months. MA was the second child. She was followed by three brothers, but they all died within six months of each other; MA was only about eight years old. The eldest, Kali Prasanna, was chronically weak and ill. One day, MA’s maternal uncle wanted to bring the young Nirmala to his home. Suddenly, Her brother spoke up, “Didi (elder sister), please don’t go now. Go after I die.”

MA said, “Very soon after this, his condition deteriorated. As he was again being carried outside, he looked at This Body and said clearly, ‘Mother, oh Mother, I die, die, die.’ With these words on his lips, he breathed his last. He was about five and a half years old at that time.”

The second boy was born with the mark of a king on his forehead. The locals would say, “This child will not remain in a poor man’s house.” He fell ill, suffered for five months and died at the age of four. The third brother, born with the signs of a sage, lived for only a month and a half.

Nirmala’s behaviour was remarkable during this time. She had been an elder sister, a playmate, a nurse and almost like a mother to Her three brothers. Nonetheless, She remained calm, showing no sign of mourning. Her parents, too, endured, accepting their sorrows and tragedies as God’s dispensation. But Didima, when alone, would weep at the loss of her three boys. Seeing her crying, Nirmala would start wailing loudly. This was the first time that Nirmala had ever been seen crying. She would weep so disconsolately that Didima would be forced to stop her own crying to get busy trying to pacify her Daughter. Didima would say, “I cannot weep even a little on account of This One.”

Years later, Anil Ganguly asked MA whether she felt the pang of separation at Her brothers’ deaths. MA said that little Nirmala accepted the loss of her brothers as a matter of course. When She did cry, it was from a sense of duty to Her grieving mother. The Child’s tears would naturally touch Didima, who would forget her own sorrow to comfort her Daughter. How could Didima understand that the grieving was not for MA’s brothers, but that the Child was comforting the mother?

After the three boys expired, two sisters, Surabala and Hemangini, were born, and another brother called Makhan. The elder sister, Surabala, was born when MA was about 9/10.

When the marriages for both sisters were fixed, MA objected to the choice of bridegroom for Surabala. Other family members, however, had no objection and both

sisters were married on the same day. Later it was discovered that Surabala's husband had a mental disorder. MA said, "After Surabala's marriage, when she came to pay her respects to This Body prior to her departure for her in-laws' home, the words came out of This Body's lips, 'Do not stay long in this world.' Within a year, Surabala was afflicted with a very serious brain illness which caused her to lose both her eyesight and hearing and ultimately, her death.

MA felt that Surabala would not live past eighteen. She asked Bholanath to write her mother to find out Surabala's age. When the reply came, there were only a few days remaining. Meanwhile, one man, with his blind wife, came to MA's place for receiving alms. Suddenly, it came to MA's kheyal that if that blind woman were given food for eight months, Surabala's life would be extended by that same amount of time.

Within this time period, Bholanath's job suddenly ended, and he and MA had to go to Dacca, affording MA the opportunity to meet with Surabala one more time. At the end of the visit, MA went to say good-bye to Her sister. "As soon as This Body touched Surabala, a mantra poured spontaneously from Her mouth into Surabala's ear. It was seen that Surabala was able to understand what was whispered – a flash of joy spread across her face."

After returning from Surabala's home, MA spent one night in the Siddheshwari temple, sitting near the deities of Mahadev and Kali, focusing completely on her sister. At dawn, the words emerged from MA's mouth, "Attain liberation now."

Later that day, MA's parents arrived, bringing news of Surabala's death. "Mother was inconsolable in her grief," MA said, "but This Body remained detached. Later, when discussing the time of Surabala's death, it was found that she had died at the very moment This Body had the kheyal for her to be released. Surabala died only three years after she was married, but during this short span of time she had won the heart of everyone with her beauty and her many admirable qualities. Her exceptional intelligence, her charming, happy disposition, her patience and forbearance in the face of her parents' poverty and tribulations endeared her to those who came in contact with her."

The younger sister, Hemangini, had married at the same time as Surabala, but when she fell ill, she took sanyas and became Jayananda. At the time, she was living on a houseboat on the Ganges at Varanasi having, therefore, an enviable departure by Hindu custom.

About Her siblings, MA said, "As long as This Body lived at what you would deem to be her father's home, none of the brothers and sisters born before or after This Body lived very long. They had come merely to fulfill their karma and to meet This Body. After This Body's marriage, a sister (Hemangini) and a brother (Makhan) were born. Later, Hemangini, at age 37, died in Varanasi."

MA's youngest brother, Makhan, known in the ashram as Mamu, survived to live a full life, with his wife and five children. He was both a brother and a devotee and he dedicated his life to serving Shree Ma and the sangha and ashrams.

Didima had faced tremendous tragedy and grief, at least in the householder phase of her life. But looking at her peaceful demeanor, nobody could gauge that she had lost six of her eight children and that she had overcome the cruel calamitous tests of fire with ease. Her early life was a story filled with such extreme sadness and poverty that people would contend it would have been unbearable had it not been for her limitless patience and steadfast, unflinching faith in God. Always, the mother of Shree Ma saw Bhagawan's benevolent hand in every aspect of life. Even before her

life with her Daughter, she held firm in her conviction that one who does not have any vasana (desire) for happiness does not fear the torment of dukkho (sorrow).

After Mamu's Griha Pravesh, MA went and sat on the veranda of Annapurna Mandir.

MA also talked about the different Shaligram Shilas installed in the mandir and said, "Among these Shaligrams, there is one that belonged to This Body's father and was worshipped in the ancestral home. At about eight in the morning, This Body would go and sit in the puja room, in a place that even if the door was ajar, no one could see This Body from outside the room. During these times, it happened that even if the Deity had not yet arisen from sleep, HE would awaken then and rising from His bed, would sit in front of This Body. During that time, a blue lustre would emanate from His body and spread out in all directions. Seeing that, This Body would be transformed into a different state."

It was Didima's duty during her householder days, to do the daily seva for this Rajrajeshwar Narayan Shila vigraha that had been in Dadamoshai's family for generations. Didima said that this vigraha used to communicate with her and had appeared once in the form of a child. At that time, the shaligram told her to offer Hari'r loot. When Dacca became a part of Pakistan, that Shaligram was brought to Kashi. It remains there to this day.

On 13th April, 1960 Didima's Sanyas Utsav was held in MA's presence in Anandakashi. On the day before. MA personally made all arrangements for Didima's Sanyas Utsav in such a beautiful and well-organised manner that it simply would not be possible for an ordinary person to do the same. All details were perfect and precise including where the sadhus would sit, their asans and malas, puja arrangements, and everything else. Usha Aarti was done on Didima. Kirtan and paath was done throughout the day. In the afternoon puja was done on Didima and bhog offered to Her. Many sadhus had come for the Utsav including Mandaleshwar Shukdevanandji, Bhajananandji, Purushottamji of Vashistha Guha, sadhus from the Shivananda ashram, and others. They were offered bhojan, fruits and clothes.

It was perhaps easier for the sadhus to notice the humble, selfless radiance of Didima. In the blazing effulgence of being around MA, not everyone had that capability or interest. But Didima, with her gentle, inner compassion was watching everyone around her. Anil Ganguly found it inspiring to watch Didima, as she watched those around MA. He shared some stories:

"A poor, young woman used to work in the kitchen of the ashram making rotis. Every evening Chabidi's kirtan would be played on a tape recorder in a small room of the ashram. The girl very much wanted to listen to the kirtan, but it was inaudible from the kitchen and she'd been denied permission to leave her work. She suddenly saw that from the adjoining verandah Didima motioning her to come to her. As she went to her, Didima said, "Go fetch my stool." As soon as she fetched it, Didima took her to that room where kirtan was being played and sat on the stool. As the girl turned to leave, Didima said, 'You sit here' and sat motionless holding onto the pallu of that woman's sari, until the kirtan finished.

"Another of Didima's disciples who was extremely poor, had a yearning to go to see MA in Vrindavan. Due to her financial condition, she was unable to do so. She had not spoken about it to anyone. Suddenly Didima came to her and put some money in her hand saying, "For the expenses of Vrindavan." The girl was surprised and was extremely hesitant to accept any gift or charity from her Guru. Didima

explained to her, 'When the Guru gives on his own volition willingly, then there is no fault in accepting it.'

In the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1960 at Dehradun, MA said, "Let's go for an outing and return when there is kheyal." Without taking anything with Her, She left in the car, given by Kantibhai, and was accompanied by Sobhadi, Kamalda and Chinmoyda. The others were anxious and asked, "Where has MA gone in the rain? Her health is not good." Didima was especially apprehensive. MA said to Her mother, "Ma, don't be worried and spoil your health. Just a short outing and coming back. What can happen from this? Earlier This Body used to roam around like this. Is there any rule that one has to remain in one place? The whole world is an ashram."

Didima had been concerned about her Divine Daughter from birth. As Didi wrote, "Since a baby girl had passed away before MA's birth, Didima would put MA under the tulsi (holy basil) plant, beginning on the morning of the day after MA was born and, for the next eighteen months, she would put the Baby under the tulsi plant every day. When MA grew up a little she used to roll beneath the plant on Her own every day."

During noon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1960 at Varanasi, MA, who was unwell, called Didi and said, "Whatever happens, This Body will go to Vindhyachal." Everyone became apprehensive, knowing it would be impossible to stop Her from going. MA left at about 4 p.m., without taking any attendant to stay with Her. Patalda would only accompany Her to Vindhyachal and then return back. MA said, "Belu is there. She will make all arrangements – nobody else is required."

Didi held Her and helped Her to the car at 3:45 p.m. Her walk was wobbly. Didima also accompanied MA to the car, caressing Her and saying, with great concern, "Get well and return soon."

"Mago (an endearing term)", MA said affectionately, and She put Her head on Didima's bosom.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1961 at Delhi, MA was sitting in the room upstairs with Didi, and Didima was sitting on a chair a bit further away. Referring to Didima, MA softly said, "Look Didi, it is seen that Ma (Didima) is just sitting, doing this and that. She keeps carefully concealed so that no one can understand or know anything (about her inner state). Such people live like that." When Didi was asked to make her stay in Dacca a bit more comfortable, MA said, "Don't make too much arrangement for her. Such people are satisfied with what they have. She will not be able to bear too much comfort." If MA travels without Didima, before leaving She says to her, with folded hands, 'Namō Narayan' and then gets down on the floor and performs pranam on Didima's feet.

And Didima was becoming more like a child, she did not want to be without MA. Wherever MA sat, she also sat; if she was called to eat, she would say, "I will eat later." Bithika Mukerji said, "We used to tease Didima about this but Didima would cheerfully laugh along with us, acknowledging tacitly that she did not wish to leave MA's presence even for a moment."

On occasions one could see her sitting quietly outside MA's door – MA's mother! Didi said that it never occurred to Didima to claim the position that was naturally hers. She would remain in the background, where it would be impossible to guess who she was if one didn't already know. This was Didima's pure and humble nature. In speaking about MA to another person, she would always refer to MA as

'Your Mother'. But when she had occasion to write to MA, she would address Her by name, 'Dear Nirmala', and sign it, 'with blessings, your mother'.

Within Didi's diary is a heartfelt tribute to Didima. "The more one watches Didima and gets to know her, the more one marvels at her. Indeed, it is difficult to think of another such person as Didima. Thousands have now taken diksha from her. Perhaps she is not learned or scholarly like other Gurus, but by nature she is a true Mahatma, with a genuine, intrinsic, pious and saintly disposition. I have known her for the last 35 years. Anger, greed, enmity, pride, arrogance, envy, malice, and jealousy, are simply non-existent in her. This is not an exaggeration. She is loving and affectionate towards all."

Didima's humility too was immaculate. Basanti Misra wrote about the following incident. "MA's sevika (person rendering service) was extremely protective about Her and would be annoyed if anyone, including Didima, used anything which MA used. As the sevika was totally devoted to MA, Didima wanted to ensure that the sevika's bhav was not disturbed. One night in Kankhal, a devotee saw Didima descending the stairs and asked, "Didima, why are you coming down so late at night?"

"To go to the bathroom."

The devotee was surprised and said, "Why don't you use MA's bathroom instead of coming all the way down here?"

Didima replied softly, "She (the sevika) does not like anybody using MA's bathroom."

He said emphatically, "MA is your daughter, you go."

Didima replied, "No, she will scold."

"How will she scold?" he asked.

Didima smiled and said, "She will scold with her eyes."

Didima's sincere humility could even lead to some amusing incidents. In 1953, when MA was in Vrindavan Ashram with Didi, Didima and others, a list was being made regarding the participation of the ashramites in the upcoming Sanyam Saptah in Bombay. Didima was unsure whether her name was in the list. She went hesitantly to Didi's room and said to her, "Did you know that Kanta behan (sister) has invited me to Bombay?"

Didi understood why she had come and wanted to tease her, and so replied, "So you will go to Bombay just for Kanta behan's invitation and for no other reason?"

"Apart from that, Pathak had also asked me to go to Bombay," Didima said with all due seriousness. "Also, earlier when you, Dadamoshai and I accompanied Bholanath to that area, we could not complete the teerth darshan (visiting sacred places) of many places in that area."

Didi, barely controlling her laughter, said, "Ok, if you want to go for teerth darshan, then we will make arrangements immediately for you to go while MA is still in Vrindavan. After you return, then MA and the rest of us will leave for Bombay."

Realizing that Didi had understood her intention, Didima joined in the mirth, and laughed as she said, "Is it always possible to say everything clearly? My main attraction of going to Bombay is to be with your MA."

MA made all the arrangements for Didima's Sanyas Utsav, which was held, as always, on Chaitra Sankranti on 13th April, 1961 at Kankhal. A large number of devotees, sadhus, and mahatmas attended, and Didima's disciples flocked in good numbers from all over India to pay homage to their revered Guru.

The programme was as follows: from 5 to 8 a.m., Usha Kirtan and Mangal Aarti. Then from 8 to 9 a.m., Gita, Chandi, Bhagavat Paath, etc., were chanted. Guru

Katha (discourse) was held from 9 to 10 a.m., then from 10 to 11 a.m. Shri Krishnananda Avadhutji gave a discourse, 11 to 12 noon was discourse by Mahamandaleshwar Maheshwaranandji of Sanyas Ashram, Bombay, and other mahatmas. Kirtan was held from noon till 5 p.m., Ramayana Paath from 5 to 6 p.m., lecture by Mahamandaleshwar Krishnananda from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m., Aarti and Kirtan from 7:15 to 8 p.m. and Ramayana Paath from 8 to 8:45 p.m. A new type of Ramayana Paath was carried out wherein eight to ten people did the Paath with harmonium in the style of a kirtan. Maun was held from 8:45 to 9 p.m., followed by Matri Satsang till 9:30 p.m.

The day before, a dust storm had pulled down the pandal that had been pitched for the occasion. As another storm broke out early in the morning, the satsang had to be improvised and was held under a large tree in the compound. MA supervised, making use of every inch of space available. "Whatever God does is for the best," MA cheerfully remarked.

In prior years, Didima's Sanyas had been commemorated by a one-day celebration. From the 5th to 11th April, 1962, at Hardwar, for the first time, it was to be celebrated in grand style with a full week's programme of meditation, kirtan, Gurupuja and discourses by distinguished sanyasis.

From all over, devotees were assembling for the week of celebration of Didima. Many mahatmas were coming to honour her, notable among them were Swami Naradanandji from Naimisharanya; Swami Shankaranandaji from Manav Seva Sangh, Vrindaban; Swami Chetan Giriji ex-Mahamandaleshwar of Kailash Ashram, Hardwar; Swami Swaroopanandji, Mahamandaleshwar of Bholagiri Ashram, Hardwar; Swami Maheshwaranandaji, Mahamandaleshwar of Niranjani Akhara, Hardwar; Swami Sukhdevanandji of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh; Swami Vishnu Ashramji of Dundeebara, Suktal; Swami Krishnanand Avadhutji of Vrindaban; Swami Bhagavathanandji Mahamandaleshwar of Hardwar; Swami Swatantranandji, Mahamandaleshwar of Kailash Ashram, Rishikesh; Swami Asanganandji, Mahamandaleshwar, Udasi Sampraday; and Swami Vasudevanandji of Sanyas Ashram, Bombay.

Billoji had decorated the ground floor of Bhagat House beautifully. On the morning of the 5th, the Utsav was inaugurated by Sri Sri 108 Krishnananda Avadhutji who gave an introductory talk, elucidating the significance of sanyas.

The daily programme would commence every morning at 5:30 a.m. Hiru Brahmachari would perform Aarti in Didima's room after which everybody would do pranam to her and MA. Everyone would then assemble in the hall for Usha aarti and kirtan, which would always begin with the Matrika dhyana song. After that, when 'Jai Jai Shiva Shankar' would start, Hiruda would enthusiastically spring up, the harmonium slung around his shoulders, and he would go around the Shiv Mandir, joyfully singing, followed by Munirda playing the dhol, Dasuda, the gong, others on the cymbals, while the rest of the devotees followed in a procession, singing and dancing. The remaining kirtan and Guru Pranam would finish by 6:15 a.m. after which the devotees were free to do their morning ablutions.

At 7:50 a.m., everyone would again assemble in the hall, and Bibhuda would sing 'Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma' before the collective meditation, which was from 8 to 8:30 a.m. This was followed by the chanting of the Gita, Chandi, Upanishads and a discourse on the Bhagavat. Then from 9:30 a.m., Hiruda would perform an elaborate Guru Puja on Didima, including Ved paath, kirtan and bhajan, in the corridor of the Shiv temple. MA usually watched from the balcony or the hall,

and would generally come in towards the end to offer a garland. It would be concluded with pushpanjali by 11 a.m. From 11 to 12, every day, Sri Chaitanya Giriji would give a discourse on vedanta.

From noon to 4 p.m., there was uninterrupted Naam Kirtan. Devotees could come and go, but the programme was continuous. After 4 to 6 p.m. there were more discourses. Sandhya Aarti, conducted by Hiruda, took place from 6 to 6:30 p.m. After this, in MA's presence, more discourses were given by different Mahamandaleshwars. As always, maun was held from 8:45 to 9 p.m., followed by Matri Satsang.

With MA's kheyal, the celebrations were conducted in a superb manner. The atmosphere and program of the Utsav was of continuous and uninterrupted spiritual bhav.

On 13th April, 1962 at Haridwar, the day of Chaitra Sankranti, a most auspicious day according to the solar calendar and the most important snan of the Kumbha, MA's programme began at 3 a.m. when Didima, at the Ganga, and in MA's presence, conferred sanyas on three ashramites, and brahmacharya on two other ashramites. All received the gerua (saffron) cloth and new names. Of the sanyasis, Kantibhai was named Bhagavathananda, Bordi was named Satyananda and Birenda was named Bhoomananda. Of the two who were conferred as brahmacharya, Brahmachari Kamalda was named Virajananda and Brahmachari Bibhuda was named Brahmananda.

When someone asked whether Didima (who was 84 years old) could bathe, MA said, "If she wishes, she can." Didima bathed during this auspicious time along with others. After bathing, MA and everyone returned to Bhagat House and sat in the satsang hall, recounting the events with merriment. MA again sprinkled Gangajal from Brahmakund on everybody's head while they were doing pranam.

Akshaya Tritiya (a particularly auspicious day as per the lunar calendar) was celebrated in MA's presence on 6th May, 1962, Dehradun. MA said, "Didima had performed Akshaya Tritiya vrata on This Body but as the age was less than eight years at that time, the vrata was not completed. After going to Shahabad, Akshaya Tritiya vrata was done while in maun. Three pitchers of water were brought from the local pond. The pond from where the water was brought – that pond was special. This Body had seen Narayan in that pond. Jal kriya had also taken place in that pond.

"This Body was extremely thin at that time – because at that time there was a kheyal once, that like the rishis and munis who had become extremely thin on performing Kriccha Sadhana, This Body would be only skin and bones – there is probably no photograph of that time period. Seeing the observance of the vrata, Pran Gopal Babu had arranged for a celebration. This Body's mother had at that time cooked plain pulao, bhaja muk dal and sweets."

MA added, "On Akshaya Tritiya 1) satyug started, 2) birthday of Parshurama, 3) japa, tap (austerities), daan (charity), whatever is done is akshar (indestructible), 4) the doors of Badrinath Mandir open, 5) Sri Bihariji's Charan darshan in Vrindaban. On this day, water should be offered, and said to Thakur, 'Thakur, end all my thirst and hunger' – to gain infinite contentment, to gain everlasting joy."

On the day of Guru Purnima, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1962, Dehradun, MA had been suffering from cold and cough, since morning. Her voice was breaking up and, from looking at Her eyes, it seemed that She was feverish. Binadi had made the

arrangements for Her puja. MA sat up in bed for a short while, and then lay down again. Jogenda performed puja on MA while She was lying down in that condition. Many people offered Anjali.

A bit later, MA went downstairs. The disciples of Didima (who had received diksha from her) had arranged for the puja of Didima in the hall downstairs. Seeing how crowded the hall was, MA told them to shift to the Shiv Mandir where Brahmachari Hiru then performed the puja on Didima.

Many devotees, including royals, had arrived for Guru Purnima, among whom, were the Raja and Rajmata of Tehri, Raja of Kuchaman, Rajmata of Suket, Raja of Ambe, Rani of Mysore and others.

Akhanda Naam kirtan also started simultaneously with the puja. The ashram was so crowded that a mass of people spilled out onto all the roads around the ashram. The devotees had brought so much fruit, flowers, sweets, and other things as offerings that there was no place to store it all. Among the celebrations and the ensuing pandemonium, it had started raining. It was a difficult task to feed this huge number of devotees, who were served food in any free space that was available, whether it was a room or a veranda. The feeding of bhog ended at nearly six o'clock in the evening.

Finally came the day of the consecration, 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1963, for the huge, new Lakshmi Narayan, Durga, and Maheshwara Temple that had been built by Modibhai, one of India's big industrialists. Shri Krishnashramji had been in deep meditation since early morning. He, MA, and Shri Haribabaji were taken to the Garba Griha (sanctum sanctorum) of the temple. Only they three entered the Garba Griha and the doors were closed behind them.

Meanwhile, the town of Modinagar was buzzing, packed with devotees, wanting to participate in the public celebrations and to be in a rarified atmosphere of profound, concentrated holiness. A foreigner and Christian, Abbot George Burke, had come to Modinagar, hoping to have his first darshan with Shree MA. He was later to interact extensively with MA, even travelling with Her. And for fifteen years, until MA left the Body, Abbot George said that "our ashram in America was under Her direct supervision. She would advise me very carefully, and in great detail, including all the Christian aspects of the ashram." He added, "You might be interested to know that at the request of the nuns, Mataji was also the spiritual director and advisor of a Christian Nunnery in Pune for several years before She left this world." But on this day, he had a different story to tell. He began, "Instead of writing about MA, I would like to tell you about Her mother, Srimati Mokshada Sundari Devi Bhattacharya, who became Swami Muktananda Giri but was usually called Didima or Giriji (a reference to her sanyas lineage).

"The town was jammed with cars and busses, and it was difficult to find a place to park. When finally we spilled out of the car, someone clutched my arm and said, pointing to an auto several meters ahead, 'Go quickly, Mother is in that car!' I ran. But when I reached there I saw immediately that Mother was not there at all. Instead, sitting in the front seat was a tiny woman swathed in the gerua (saffron) clothing of a monastic. In retrospect I have no idea how I knew the little figure was a woman, for her hair was cut short, almost shaven, and she looked for all the world just like my great uncle. But that is how I had my first darshan of Srimat Swami Muktananda Giri, the mother of Anandamayi Ma.

"I learned afterward that Giriji had been a great yogi even when young, and there are indications that even then she had disciples who did not make it public.



Giriji was unique in that she had totally interiorized her illumination, concealing it completely from external manifestation. Mother Anandamayi said that such an accomplishment occurs only once in many centuries, and was a great wonder beyond any miracle, that such a one as Giriji had appeared upon the earth.

“Giriji, who was virtually illiterate, would write exquisite hymns in Sanskrit delineating spiritual experiences reaching far beyond the bounds of the yoga shastra, the classical texts on yoga. Nonetheless, she passed her days sitting quietly, japa mala in hand, reciting the Name of God. When asked why she did this, since she had no more need for formal spiritual practice, she would answer, “For my disciples who do not repeat their mantra.”

This was well-known about Didima. Anil Ganguly, decades earlier wrote about this in Bengali. “Didima was constantly doing japa. When asked, ‘Didima, even after receiving MA in your womb, why do you do so much japa?’ Didima replied with a slight smile, ‘Whoever has taken shelter here, most of them are householders and are busy in their daily work and hardly have any time – complementing their shortfall – whatever you understand.’”

At another completely different time period, these stories took place over a thirty year time span, Basanti Mitra wrote, “Didima would be sitting near MA but she would continue performing japa. A devotee asked her, ‘You are a sanyasi. You have borne a Bhagawati child in your womb. Why do you need to perform so much japa continuously throughout the day?’

“For all of you,’ was what Didima quietly replied. For her disciples, who would not be able to complete their quota of japa every day, Didima, without speaking a word to anyone, would do it.”

Abbot George continued, “Speaking of disciples, Shree Ma Anandamayi did not take on the role of Guru and did not give diksha (initiation). Instead, when anyone asked for diksha, she told them to receive it from Giriji. As a consequence Giriji gave initiation to a great many people who did not really care anything about her and who told people that they were MA’s disciples, not even mentioning Giriji. One man bragged to me that when MA told him to be initiated by Giriji, he replied, “I will do what you say, MA, but you must be present for the diksha and I will still consider You my Guru.” So as I say, Giriji bestowed her tremendous grace and love upon a multitude of people who could not care less and never gave her a thought. But that made no difference to her. She loved and she cared, and she looked after them all.

“Most people who came to see Anandamayi Ma did not have any idea who the frail, elderly person dressed in gerua and usually sitting next to MA, even was. When MA would get up to leave, they would surge after Her, and more than once I saw people push Giriji aside and nearly knock her down in their haste. She would look at them with total calm, without a flicker of annoyance. Her humility and patience were the humility and patience of God.”

Didima’s kindness and compassion were legendary and powerful enough to have profound effect in people’s lives, if they were paying attention to someone so humble as to be nearly invisible at times. Abbot George dearly loved Didima and had many stories to share. This took place at the end of her life. “My last darshan of Giriji was at the Delhi Ashram Satsang Hall. I was sitting at the back when Dayanandaji came in with Giriji who she led right over to me. Giriji was holding her hands together in pranam, looking steadily at me and smiling more radiantly than I had ever seen her do. When she was in front of me, I bowed down at her feet. As I rose up, I saw that her hands were holding many small red flowers. She extended her hands to put

the flowers in my hands, then stood there smiling, quietly laughing in joy. Then she pranamed and left.

“Later, when Giriji left her body in Haridwar, one member of our ashram, Prangopal, was there. The afternoon of the day before her Mahasamadhi, he was standing at the door of the satsang hall, when Giriji came toward the door. He moved aside to clear the way for her, but she moved too, towards him, coming right up to him, smiling and holding out her hands. She filled his hands with flowers, pranamed and walked into the hall. Before dawn the next morning, she left the body.

“The flowers she gave Prangopal were brought back to America, given to me, and are kept in the temple as holy relics.”

MA, at the request of Shri Haribabaji Maharaj, went to Jodhpur for a few days to be present at the inauguration of a satsang hall from 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1963. She left Giriji and a few other companions with Narayan Swami at Kankhal, asking them to meet Her at the Delhi Ashram on the 14th.

After maun, in Her room, MA suddenly said to Swami Chinmayanandji, “Send a telegram to Kankhal, to Narayan Swami, requesting Giriji to be careful about her health.” No one could understand the significance of this, as MA was soon to meet Giriji in Delhi.

Earlier MA had said to Pushpadi, “Something about Giriji has been seen.” Pushpadi did not inquire further, and MA did not say anything more.

On the 13th, MA left Jodhpur by overnight train.

MA reached the Delhi ashram, early in the morning on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1963 with the many devotees who were travelling with Her. Didima and her party had arrived the evening before, from Kankhal. In the morning, Didima did not leave her room to go out and greet MA.

“Where is Giriji?” MA asked. “She is nowhere to be seen.” At 10 in the morning, MA went to her room and found her sitting on a cot, doing japa. She was in maun and continued to be silent even after MA spoke. MA pointed at her and said, “Akhand (continuous) sanyas japa is going on inside.” The door to the room was then closed so that they could speak in private. After an hour, MA and Didima came out.

About two or three days before, in Kankhal, Didima’s bhav had been strange. After returning from pouring jal (water) on the Daksheswar Shivji, she had sat in her room like a rock, with a cloth covering her head. That day she refused to take any food, even after repeated requests. She had then gone under the bel (peepal) tree and remained there motionless in a posture of pranam. Everyone was worried. MA was in Jodhpur at that time and was seeing everything (ethereally). Didima had come to MA and said, “Shall leave tomorrow.”

MA replied a bit forcefully, “Na, na, na – do not go tomorrow.” Didima’s bhav had been, ‘(I’m) not getting up.’ But it then changed due to MA’s kheyal. Still, MA had said to Chinmayananda, “Immediately send a telegram – Didima should stay safely.” When the telegram reached Kankhal, everyone understood that MA was aware of the situation.

MA now came out of Giriji’s room and, while standing on the veranda, She had the kheyal to talk about Didima. “When we were to meet after only two days, then what was the use of the telegram?” Laughing, MA said, “The inner telegram reached earlier. But so that the external telegram could reach within 24 hours, it was done in a hurry.”

At another time, someone else asked again about the need for a telegram. "Do you know why the telegram was sent?" MA asked rhetorically. "Just as one does not become a sanyasi by reading the sanyasa mantra in a book, but has to obtain it from the Guru – similarly, This Body had the kheyal to confirm, as it were, what Giriji had heard MA say. This is why the wire was sent to Narayan Swami."

And at another time, the question was asked again and MA gave a completely different answer. "You had already communicated internally with Didima, what was the need for the telegram?" MA smiled and said, "For all of you! Otherwise you would find it difficult to believe that Ma was ready to leave her body at that time and that This Body made her change her mind."

On that day too, the day MA had sent the telegram, in Kankhal, MA had seen an entity of Dadamoshai (MA's father), standing near Didima with a gentle smile. MA said, "Do you know Paramanand, how he gets ready for a journey with luggage packed, Giriji was also like that. A hint of essence of This Body's father was also seen, a bit."

To someone's question, MA said, "Don't you know that? There is nothing about This Body's father here, (but) as Ma (Didima) was seen in the red-bordered saree in the guise of a wife of the grihasthashram, the talk of the hint of essence of This Body's father, was said. This Body had also seen the darshan that This Body's mother had seen – what Ma had seen – a beautiful place of dharma, enveloped in divine bhav."

MA continued, "A lot of people have a bhav against Didima. A kriya (reaction) also occurs due to that. Some supposedly use such language and send letters to their own people saying, 'MA seems to be under the influence of Didima. We don't like it. The absence of Didima may bring about a semblance of order in all directions.'"

Everyone was shocked and astonished to hear that anyone could have such feelings about Didima, one who had never uttered a single rude word to anyone, had never shown an iota of anger or displeasure, always prayed for everyone's welfare, and would remain in the background, behind everyone. Nonetheless, many people were unable to understand Didima, as she would most often remain silent and detached. She had no wants or desires and was constantly engrossed in Atma Chintan (Thought of God). But even if it made no difference to Didima, her disciples were very upset and wanted the names of the people.

MA would not say and replied, "It's human frailty. What is to be done? They try to lighten their minds by writing a letter about their hidden thoughts to their own people. Everything is His form." Didima was 87 years old at that time.

On 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1963 at Lucknow, MA had the kheyal to mention to Panuda that, in Giriji's lineage, there were some who had ichha mrityu shakti (the power to choose one's own time of death). Some of Giriji's brothers, before dying, left their bodies only after informing everyone about it.

MA arrived in Delhi in the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1963. She was continuing to speak about Giriji. "Earlier also, in Shahbag, beautiful things were seen regarding Giriji. Giriji was probably not getting any news about This Body, and she would shed tears in the evening when lighting a lamp near the tulsi plants." The inner pain of Giriji would touch MA, wherever She was, and later, on meeting with Giriji, She would say, "On such and such a day, you were feeling sad." Giriji would reply, "I hadn't seen You in a long time, that's why."

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1963 at Vrindavan, there was a discussion going on, in MA's room, about Giriji, who was amused by her own vision in which she had seen

herself in the clothing of the purvashram (her earlier family life), wearing a red bordered saree with ivory bangles on her wrists. Dadamshoi was ready with the luggage and was calling out to her. Then she suddenly remembered that one day long back, MA had said, "If you all don't listen to what is being told, and if pukka (ripe) kheyal comes, then (This Body) will go in any direction, and hanste hanste (laughing) – in which case you'll not be able to keep (ME)." As Didima remembered this, she thought, "I am a sanyasi, I am to remain with Nirmala (MA's birth name)."

Didima had said that it was in Kankhal on 10th February at about 2:30 in the morning when the desire to leave the body first came to her. She had sat on the asan throughout the night, experiencing the essence of past memories and the many darshans that had taken place. At dawn, she rose from her seat. At about eight a.m., she and Vimala, her sevika, went to bathe in the Ganga at the Daksh Prajapati ghat. She then sat in the Daksh temple doing japa for a long time. Sitting there, she saw many of her devotees. When she got up, she asked Vimaladi where they had gone. Vimala was astonished, "What do you mean? They never came here!" After distributing wheat-flour and jaggery to the beggars at the temple gate, Giriji sat among the tulsi plants at Nitaida's house, in meditation. For a long time, she remained in that state of deep inner absorption.

During all this time, MA, who was in Jodhpur, was observing Giriji (ethereally). MA later said, "Giri Maharaj's eyes were not opening – so much so, that the external senses were becoming withdrawn – it was required that the eyes be open." MA then saw that after a long time the right eye opened slightly, and again after a long time, the left eye opened slowly. Giriji remained absorbed in deep meditation. Her eyes were closed with the bhav of meditation but her consciousness was fully awake.

Giriji said, "Yes, yes, yes, that day, exactly this happened."

During the darshan witnessed by Giriji she had seen (ethereally), a big boat, along with a kandari (helmsman), for the crossing of Bhabasagar (the ocean of samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth). Giriji and the kandari were on the boat.

MA, while sitting at Jodhpur, had also witnessed the same and had seen that She was with Giriji on that boat. Giriji asked the kandari, "I have already achieved the crossing, (but) those who are standing on the banks, what will happen to them? Without them I will not go." Giriji then asked the kandari again, "Will you allow them to cross (the Bhabasagar)?"

The kandari replied three times, "Yes, certainly I'll allow them to cross."

At that time, Giriji was thinking that "for such a long time I have wished for the welfare of the devotees who are under my shelter." She prayed, "Hey Bhagawan! Let everyone proceed towards You, do not let anyone experience again the agony of birth, the trials and tribulations of this human life, the direction of bhog (suffering)."

As soon as this bhav came into her mind, she again saw the vighraha (kandari). He was ascending a staircase along with Giriji and a dog was following them. Giriji saw the dog, in the form of Dharma. Giriji asked the vighraha, "Who are you? Are you male or female?"

"I am neither a woman, nor am I a man." The vighraha was wearing a white cloth and had long black hair.

Giriji then said to the vighraha, "Yudhishtira also had to have narak-darshan (darshan of hell), those under my shelter should not have narak-darshan."

The divine apparition said loudly, "No, no, no, those under your shelter will not have narak-darshan. Where there is Hari Naam, there is no question of narak."

There was again a sudden change in Giriji's darshan. She saw a kingdom of everlasting light. Suddenly a question came in her mind, "Where is the kingdom where you can see the ones who are sheltered?"

The vigraha pointed in one direction and said, "They are there, according to their own stithi and sthor (stages and states of achievement). The difference is due to their different levels (of realisation). The stithi of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra, are as per their karma."

Giriji asked the vigraha thrice, "They won't have to suffer any decline (in stithi and sthor)?"

The vigraha replied thrice, "No, they will not suffer any decline."

Then, the vigraha and Giriji were alone in one place. The description given by her was, "The place was such that from there, whether it was Earth or anywhere else, everything could be seen. At that place, there was no day nor night, neither darkness nor light, a deep pervading tranquility – what was there or not there, nothing could be said – impossible to describe or understand."

On that day her bhav was, "Unless everyone receives mukti (liberation), what is the use of mukti? No one, including animals, birds, insects, trees should suffer the pain of birth and death."

Didima stayed on her asan in the room for many hours, and then, after twilight, she came and sat under the bel tree and performed kirtan and then distributed prasad to Yogibhai, Swami Prakashanandji and others who were there. Her bhav, at that time, was such that she thought she would lie down in front of Shivji and not get up again.

She said, "There was no unease, everything was happening as the thoughts came. Suddenly it was seen that your MA was there along with Udas. I understood that my body would remain. The previous day, your MA had indigestion, stomach pain and I had caressed the stomach for a long time." (This had taken place in the subtle realm).

MA added, "That night there was something like pain in This Body and stomach. When you came near, you affectionately caressed at times – that kheyal had come."

Seeing the sudden presence of MA, the thought regarding Her health came to Giriji's mind and eagerly she asked MA, "How are you? From where have You come now?"

MA replied, "Came to see you."

Giriji saw that MA was wearing only a red saree. Seeing the lack of warm clothes on MA, she asked, "Don't You feel cold?"

"They keep (This Body) like that," MA replied. "Look, asked for water at that time, and they didn't give."

MA had called someone, asking for water, in Jodhpur, but no one was available. Later water was given to MA and on that particular day, MA drank a lot of water. On that day too, a devotee in Jodhpur had adorned MA in a red saree and had performed puja on Her.

Giriji said, "Have You come to stop me?"

"Won't you look at me?" MA asked.

"I am looking," Giriji replied. MA kept on looking at Giriji and saw that both her eyes were shut and not opening. Then first, the right eye opened. MA kept on looking at Giriji and did not move Her eyes. In front of MA's vision, Giriji kept on lying in that manner, for a long time.

As She was leaving, MA said, “A bhav was made to start in you that will not let you leave – a response was given in your inner self so that you cannot go.” MA then gave Giriji a flower from the head of Shiva and placed it in her hand. Everyone in Kankhal that was near Giriji at that time, though unaware of the inner events taking place, had actually seen a flower from Shivji's head fall onto Giriji's hand.

After this, Giriji could feel the sensation of life return. Slowly, she regained her senses and was able to get up. On that day, this type of condition was experienced by Giriji twice – once, near the tulsi plants and another time, under the bel tree – both of which were witnessed by MA (in the subtle realm).

MA reached Vindhyachal at 2:30 a.m, on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1963 for a fortnight along with Didima, Udasji, Vimaladi, Narayan Swamiji, and others. MA was extremely unwell, yet She was being completely attentive towards everybody's satisfaction.

During a discussion, MA was lying in Her bed, and Giriji was sitting on a cane stool in front of Her, when MA began to talk again about the incident of Giriji, in Haridwar. Giriji said that she had seen that someone had arrived in a boat, wearing a white garment, but could not understand who it was – at times it seemed like MA, and at times it seemed like Krishna. That person said, “Get on the boat and (I) will take you.” Giriji boarded the boat and saw that a lot of her disciples (those who had taken diksha from her) and MA's bhaktas were standing on the bank. When the boat was about to leave, she asked, “Won't they go? Without them, I'll not go.” The one who had brought the boat, assured her that everyone would also go.”

When Didi came to know about Giriji's vision, she had some concern. Perhaps she was worried she would not be included, perhaps she was worried she would be included. Didi started a conversation with MA saying that she had heard that some of MA's bhaktas and Giriji's disciples were seen standing on a bank. Immediately, before she could say anything else, MA got up from the bed and said playfully with a smile, “You keep preoccupied with MA throughout the day and night – who will see you?” and She stood near the bed.

Didi performed pranam on MA and said, “Bless me, MA, that I can stay with You at all times. I am uneducated and have no requirement to get on the boat. (Bless me) so that I can be with You always.”

MA arrived in Delhi on the 12th. On the 14th, Didima's Sanyas Utsav was celebrated in grand style, including discourses by Shri Mahesanandaji and Nrisinha Giri and fireworks at night. There was great joy in that Didima was still there, with everyone, in the body. There was no one like Didima.

One time, MA was talking about Didima and Her childhood, mentioning all the moves that the family had to make. “Going from Vidyakut to Kheora, and later from Kheora to Vidyakut – it was like moving from this room to another. Dhara-chara (the desire to acquire or the desire to be rid of), abhav-abhiyog (wants and complaints) – one couldn't find an iota of indication in this regard. One could see no sign of her liking or disliking any place. Even moving from one place to another – she would be the same. Whether any place was pleasing or unpleasant, she would always be calm and serene, always in the path of truth.”

MA went to Dehradun by car with Hemidi and two sanyasis on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 19363. Throughout the journey, MA kept talking about Giriji's earlier life and her endurance, devotion and sadhan-bhajan. She told a story from Her childhood. One time, the roof of their mud house had blown away during a storm, but Dadamoshai

(MA's father) had no kheyal (attention) towards it and he sat there, singing bhajans while strumming an ektara (one stringed musical instrument). The young MA watched her mother watching her father. Didima just sat there calmly, accepting her husband's detachment to worldly life, as he sang devotional songs; she had no feeling of complaint or irritation. Her firm belief was that everything that happened was as per God's wish, and what was happening, and what would happen, was as God wished.

During Giriji's childhood and in the grihasthashram (householder's life), she never had any quarrel or disagreement with anyone. No one ever saw even a trace of anger in her. Even if she had faced any injustice, she did not have any feelings of reproach. The neighbours would turn to Didima to mediate in cases of conflict.

MA said, "It was seen that, after finishing all the work in the household, (when Ma) sat down to eat in the afternoon – if suddenly a guest would arrive, she would offer the same to the guest cheerfully and she would eat only a small bit and drink water – and (Ma) would remain so throughout the day." MA was a child during that period and seeing her mother not eating, MA would say, "Ma, you have not eaten anything." Didima would laugh and say, "I just had it." She would look at the guest as Narayan and would be satisfied with the joy of serving the guest. Even within her own family, Didima would not take a bite of food until all others were fed to their satisfaction, even if nothing remained. MA also added that during Her childhood, She would love to eat the radha-sakh (type of leaves) with rice, cooked by Didima.

There are many stories of Didima's selflessness in regard to food. One day in Dehradun, Didima was having some fruits in the morning, while some of her disciples came to perform pranam. Soon after, her sevika Vimaladi, came into the room with a plateful of food for her. Didima started distributing the food brought for her among those present leaving hardly anything for herself.

Basanti Misra asked her, "Didima, you have given away everything, what will you have?"

Without being the slightest bit perturbed, she replied, "Whatever is there, will do."

Anil Ganguly wrote about another incident. "One day in Baghat house in Haridwar, Didima was sitting in a room with a basket full of mangoes. Whoever was coming to perform pranam to her, she would take out the finest mangoes and hand it to them. The mangoes which had gone bad, she kept aside.

Out of curiosity, a girl asked Didima, "Why did you keep these mangoes separately?"

Didima replied, "These are rotten mangoes. Rotten things should not be given to anyone. That is why it is kept separately."

"What will you do with those rotten mangoes?"

Didima cheerfully replied, "The rotten ones will be eaten by me."

Regarding MA's grandmother's sadhan-bhajan and devotion, MA said with extreme compassion, "The family was so dharmik (pious), that they even had to sell their land, in order to get their daughter (MA) married."

Swami Prakashanandji asked, "When MA Herself had manifested into that household, then why was there so much koshto (hardship)?"

MA laughingly replied, "Koshto would feel koshto from them."

That was Didima – capable of making suffering suffer! Didima was a living example of MA's teachings. "Bear as much as you can with patience – the more you tolerate, the more your shakti (spiritual strength) increases. When shakti increases, it

will be helpful not only to you, but you can protect others too from danger and difficulty.”

“Do not pay attention to the faults of others. It blurs the vision, defiles the mind, and adds to the load of the world’s sin. Therefore try to see only the bright side of things in whatever you perceive. It is the good and beautiful which are true and living, whereas the bad and ugly are only the shadow of what really is. If you are simple and sincere, inwardly as well as outwardly, your heart will be pure and full of joy, and your intelligence and reason sound and accurate. But no person is free from defects; God alone is perfect. By making a practice of seeing the good qualities in others, the same virtues develop in yourself, for as you think so you become.”

“At all times let forbearance be your norm. Say to yourself: ‘Lord, everything You do is for the highest good!’ Pray for the power of endurance. Nothing happens that is not an expression of God’s grace – all is His grace. Anchored in patience, enduring everything – abide by His Name and live joyously.”

This is the path and Didima offered an exquisite, flawless example. From one such as Didima, koshto itself felt koshto.

In the evening during satsang on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1963 at Dehradun, when MA was sitting with Didima, in front of the Shiv Mandir at Kishenpur, at the request of the devotees, MA narrated the incidents in Kankhal about Didima’s intention to leave her body, as well as the earlier sadhan-bhajan of Didima and how MA’s uncles had left their bodies only after informing everyone.

Regarding the essence of Dadamoshai which MA had seen in Giriji, MA told Paramanand Swamiji, “The Bhagawat Katha is conducted for the Mahapurush – that is nishkam karma. How would it be if it was held in This Body’s father’s name.” For this purpose, a Bhagawat Saptah was organised in Haridwar from 28th June till 5th July, 1963.

Dadamoshai had left his body on the bank of the Ganges in Calcutta in 1936. MA saw him celestially after he departed; he appeared in a cloudy form wearing a loin cloth. She said, “The murti (form) was of vairagya (non-attachment) – a resplendent murti of white bright dense light. Then it merged entirely with This Body.

“That is also in that Swaroop (True Nature) – what is the meaning, going to the Swaroop? Jai ta (It is what it is). Whether you call it angsha (part) or kana (miniscule piece), at all times, in all manners, in all forms – call it Prabhu (God), call it servant, form, formless, whatever you say. That itself is Swayam prakash (revelation of the Self). There, bhasa-bani (talk-words) does not happen.”

A Bhagavat Saptah was observed in MA’s presence in the Bhagat House during 28<sup>th</sup> July to 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1963 at Haridwar. The Bhagavat Saptah was arranged according to Didima’s wishes, not only for the good of the deceased person’s soul, but also purely for the love of God. This is called nishkam (selfless).

Kali puja was celebrated in MA’s presence, in Mamu’s house on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1963 at Varanasi. MA went to Mamu’s house at dusk and roamed around the area where the new Satsang Bhavan was planned. Suddenly, MA sat on the ground without an asan and continued sitting in that manner, even when an asan was brought. After some time, MA went to the courtyard of Mamu’s house where a few old films of MA were shown.

The idol of Kali Ma was quite tempestuous and fierce. Mamu performed the puja and MA distributed fruit prasad after anjali.



Kali Puja was often a time of miraculous events in MA's lila. Didima told about one particular Kali Puja in 1927. "Once a Kali puja was organised in Shahbagh, and it was decided that your MA would perform the puja. Initially, your MA put sindoor on the Kali murti and chanted a Stotra paath. After offering some flowers, Her bhav changed and She said to Bholanath, 'Put the flowers in MY hand.' Even after being given the flowers, She was unable to offer them. She then said to Bholanath, 'You perform Puja, let ME sit.' Saying so, She started laughing and went to sit on the left side of the Kali murti.

"Bholanath began to perform the puja. But first, noticing this extraordinary bhav of your MA, Bholanath told everyone, 'Please keep your eyes shut.' Even though everyone had closed their eyes, a mali (gardener) who was standing a bit further away, did not do so. Your MA said, 'Shukiya (mali's name) is still looking.' Everyone said to him, 'Either shut your eyes or go away from here.' He left.

"Only after the puja was complete, then we opened our eyes. I heard later that during the puja, Her clothes had been shed from Her body. After this, I went outside to fetch something. While going to another room, somebody told me, 'Look in MA's direction.' That is why I returned and, looking at your MA, I saw that Her face had turned bluish and Her tongue had become long and was hanging outside Her mouth. I left soon after I saw Her face."

Someone asked, "Why did you leave? Were you afraid?"

Didima replied, "Why I left, I cannot say now. At that time, having the darshan of MA in that roop (form), everyone was overwhelmed and immersed in bhav. After everything became normal, I sat near the place of puja."

Someone said, "We heard that during that time you had gone to offer anjali at MA's feet but had returned without offering the anjali. Why?"

"Yes, during the time of anjali I'd thought that I would offer anjali at your MA's charan (holy feet). But after taking the flowers and belpatra, I thought how can I offer anjali to my own Daughter? That is why those flowers and belpatra were given as anjali to the Ma Kali idol. When your MA and Bholanath sat to eat, She was telling someone, regarding me, 'Ask Ma, to whom she wanted to give anjali.' I replied, 'I wanted to offer anjali to you but ultimately gave it to Ma Kali.'"

MA had given Didima darshan in the Ma Kali roop. While she wanted to offer anjali to MA, Didima fell into the net of the all-encompassing Maya.

MA went to Agarpura ashram as per Her kheyal, without any difficulties for a week on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1964.

The next day was Makar Sankranti (when the sun turns northward) and everyone celebrated with MA. On this auspicious day, a number of devotees took diksha from Didima. Among them was Nepalda's son, Baka, who was very young. MA joked with Didima, "You've probably not had such an elderly disciple."

Didima's Sanyas Utsav was celebrated from early in the morning on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1964 at Dehradun. Beginning with Usha Aarti and Kirtan, then Aarti, Puja, and distribution of prasada, etc. At 4 p.m. MA was taken to Rishikesh and to Mr. Dikshit's land, returning at 7 p.m. Then, in MA's presence, Aarti was performed on Giriji and mahatmas gave discourses on her too.

Didima was to participate in a total of eight more Sanyas Utsavs, after the vision in which MA convinced her to remain in the body for a while longer. It was February 1963 when Didima felt that her time was complete. MA chose a different time for Her mother. Didima left the body in 1970 when she was 92 years old.

Bithika Mukerji gave a moving tribute: "Didima left us on August 7, 1970, during the Bhagawat Saptah in Hardiwar. This time she did not ask for permission. The time and place were suitable for this event which marked the end of an era. It was held at Jaipuria House, a dharmashala for pilgrims. Didima would sit next to Shree MA on the dais everyday listening to the programme. The orator described the birth of Shri Krishna. The age-old story, ever-new in the countless retelling of it, gripped the attention of the audience. Didima got up from her seat on the dais, made her pranam to Shri Krishna and returned to her seat. She was very quiet the whole day. Late at night she sat as usual in Shree MA's room for a while. When it was time for her to go to her rest, she placed her hand on Shree MA's head in blessing, saying, "You too."

"Around 1 a.m., Didima started having breathing problems. Vimaladi enquired anxiously if she should fetch Shree MA. Didima said, 'No' quite firmly. Vimaladi could see that Didima was wakeful and a little restless. She was in a quandary. Her relief was great to see Shree MA walking in and taking charge of the situation. Shree MA tried to give Didima a little honey mixed with ginger-paste, but she hardly took it in. Shree MA then massaged her chest and held her almost in her arms. She went on calling her, 'Ma, Ma, Ma'. Didima answered in one syllable which sounded like 'Om'.

"Didima showed herself fully conscious in the last few minutes, as she raised her joined palms slightly and moved them from side to side around her. It was a pranam, a farewell gesture of leave taking. She then raised her eyes to Shree MA's face and thus, breathed her last breath.

"She had been a personification of desireless benevolence toward all. Now, she would no more give succour to the hearts of her disciples, listening to their troubles and tribulations. A veritable Ganga, an all-encompassing confessional for the washing away of sins and sorrows, was forever withdrawn, or perhaps not, who knows!

"Shree MA sat in Didima's room clasping her body, for many hours. MA said later, "When I saw Paramananda enter the room and roll up his sleeves, I knew he would now send Ma away, so I then put her down." Shree MA's ever-radiant smile was overshadowed by Her tears falling freely. It has been written again and again that Shree MA was never seen to grieve over a death, and indeed, as per Her Swaroop, She did not grieve now. Yet, MA kept Her Swaroop veiled, and Her kheyal portrayed the emotion of a daughter grieving her mother. It is difficult to describe the poignancy of the lamentations of Shree MA over the death of Her mother. Still, She went on smiling to people as they flocked to the dharmashala on hearing the sad news. She would say to them, 'Ma did not even give me a chance to sit with her for a while. So many times she used to say, "Have you a little time now?" And I would say, "Right after this appointment I'll have enough time," but alas, I never had time to listen to her or converse with her. Always there were pressing matters which came first. How patiently she waited for This Body to find a little time for her but (I) hardly ever could do so!'

"So MA talked about her mother while Swami Paramanandji made all arrangements for the samadhi at the Kankhal Ashram. All rituals and rites attending to the internment of an ascetic were set in motion with scrupulous care. The sadhus of the monastic order to which Didima had belonged assumed responsibility for the last rites. The next morning, her body was brought to the ashram and during twilight after the abhishek, aarti and bathing of the body, she was given samadhi in the ashram premises. The solemn internment ceremonies were carried out with the

greatest circumspection and honour. MA attended all engagements bestowing Her own vibrant radiance on them and enhancing their excellence.

“The end of the year saw the laying of the foundation stone of a Samadhi Mandir, a temple to house Didima's samadhi. Shree MA returned to Kankhal for this function after Her extensive travels between the two events.”

In all the pictures of Didima, we see her elderly, usually serious, and with a shaved head, looking as Abbot George had said, “like my great uncle.” But Anil Ganguly wrote that “from childhood, Mokshada Sundari Devi was extremely beautiful. Her face was like the smooth well-proportioned moon. Her serene, gentle eyes were akin to the brightness of the shining moon. This was there till the last day of her life, becoming ever brighter over time.”

Chandandi noted that from the worldly point of view, we have Didima and MA, Mother and Daughter. But underlying this view, it is only MA in these two forms. Where the One alone is in two forms, the second entity, in fact, is One only. It is MA alone, the receptacle for self-revelation as the body of Her mother – Herself creating Herself in that different form.

**This humble tribute on Didima has been written by Ms. Marcie Romano on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2021 taking reference from The Holy Chronicle 1958-1964, first edition, Books and articles written by Ms. Bithika Mukerjee, Sri Somesh Banerjee, Mr. George Abbot, Mrs. Basanti Moitra, Sri Anil Ganguly, Didi's diaries and Svakriya Svarasamrtita written by Brahmacharini Kumari Chandan Puranacharya.**