

MA ANANDAMAYEE
AMRIT VARTA

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MATRI VANI

To frequent the company of saints, sages and seekers after Truth is the bounden duty of man.

Association of this kind will help to awaken his interest in that which is Real. (*Sadbuddhi*).

The more consistently one seeks the fellowship of the spiritually minded the greater will be the good.

* * * * *

Whenever no opportunity can be found for coming into the physical presence of the holy and the wise, it behoves one to contemplate *Vasudeva*, the divine Dweller in every human heart. By cultivating His Presence one has to prepare oneself. One should choose activities and surroundings that are apt to induce Godly thoughts and aspirations. (*sadbhāva*).

* * * * *

Just as without the help of teachers and experts one cannot become proficient in the worldly knowledge taught at universities, even so the sublime Knowledge of the Absolute does not come without the guidance of a competent Guru. To find him is the problem, be it for spiritual progress, liberation, or anything, down to the smallest detail.

* * * * *

In one form or another the grace of the Guru must be obtained. Until the Guru has been found it is man's duty to invoke and to try and realize God by looking upon all forms as His Form, all names as His Name and all modes of being as His.

* * * * *

Tell everyone to abide in fortitude and in total surrender to lay all matters at His Feet.

* * * * *

Verily, He is in all shapes and in all states of being. Whatever comes to pass at any time, it is He who either causes it to happen or does it Himself or knows about it. In all things rely wholly on Him.

* * * * *

Adversity will surely befall man. Bear it like a hero, armoured in patience and fortitude. Accepting what comes as His dispensation, endeavour to seek refuge in Him alone.

* * * * *

It is desire that causes sorrow, but the will to God-realization is itself felicity. Be certain that He will cleanse and comfort you and take you into His arms. This trouble has come to lead you to happiness. At all times hold Him in remembrance.

* * * * *

Nothing should be done in a hurry. One has to be anchored in patience. Whatever He may assign to you, try to take it upon yourself as His gift, joyfully.

* * * * *

More often than not God destroys disaster by adversity. Complete trust in Him through foul and fair is what is wanted.

* * * * *

No evil can ever betide him who cleaves to God's name. What one suffers is in exact keeping with the nature of one's actions. If the flow of God's Name is sustained, all work will beget the good.

* * * * *

Wherever God may place you at any time and under whatever circumstances, recollect that it is all for the best. Endeavour to go through life leaving your burdens in His hands. He is the preserver, He is the guide, He is all in all.

* * * * *

In times of affliction one must persevere in patience. Although distress and danger certainly are part of man's lot, yet will then be conquered by one who can meet them with courage and calm.

Conditions vary. During spells of misfortune it is necessary to rely on Him with even greater fervour. There is no knowing through what mishap he may wipe out peril. Sometimes He actually removes danger by adversity. This is why He is called Dispeller of Danger — Saviour.



"MA ANANDAMAYEE PRASANG"

by

Prof. A. K. Dutta Gupta

[Translated from Bengali]

Dehradun, Kishenpur Ashram, 23rd May, 1941

In the afternoon, some ladies of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's family arrived to meet Ma. They raised the subject of general unrest in the world.

Ma said : "There is bound to be unrest as long as duality reigns. It lies in the nature of worldly things to produce unrest. Hence it is essential to be ever engaged in activities prompted by one's true nature, that is to say, to do God's work. To perform service to mankind is also very good. By such work the mind is purified. But to do service by fits and starts will not lead to peace. Where there are two, strife and unrest are unavoidable. If you engage yourself in ceaseless, uninterrupted service directed to Him, then only by His mercy the waters of the river of knowledge will wash away all your desires and doubts, and only then will you be at peace."

One of the ladies asked Ma for a cure for insanity.

Ma replied : "I have only one kind of medicine with me. I have just spoken to you about it. This body does not prescribe any specific remedy for anybody. There is general suffering in the world. Suffering produces a similar effect. That is why I always stress that constant remembrance or contemplation of God is the only way to Supreme Peace for mankind."

Truth and Untruth

Late that evening Nepalada (the late Narayan Swamiji of our Ashram) was reading from the Mahabharata, and translating it immediately into Hindi. This continued upto 10 p.m., and thereafter various topics came up for discussion.

Ma said : "I arrived at the station and saw Bhupati boarding the train. I went for a drive to the station."

Myself : I had already presumed this.

Ma : How did you do so ?

Myself : You came down to enquire whether Bhupati babu had left for the station or not, and later learnt that you had proceeded to Dehradun by car, so I surmised that you had a *kheyāla* concerning Bhupati babu, and that you had gone to the station to meet him.

Ma : When I came down from upstairs, I had the *kheyāla* that as Lakshmi Tankha usually comes to see me at about this time, so if she happened to bring her car, it would be possible for me to go to the station. In actual fact, there and then I saw Bhupati.

Myself : Then why did you enquire if his tonga had left the ashram when you came down ?

Ma : What else could I say ? I have to say something. I knew full well that Bhupati had said good-bye to me and that I came downstairs much later, so Bhupati could not be here anymore. Nevertheless, I asked the question. Do you know what this means ? A semblance of ignorance in the presence of knowledge. Did I not tell you the other day that I am now exactly as I was in my childhood ? Yet, when all the various *lilas* of *sadhana* were being enacted by this body, there was this outward semblance of ignorance. This now is something similar.

After remaining silent for sometime, Ma continued : "What you call telling a lie, is not what I am talking about now. If you know something and you falsify it deliberately, then this is called telling a lie. But if, in different states of being, you speak of the same thing quite differently, then this is not telling an untruth. Because if you talk according to the state you are in, it is true at that stage."

Saturday, 24th May, 1941

In the morning Nepaldada was reading from the Mahabharata as usual in the front veranda of the ashram. Sri Sri Ma was seated on an asana near the staircase. At this time a few local ladies arrived with a basket of fruit to see Ma. They performed their pranama to Ma and placed the basket before Her. Ma smiled gently, and pointing to Nepaldada, She said : "Place the basket near the reader. Let us see which way his mind goes."

Hearing Ms's words all started laughing. Nepaldada smiled and asked Ma, "Does the mother test her son making him aware of his greediness? Suppose he fails to control his craving in the presence of the coveted articles ?"

Ma : It has been done because it is certain that he will remain indifferent.

Nepaldada : Is it not wise to keep away from temptation ?

Ma : During the first stages of *samyam*, it is wise to keep away from temptation, because otherwise lack of control may set in, that is to say, one may be unable to control the senses. Later, when one has become somewhat firm, it is better to try and practise self-control by having desirable objects near at hand. Why should the need ever arise to run away at the sight of desirable objects ? And even when fleeing to the jungle, is there any deliverance ? There also desire for objects may make its appearance. So it is necessary to remain concentrated on one's Goal under all circumstances. It is He who appears before us in all forms; if one cultivates this attitude and arrives at this actual knowledge, then only can one be at complete rest and ease.

Nepaldada : How will I realise that I have become sufficiently strong ?

Ma : When the fruit ripens, this need not be announced. Its colour and smell proclaim its condition.

The reading from the text was taken up again. After a while Ma indicated that the fruits should be cut into pieces, saying, "The child is hungry, and cannot wait any longer". She distributed the job between two or three persons. When all the fruits were cut up, Ma ate only a tiny bit Herself, and asked that the *prasada* should be distributed among all present. This task fell to the lot of Sadhan Brahmachari. He was not very keen on this type of job, but because it was Sri Ma's order, he was compelled to do it. Ma laughed and said, "I often give tasks to people which they do not relish."

In the afternoon Sevaji and some other ladies came to meet Ma. They all went upstairs to Ma's room, while we sat downstairs in the hall, conversing. A little later Nepaldada came and told us, "Come to Ma's room and see the fun."

So we went to Ma's room, where we found Her sitting on Her bed and laughing. Sevaji and the other ladies were seated in front of Ma. On seeing me, Ma said, "I have made this situation in order to have some fun with Seva. I said to her, 'Today we are going to Meerut, so check my pulse to see if I am fit to travel such a distance by bus'. As soon as she touched me, this has become her condition. The hand with which she touched me had remained so long suspended in mid-air, only now it has dropped down, but she cannot open her eyes nor move her body."

I then perceived that Sevaji was sitting like a piece of stone. There was no movement in her body. Her eyes were closed as if in meditation. On noticing her condition. I asked Ma, "Is she now unconscious ?"

Ma : No, she is quite conscious. She can hear what I say, but cannot open her eyes.

Saying this Ma smilingly asked Sevaji : "Are you now going to sit like this indefinitely ?" Sevaji smiled gently, but could not open her eyes.

Ma told me, "So you see, she can hear my words, but cannot reply or open her eyes. There is not the slightest artificiality in her condition. Had she not heard my words, her facial expression would not have changed at all. If she were able to speak, she would have replied on hearing my question. She will not do anything deceitfully."

A gentlemen : Is this a kind of inert samadhi ? (*jada samadhi*).

Ma : Not quite, but something on this line.

Nepaldada : Why does this happen ?

Ma : She has something in her which induces such a condition. But Seva herself is not aware of this trait of hers. She is as simple as a child. It is not at all difficult to make her laugh or cry.

"They are two sisters. They used to cook their own food and perform their own household chores. But from her early years Seva had a strong inclination to study. So her father educated her and her younger sister also. Having earned a little, Seva bought a piece of land and built a house on it. Ultimately she got her younger sister married, and the house she built at a cost of Rs. 16,000/- or Rs. 17,000/- she donated to her sister. Seva says, "What will I do with a house or property ? If necessity arises I can always beg for my food." Her brother-in-law's people wanted her also to donate the piece of land she possessed at the time of the wedding, and it was not as if Seva was unwilling. But her other relatives dissuaded her from doing so. You should know that God looks after the welfare of those who are indifferent to possessions."

"Seva's trust is so childlike that she invariably believes without doubting anything that people tell her. Seva became very friendly with a woman who used to

associate frequently with her. On observing this I warned Seva that she should not associate so closely with householders. On hearing this she exclaimed, "Ma, what is this you are saying ? This woman calls me 'sister' and loves me so dearly. Furthermore she is so deeply religious. She is always talking about God and often becomes absorbed in meditation. What harm is there in my going to her house ?"

"On hearing these words, I did not say anything more to her. Had I then forbidden her to associate with that woman, Seva would have in her simplicity informed her friend that I had instructed Seva not to visit her. This would not have been good as the woman might have felt hurt. Seva used to stay in this woman's house whenever she visited Hardwar. I could see that the woman's character was not what Seva imagined and so I persuaded Seva to stay in Baghat House instead, and she finally obeyed. Seva has passed her Medical Doctor's degree, so one cannot say she is devoid of intelligence. But she has not much worldly shrewdness."

"After hearing all this, Gopi Baba (Mahamahopadhaya Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj) once asked me whether or not this worldly knowledge could be acquired at a later date. I replied, "Yes, this could be so, but if, in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, true knowledge is once attained, then there is no danger of deception anymore. That is why so much emphasis is laid on regular spiritual practice."

"It is not that Seva was very religious minded from her childhood. She then never pondered whether God existed or not, or whether one should try to realise Him or not. But she had a strong urge to be truthful and she led a pure life. For all these reasons her character was very pure. That is why certain things have such effect on her bodily functions. Not only by touching me does she attain such a state, she even does so sometimes as soon as she enters my room. At times she would tell me that as soon as she enters my room, she feels a sort of electric current passing through her, and therefore her body becomes dizzy. That is why she would sit down motionless and mum. She does not behave like this at all times, but fairly often this sort of thing is happening. On the other hand, I have noticed that when she has helped me to have my bath or dry my body, there has been no change perceptible in her. So when I chided her by saying that these sudden changes in her bodily condition were nothing but some type of hysteria, because she has at those times touched me so frequently without such consequences, she would laugh and say : "No, no, all this is not hysteria at all."

"When engaged in meditating also, at times Seva was unable to move. One day one Inspector was expected to arrive to inspect their work. She had dressed specially

for the occasion, and was waiting for him, but as the Inspector seemed to be delayed, Seva thought she would spend the time profitably in meditation. As soon as she sat down, she entered that state of absorption ! So who was there to receive the car or approach the Inspector ? This however had no undesirable consequences."

"Even now Seva sometimes enters into those states. On occasions she was ready to visit me when such a condition happened. If then she has the power of speech, she told, "If you all will take hold of me, and put me in a car, I shall be alright", because she knows she will be normal within a short time. At other times, she cannot even speak. I have often told her to resign from her job, but she says that she wants to continue her work."

"In the beginning she could not exactly understand what this condition of hers was. Later, when she became aware that she reached such a state when sitting down to meditate, she imagined that such a state was a part of the process of meditation ! Now, of course, she understands that she reaches such a condition because deep meditation comes about. In this way inner knowledge is revealed by bits. Even without somebody else's explanation, this kind of knowledge goes on revealing itself, and it is not too difficult to understand the true state of one's condition. While very often the revelation of such knowledge awaits the guidance of the Guru. When the Guru arrives himself and explains to the disciple exactly his condition, it is only then that he attains unquestionable knowledge of the Reality. That is why our scriptures maintain that without receiving Divine wisdom from the Guru, true knowledge of the Divine Being cannot be obtained."

"The real reason why Seva reached such a condition whenever she touched me was due to the fact that the sight and touch of this body immediately directed her outward sensory perception inwards towards the Self. The momentary stillness of her limbs, her inability to open her eyes, all this is the result of intense meditation (*dhyana*). It is not that others cannot reach identical states, but because their doors are shut, outward manifestation of it does not take place. Seva's character is so pure and unspoilt, that this attainment of outward manifestation is easy for her and happens naturally."

[To continue]

WHO IS A HINDU ?

— Lt. Gen. J.C. Chatterji (Retd)

Prior to this I stated my view that most of us Hindus, including educated ones, do not know why we call ourselves Hindus. We have hardly any idea of Hinduism, not to speak of the masses who only follow or perform rituals for some boon or some other considerations. However, rituals properly performed purify the mind and help towards attainment of the goal of Realisation of God.

I wrote earlier that I do not question any of those who are diffident to call them as Hindus. I found the answer to my unasked questions in the article written by Gurcharan Das in 'The Times of India'— 'I am a Hindu but...'. He sensed an unhappy defencelessness from a friend of his son—His 'but' betrayed that he was ashamed at being called a Hindu. Another encounter of his was with the Principal of a college who asked him to talk to his students. But when he mentioned that he wanted to talk about 'Dharma and the moral dilemmas of the Mahabharata', the Principal was horrified because of the probable adverse reactions of some secularists in the governing body. Mr. Das comments, "I ask myself why should these successful young professionals be embarrassed of their heritage— Hindutwa? Indian-ness or cultural Nationalism has confused our young generation ? Hinduism is a liberal religion. This has been practiced and stated time and again by Hindu saints (if you do not like to call them *avatāras*) like Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who practiced and preached liberalism of Hindu religion. Secularism gives due respect to all religions. So who is secular ? A true Hindu or the so-called secularists, viz, some intelligentsia, who decry some religious or even some moral and ethical traditions connected with them based on their professional atheism or personal views on religion or hypocrisy for their personal aggrandizement ? Some politicians (so-called secularists) do the same for their ulterior motives.

Why should a Hindu be ashamed to call himself a Hindu ? Where does the problem arise - at home, in society or in the community led by politicians ? All of them to some extent.

At home materialism overrides or even ignores spiritual attitudes, schools do not even teach moral and ethical values, not to speak of spiritual matters. So both parents and teachers are responsible for this state of affairs, viz, a Hindu is ashamed to call himself as such. Society only responds to celebrations on communal lines and the government is 'secular' !

Before proceeding further, I want to quote from a letter in 'The Statesman', 'In 'Young India' Gandhiji himself declared, "I call myself a *sanatani* Hindu, because i) I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures and therefore in *avatāras* and rebirth ii) I believe in the *Varnāshrama Dharma* which is in my opinion strictly Vedic, but not in the present popular and crude sense iii) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense, than the popular one iv) I do not believe in idol worship."

The writer, however, criticizes Gandhi — "Often posing as a secularist, Gandhi was an orthodox Hindu..." like few others. But majority of Indians consider Gandhi as secular. I include the name of Mahatma Gandhi in this discussion so as to counter the views of one against my proposals as detailed below :

a. In schools at an appropriate stage a book on 'Moral Science' to be introduced where selected stories or tales from the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, Buddhist scriptures, the Bible and other books on morals and ethics, like Aesop's Fables and Panchatantra. Knowledgeable people may select suitable stories from other religious scriptures too.

b. There are schools where religions are taught at an early age. So long fundamentalist views and perverted practices are not taught, there should be no objection. But strict supervision is required for that. Surely a sensible government can do it.

c. During my few visits to USA, I heard that in Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures are read and explained in simple language so that children comprehend the basic tenets of Hinduism. I visited one temple in Columbia where classes are regularly held on the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and other Hindu scriptures.

I suggest similar classes by all Hindu organizations for children, who do not have religious instructions in schools, starting with preliminary lectures on Hinduism, its liberalism and why we call ourselves Hindus and not be ashamed to call oneself a Hindu. Hindu families (the society) should be involved in this.

"If we are not part of the SOLUTION, then we are the PROBLEM" — The Pioneer

Jai Ma.

MĀ ĀNANDAMAYEE— AN EMBODIMENT OF SATCHIDANANDA

— Prof. Bireshwar Ganguly

One can understand the unique and mystic personality of Mother only after attaining Ānandamayee - consciousness, which is tantamount to Sachchidānanda - consciousness. Of course, I consider the advent of Mā Anandamayee on our earth as the most important event in the spiritual history of India in the Kali yuga.

As stated by Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj¹, in a private interview with the late Swami Dayānanda of the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal (and not Swami Dayānanda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, who died in 1883) in which Dr. Kaviraj was present, the Swamiji put several questions to Mother, which were answered spontaneously thus:-

Swamiji — Mataji, what are you in fact ? People hold different views regarding you and no agreement seems to exist. What have you to say yourself ?

Mother — You want to know what I am. Well, I am what you consider me to be — not more — not less.

Swamiji — What is the nature of your *samādhi* ? Is it '*savikalpa*' or '*nirvikalpa*' ? Does mind then exist ?

Mother — Well, it is for you to decide the question. All that I can say is that in the midst of all apparent changes of state in body and mind, I feel, I am aware that I am always the same. I feel that in me there is no change of states. Call it by any name you like. Is it *samādhi* ?

In *Mātri Darshan* (Bengali),² by Bhāiji (one of Mother's earliest and chief devotees, who gave Her the name Ānandamayee Mā) Mother's own account of different stages of *samādhi* are mentioned as *chitta samādhāna*, *bhāva samādhāna*, *vyakta samādhāna* and *purna samādhāna*. Dr. Kaviraj has summarised Mother's statements on the last two stages in the following words: "The third state is called *vyakta samādhāna*. In this condition the fire of knowledge burns as fully within the individual as it does outside. The soul is then absorbed in one undivided Universal Being. Even in this state the duality of forms and formless persists. But in the next stage which represents perfection and is called *purna samādhāna* all sorts of dualities melt away, having been forever transcended in the Supreme Unity of the Absolute Truth. This state is Transcendent and yet Immanent, is *nirguna* as well as *saguna*, *sākāra* as well as *nirākāra*, at one and the same time, and yet it transcends

both. This is really the so-called *bhāvātita* condition, free from the ripples of thought vibrations. This is *samādhi* in the proper sense of the word, for it signifies *samādhāna* or completion of every sort of activity and thought, a state beyond ignorance as well as beyond knowledge."

This appears to be the highest perfection of *nirvikalpa samādhāna*. Mother says that in this state all the activities of the body, even the vibration of the cells, are stopped and that if the condition continues for a long time the body is likely to be destroyed. But one whose descent has for its object the welfare of the world, continues in body as long as such continuance is necessary in the interest of humanity. This is a state of *mahāyoga* and is to be sharply distinguished from the *yoga* of the ordinary class. While an ordinary *yogi* retains his sense of physical identity to the last moment of his life and is subject to action, a *mahāyogi* is above such limitations and is immune from the necessity of any action initiated by himself.³

Though Nirmalā Devi (Mother Ānandamayee) of Kheora in Tripura district (now Brahmanbaria district of Bangladesh) was *janmasiddhā* (enlightened from birth) and *swayamsiddhā* (self-enlightened without the help of a guru), She got Her self-initiation at Bajitpur (now in Bangladesh) on the day of Jhulan Purnimā in 1922 at the age of 26 and there were automatic manifestations of *āsana*, *prānāyāma*, *mantra-uchchārana*, ecstasy etc. for some time and Her worldly husband Baba Bholanath (Ramani Mohan (Chakravarti) was initiated by Her as Her first and only disciple in the same year. Once during this period of so-called *sādhanā*, Baba Bholanath and Nishi Babu (Kaviraj) asked Mother after *vyuththāna* (emergence) from a spell of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, "Who are you?" Slowly came the sweet reply, "*Purna Brahma Nārāyana*". Then Baba Bholanath asked Her, "If you are *Purna Brahma Nārāyana*, then who am I ? Mother replied, "*Mahādeva*". Bholanath asked Her again, "If I am *Mahādeva*, then who are you ?" Mother's emphatic reply was, "The same, *Mahādeva* as well as *Mahādevi*"⁴

After commenting on the state of *mahāyoga*, Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj observes : "It is evident from the above that the state of *mahāyoga* bears a faint resemblance to Mother's own condition, with this difference that while *mahāyoga* is the logical culmination of a series of prior *sādhanās*, Mother's state, as such, was not evolved in that way. It has appeared with Her and will disappear with Her."⁵

After dismissing the hypothesis that She is an *Avatāra* (incarnation of God Vishnu), Gopinathji concludes his views on Mother in the following way:

"If is therefore a very difficult task to try to describe Mother as She really is. She has appeared differently to different persons and even if these differences are contradictory we can quietly accept them, knowing fully well that in a higher

synthesis even contradictions may meet together.... Naturally we do not and cannot know all the phases of Mother's life... What is really needed is to feel that She is our Mother and we are Her children, and that as mere children we cannot be expected to know Her as She is." ⁶

There is absolutely no doubt that Mother was a *sthitaprajna*, as described in the second chapter of *Shrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, from her very childhood.

"When a man completely casts away, O Partha, all the desires of the mind, satisfied in the Self alone by the Self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom.

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after happiness, who has become free from affection, fear and wrath, is indeed the *muni* of steady wisdom."⁷

The above state is the goal of all *sādhakas*, who follow the path of *sāmkhya* or *jnāna yoga*, and such a *muni* attains *Brahmanirvāna* at the end of this life.

"Being established therein, even at the end of life, a man attains to oneness with *Brahman*" ⁸

In the *Kali yuga*, Buddha and Ramana Maharshi are fine examples of *sthitaprajna*-hood.

The devotees of God, after attaining this condition also exhibit *parābhakti* (sublime devotion), and enter into or merge with god, after leaving this body.

Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrī Rāmakrishna Paramahansa are two of the best models of *sthitaprajna parā bhakta*, apart from the fact that they are also considered as *avatāras* of Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna.

In the words of Śrī Aurobindo, the goal of Hindu *sādhana*, as described in the *Gītā* is the following.

"To exceed himself was their goal for the individual, not by losing all his personal aims in the aims of an organised human society, but by enlarging, heightening, aggrandising himself into the consciousness of the Godhead. The rule given here by the *Gītā* is the rule for the Masterman, the Superman, the divinised human being, the best, not in the sense of any Nietzschean, any one-sided and lop-sided, any Olympian, Apollonian or Dionysian, any angelic or demoniac supermanhood, but in that of the man where the whole personality has been offered up into the being, nature and consciousness of the one transcendent and universal Divinity and by loss of the smaller self has found its greater Self, has been divinised."⁹

However, a divinised superman, a *sthitaprajna* divine worker as well as a *parābhakta*, may either be an evolutionary being or an involutionary being. According

to Śri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, there is a process of spiritual evolution of the soul from lower planes to higher planes of consciousness, over and above the Darwinian process of evolution from matter to life and mind. Whereas, involution is the process by which *Parushottama Paramātmā* has come down to the lower plane of *Kshara Purusha* or *Aparā Prakriti* or material universe, in which individual souls, which are parts and parcels of the Universal Soul or *Akshara Purusha*, or *Parā Prakriti*, have their parts to play in the *leelā*, which is governed by divine laws, there is some incarnation of God to rectify the defect or to give a fresh impetus to the *Dharma Chakra* (Divine wheel of righteousness).

As Lord Krishna declares in the *Gītā* :

"Whenever, O descendant of Bharata, there is decline of *dharma*, and rise of *adharma*, then I body Myself for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of *dharma*, I come into being in every age."¹⁰

Sri Jayadev Goswami in his *Dashāvatāra Stotram* has mentioned only ten *Avatāras*, but in *Shrīmad Bhāgavatam* of Veda Vyāsa there is a mention of twentyfour *Avatāras*, with a proviso that in future there may be innumerable *Avatāras*, just as many rivers flow out of a perennial lake.¹¹ Out of the twentyfour *Avatāras* mentioned, plus other *Amshavatāras* to follow, Krishna is mentioned as *Bhagavān svayam* or *Purnāvatāra* (Plenary Incarnation) of Vishnu.¹²

In Tantric literature, Durgā and Kālī, for the destruction of demons and protection of *devatās* (lesser gods) For the destruction of Mahishāsura, the tyrant demon king, who had driven out the gods from their heavenly abode Mother Durgā assumed the beautiful form of a *Devi* (heavenly women) and took the weapons of the various gods, on the request of the gods, led by Brahmā and Indra, in front of Vishnu and Rudra.¹³

Again after the destruction of another demon king, Shumbha, Mahadevi blessed the gods of heaven and assured them that She would incarnate herself, whenever there would arise the necessity of destroying demonic forces for the protection of righteous divine beings.¹⁴

To understand the significance of Mother's statement, mentioned earlier about Herself, it is desirable to have a little background knowledge of the higher spiritual planes from where there may be a descent of the Divine power in the world of ours. Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, in one of his later works,¹⁵ has given a wonderful worldview of *Tāntric* literature in this regard. The following passage of Arlene Mazak Breuinin gives a beautiful summary of *Tāntric* cosmology as presented by Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj :

"Whereas in *Purānic* cosmology, the *Brahmānda* is the largest organization of the universe, the *Tāntric* scriptures have vastly extended this perspective. Beyond the *Brahmānda*, are the *Prakṛityānda*, the *Māyānda* and the *Śaktyānda*, each higher and incorporating within itself the lower *andas*. The yogin who can identify his body with an *anda* is the ruler of that *anda*. Hence as the yogin progresses from one sadhanic path to another, he successively identifies with Brahmā, the ruler of the *Brahmānda*, Vishnu, the ruler of the *Prakṛityānda*, Shiva the ruler of *Māyānda*, Ishvara and Sadāśiva, the co-rulers (extrovert and introvert) of the *Shaktyānda*. The five deities are the causal Lords, the *adhikārī devatās*, responsible for governing the universe."¹⁶

Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj found it difficult to assign *avatārahood* to Mother on the assumption of the possibility of descent of Lord Vishnu alone. He thus bypassed the possibility of descent of *Shiva-Shakti* from *Māyānda*. I have got the latter hypothesis tested by the tacit approval of Mother and Kavirajji in several of my talks in their presence. Mother allowed me twice to speak on this aspect, at Rajgir (1964) and Haridwar (1979), during Shiva-Rātri and Durgā Pujā respectively.

Śri Aurobindo talks about *Mahāsakti* with her four powers, viz., *Maheshwarī*, *Mahākālī*, *Mahālakshmī* and *Mahāsaraswatī*, that have stood in front in Her guidance of this universe. Though I first met Mother at Patna during the Saraswati pujā, I have found the *Mahālaksmī* aspect of Mother the most prominent one. Śri Aurobindo describes this aspect of Mother beautifully in the following paragraph :

"Wisdom and force are not the only manifestations of the Supreme Mother, there is a subtler mystery of her nature and without it wisdom and force would be incomplete things and without perfection would not be perfect. Above them is the miracle of eternal beauty, an unseizable secret of divine harmonies, the compelling magic of an irresistible universal charm and attraction that draws and holds things and forces and brings them together and obliges them to meet and unite that. A hidden *Ānanda* may play from behind the veil and make of them its rhythms and its figures. This is the power of *Mahālakshmī* and there is no aspect of the Divine *shakti* more attractive to the heart of embodied beings."¹⁷

The *sādhakas* in Śri Aurobindo *āshram* at Pondicherry are expected to surrender themselves to the Holy Mother who represents the Divine Mother for the descent of the supramental consciousness. Yogi Gopinath found such a Mother in the person of Ānandamayee Mā and totally surrendered to Her and spent the last few years of his life in Mother's *Āshram* at Varanasi.

Once he exclaimed :

"What if I don't understand the *swarupa* of my Mother, who is beyond understanding"!

In one of his letters of his last days, Kavirajji wrote to the Divine Mother : "Mother, please don't forget a love-lorn Gopi (*virahini Gopi*) in a corner of the earth who is waiting for you."¹⁸ For he knew that "the Mother's power, and not any human endeavour and *tapasyā*, can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering, Truth and Light and Life Divine and the Immortal *Ānanda*."¹⁹

In my long association with Mother, I discovered two apparently contradictory aspects of Her personality and sermons viz. (a) the absolute monism of Shankarāchārya and (b) the dualistic or qualified monistic Vaishnava Vedānta of Śri Chaitanya (as interpreted by Kavirāj Goswāmi and Śri Jīva Goswāmi) or of Rāmanujāchārya.

Her great emphasis on theistic devotion in the spiritual congregations and Her oft-repeated sermons to the devotees remind one of the Vaishnava Vedānta of Śri Chaitanya and Śri Rāmakrishna. However, if we consider her various sermons, we shall see that She was firmly established in *māyāvādi* monism. Moreover I found on many ceremonial occasions that She not only identified Herself with Goddess Durgā or Goddess Kālī theoretically, but also practically, inasmuch as, She allowed the priests to offer flowers and cooked food alternatively to the deities and to Herself. In fact She preached dualistic devotion to householder devotees and non-dualistic *Jnāna-Yoga* to *sannyāsi* devotees, while She Herself had no doubt or hesitation in identifying Herself as the Supreme Brahman or the Divine Mother. This is the *Āscharya* - aspect (wonderful and fascinating) of the *Ātman* or *Brahman* and that of the *Brahma-Jnāni* (realized soul).

The function of God's incarnations is not merely to destroy evil forces, but also to give new impetus to the *Dharma Chakra* (wheel of righteousness) and this latter aspect is amply demonstrated in the lives and teachings of Śri Rāmakrishna in the nineteenth century and Mā Ānandamayee in the twentieth century.

The brief account of Mā Ānandamayee's personality and sayings, presented above, is meant to prove that the Holy Mother is a manifestation of the Divine Mother from the supramental plane of *Māyānda* to present to mankind the model of the best of *sihitaprajnas*, of the divinised personality of a *Brahmavid Varishtha*, who combines in Her unique personality the equilibrium and compassion of Buddha, the *parā -bhakta's* ecstasy of Chaitanya, the *sarva-dharma samanvaya* of Śri Rāmakrishna, the Mahāyoga of Śri Aurobindo and the absolute monism of

Shankarāchārya, but all this integral synthesis in the divine body of the beautiful, ever-smiling motherly form, so that Her children may at last discover a lovely and affectionate *Ishta* (spiritual goal) and a supreme *guru* (world teacher) for emulation and worship.

1. Devotees: Mā Ānandamayee, pub. by Mā Ānandamayee Ashram, Benaras, 1946, p14.
2. Bhaiji, Mātri Darshan (Bengali) pp. 68-78 (Bhāiji = Late Jyotish Chandra Roy, I.S.O.)
3. Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, "Mother Ānandamayi", in *Mā Ānandamayi*, op. cit., pp. 29-30.
4. Brahmacharini Kumari Chandan, Puranacharya: *Swakriya Swarasāmrita* (Bengali), Vol IV, p. 117., Pub by Sri Virajanandaji Maharaj, Shree Shree Mā Ānandamayee Ashram, Kankhal, Haridwar (U.P.), 1983.
5. Op. cit : p. 31.
6. *Ibid* : p. 34
7. *Shreemad Bhagavad Gītā*, chap II-55-56.
8. *Ibid*, II-72.
9. Śri Aurobindo : *Essays on the Gītā*, Śri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 8th ed., 8th imp, 1987, p. 129.
10. Shrīmad *Bhagavad Gītā*, IV, 7-8.
11. Maharshi Veda Vyāsa Praneetam,
Shrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurānam,
(Sihulaksharam Mulamatram, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, Vikramabda 2020), 1st skandha.
12. *Ibid*, sloka 28.
13. *Durgā Saptashatī*, Chapter II, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, Samvat 2035.
14. *Ibid*, chapter XI, Slokas 54-55.
15. Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj: *Tāntrik Vāngmay me shākta-drishti*, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 1963 (Hindi, ed).
16. Arlene Mazak Breinin : "The Tantrik Structure of Akhanda Mahayoga" in *Navonmesa* (M. M. Gopinath Kaviraj Smriti Granth) (In English IV). Mā Ānandamayee Ashram, Varanasi, 1987, p. 16.
17. Śri Aurobindo : *The Mother*, Śri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1969. pp. 43-44.
18. E. Nilakānta Singh. "Akhanda Mahāyoga and Supramental Yoga." A study in *Navonmesa*, op. cit., p. 437.
19. *The Mother*. op. cit, p. 62.

GREETINGS FROM A EUROPEAN*

— Richard Lannoy

Some years ago I purchased a small map of India and drew a big green line over a route I planned one day to take. On the map I underlined Varanasi heavily, because I had always wanted to visit the Sacred City. But although a small inner voice told me that I might find there something remarkable, little did I dream of ever receiving such a deep experience as was eventually given to me when I stayed there for some months. That green line drawn at a moment when I never seriously considered the actual possibility of visiting India was perhaps a mark of fate, the first intimation of an inevitable event, of which, at the time, I could have little understanding. But if it was in my fate to come to Varanasi (in these days of easy travelling not so very difficult), it was with astonished wonder that I looked upon Mataji when I first saw Her. That some one so great, so full of love, some one with such a power immediately to inspire all those around Her, should really exist, filled me with amazement. Reading of Ramakrishna or Ramana Maharshi may convince one intellectually of their greatness, but my own fumbling conception of Mata Anandamayee is but a reminder of how extraordinarily ignorant I am of real spiritual greatness. We in the west have a very inadequate conception of the richness of the Hindu religion, and due to the trend of our civilization during the last few centuries we have lost the grace to live as Hindus can, near to God, with the inspiration of a living faith. Therefore it is very difficult for us to have any sensible idea of religion in India. When, therefore, one has the supreme good fortune to meet Mataji, who must surely stand at the very pinnacle of spiritual greatness, one receives that unique blessing which only direct contact can give, which is at once a revelation and so different from any previous experience. Mataji gives without limit, but never beyond the individual's capacity; it is all kindness which makes personal problems vanish; however, it is when one comes to write about Mataji that one balks at the difficulties. As a westerner I feel this very strongly, because for most of us any spiritual journey is a journey without maps, there are no green lines to help us, none of the guidance, or at least very little, to which the Indian may have recourse in the Shastras. To the Indian many elementary and a number of difficult problems are within his immediate command, his

*. Courtesy : Journal 'Ananda Varta', Vol II, No. 1

traditions come to his aid where we have either discarded or forgotten ours. Therefore, perhaps I may be forgiven if I flounder with my words, because I have no book-learning in the scriptures with which to express myself with accuracy.

It is precisely in this matter that Mata Anandamayee has such understanding; anyone from any part of the world may come to Her and receive guidance which no scholarship can ever hope to give. For my own part it has been such a deep experience to be near Mataji; because She is so clear and direct. I have been able to receive Her blessing and guidance inspite of my ignorance. The customs of another culture may prevent one from reaching any degree of understanding without having lived there for a prolonged period of time, and it is often held by Europeans that India is mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible and one may as well give up any hope of receiving serious spiritual experience there. The correct word for Mataji's conclusive ability to prove this notion entirely unfounded is hard to find, so I will call it 'Genius'. Not only for Indians, but for people from all countries, all walks of life, from every kind of society, people of great intellectual brilliance, people of worldly eminence or the most humble, it is Mataji's genius to be able to inspire them with the Love of God, to put them again in their own true centre. I had the good fortune to stay near Mataji in Her Benares and Vindhyachal ashrams for nearly a month and I was astonished to see so many different kinds of people visiting Her and to see their faces become radiant and transformed by Her Presence. If the path of sadhana be hard to live up to, something has been illuminated in the hearts of those who visit Her and which cannot be obliterated by time; this is such a great love which She gives to all, that at once the difficulties of sincere aspiration become simplified.

In the west the current trend of thought is to search for some new formulation of ideas which can stand up to the monstrous conditions of the present age. Nuclear physics, catastrophic wars and terrible human suffering have given the world problems of vast proportions which the institutionalized religion of Christianity has so far failed to encompass. Something new, or newness, therefore, has become almost a cult in the west, and nine persons out of ten would probably also say that Indian philosophy or Indian mysticism, great though it may be, is old, that what is wanted is something new. Mataji makes only too clear the fallacy of this search for the new. With Her the new is entirely irrelevant. If anything is new it is surely Her own unique way of helping you to realise instantly, at once and for all time, how to kindle the inner flame. Her genius, suddenly lights you up with happiness, inner and abiding happiness, the vitality of joy, and shows you that this can never come from cinemas or a fat bank balance, but from within. In this state of happiness She

gently guides you to the point where you can know without fear that this joy comes from God, Many people balk at the word 'God' and profess atheism or agnosticism, but that which one can receive from Her is nothing to do with any 'ism'.

As a photographer certain things have struck me as remarkable and my work changed considerably when I was taking photographs in the ashrams. Always seeking to catch Mataji's natural expression without any posing I found Her mobility too fast to render adequately, Her beautiful movements so quick that it was nearly impossible to photograph them. Too many were taken in moments of impetuous excitement; but by being completely quiet there was always a moment she gave my camera and all I needed was to close the shutter with it safely inside on the film. Mataji is constantly in movement, which is Her special way of filling everyone with vitality, with laughter and joy, a sparkling quality which has nothing to do with the hectic rush in which we usually live, but a movement which can only be appreciated in quietness. This playfulness which we find so entrancing and which animates and makes so expressive every activity in Her ashrams is a very unusual quality, so different from the stillness with which we usually associate sages. But because this mobility constantly transforms the ordinary into the unique we can glimpse the way in which all illusory charms of the world nevertheless contain an inner significance which our blunted sensibilities fail to appreciate. With what deft and astonishing charm She brings everything alive and unafraid.

To a westerner accustomed to the diversity and excitements of our fast moving life the serenity of the spiritual life is not easy to appreciate, still less to accept, because we are habitually restless. Therefore, this seemingly endless play of movement, like the play of light on water, which I associate with Mataji, helped me first by bewitching me with Her grace and the beauty of Her every movement. This eventually helped me to become quiet and see that such beauty can only proceed from absolute serenity. It can only be understood by oneself as the abiding peace when some small iota of quietness within oneself can be responsive to it. At the Varanasi and Vindhyachal ashrams there is always beauty in the person of Mata Anandamayee and beauty in everything associated with Her. Everything is animated by Her golden touch; this is not a sentimental beauty, but something powerful which only comes from greatness. It can be as gentle as the light at sunrise or it can be of a magnitude expressed by the German poet Rilke in his Elegy;

..... Beauty's nothing
 But the beginning of Terror were
 still just able to bear.
 and why we adore it so is

because it serenely
disdains to destroy us.'

Worldly life with its splendours and miseries makes us rely upon pleasurable distractions. Two problems seem to occur to the novice in the contemplative life : firstly, the beauty that may be so abundant in a place of retirement may cause distraction, secondly, fear of isolation, of being cut off or pent up in a secluded spot. I found, when in the ashram, that there was no alarming feeling of monasticism or unfamiliar seclusion from the robust world, but on the contrary here was total experience, the full vigour of life, enhanced by Mataji's inspiration, difficult to sustain and yet full of Her love. I have done many jobs, travelled in many different countries, but I found that here, to derive full benefit from this experience, I must summon up every aspect of my experience in order to respond fully. Living in the ashram one does not feel guilty of the trivialities of one's life, for it is too positive an atmosphere, but one's human relationships, one's work, one's inner problems receive a new impetus, and furthermore, a focus. The diversity and richness of the blessing given by contact with Mataji does not permit one to become dulled to a sluggish pseudo-serenity, does not make one recoil from life nor to be led away into a labyrinth of enjoyment of the beauty around one, but Her love, Her transmission of joy thrills one until one catches a glimpse of the way of love, the way to see God in all things. This harmony of life is total, not unreal; coming away from the ashram one may feel the pang of leaving, but one does not receive the shock of a sudden painful actuality, for actuality abides in the ashram more powerfully than in many a street. Mataji's love is pervasive too, captures our hearts and goes with us from the ashram, stretches beyond personal existence to inspire more than can be counted in terms of numbers and distance. So many people to-day are afraid to see what is meant by the Love of God; the two words have lost much of their original force, but what they mean and what *that can* do for us, Mataji at once shows by Her unique genius, by the inspiration of Her presence.

Words cannot very effectively express our feelings on this occasion of Her birthday, when many will be marking the event from the depths of their hearts. In other parts of the world too, although they could not show any conscious reason for rejoicing, there are many people without the opportunity to see Mataji, who would wish to join with those in India. In some of those distant countries until now concerned with the preoccupations of materialism, there are many who have grown weary of the negation which that implies, and could I but carry invisibly some of this feeling of theirs within these words of mine, then this small tribute would not have been in vain.



THE MANY SIDES OF LIFE

Life consists of joys and smiles,
Says the robust optimist
Life consists of sobs and sighs,
Says the confirmed pessimist.
Life is solely for seeking the Lord,
Says the staunch spiritualist.
Life is for the comforts of the world,
Says the gross materialist.
Life is a saga of peace and prosperity,
Says the rich and affluent.
Life is a drama of pain and poverty,
Says the poor and indigent.
Life is hilarity and a comedy,
Says the strong and stout.
Life is a calamity and tragedy
Says the pale-eyed patient.
So life can be seen in various hues,
It depends on our moods and views.

SOME REFLECTIONS

— Air Vice Marshal
Prasanna Madhava (Retd.)

The Supreme Unmanifest Reality assumed the form of a girl child and came into a family which was in near poverty. The parents gave Her in marriage at a very young age. She was extremely obedient to the parents and to the husband. After marriage, She covered Her face fully with Her sari, serving as a veil for many years, observing the prevailing custom of that time. She performed all house work including cleaning the floors, vessels, cooking etc. all with the veil covering Her face. Her obedience and service to all was an example of perfection.

Then, She revealed Herself gradually through *sāadhanā leelā*, self-initiation, initiation of husband, manifestation of exalted states of *bhāva* and *samādhi* and many other events. Within a few years, the entire spiritual world recognized Her as the highest Divine Manifestation.

Even highly evolved spiritual persons and scholars while extolling Her divinity, admitted that they could not fathom Her. The famous Pd. Gopinath Kaviraj asked Ma once, with regard to Her total obedience to parents and husband, Her doing all the menial work in their houses, Her remaining in veil etc—whether all that was 'abhinaya' (acting).

Ma explained that in acting, you play a part which you are not. Somebody writes the script, you learn it, rehearse it and play the part to an audience for entertainment. In Her case, there was no question of acting. She, Her actions and words are Herself all the time. It is *Bhagavān* playing with Himself.

In Her state of Absolute Consciousness, the question of a body for Her and a perception of the world separate from Her did not arise. Some statements of Ma like "I am not a Guru, I don't go to any place, talk to any people or eat their food" are spoken from that level. "God has no purpose", said Ramana Maharshi, again from that standpoint. When there is no division in the Consciousness and it is aware of only 'One without a second' how can the question of action or purpose arise ?

To consider the question of purpose or mission of Ma, we have to see it from our point of view with our limited consciousness and take the help of diving statements made for teaching the world. We see Ma had a body, moved from place

to place, explained spiritual topics, helped devotees at all levels to move up on the path to self realization and wherever She went, there was intense spiritual activity. We can understand this to some extent by remembering what Shri Krishna said in the Geeta, Chapter 4, Slokas 6, 7 and 8. "Though unborn and immortal, and also the Lord of beings, I manifest Myself through My own Divine potency, abiding in My cosmic nature (*prakriti*) Whenever there is decline in righteousness and unrighteousness is on the ascendant, I embody Myself for the protection of the virtuous and destruction of the evil doers and for re-establishing *dharma* (righteousness). I come from age to age".

Ma and Shri Krishna

It is fascinating to see the likeness of many things. Ma and Shri Krishna said about themselves. "*Purna Brahma nārāyana*", Ma said; and "*Purshottama*" said *Purna Avatāra* Shri Krishna. Their Supreme Consciousness of Self was always present before birth, after birth and in the eternity of time. All deities are in them. Devotees saw different deities in Ma's body at different times. Arjuna saw different deities in Shri Krishna's body also when He showed his Universal Form. Ma said, "I am the universe in its infinitude" and Krishna said that there is nothing other than Him in the world, that He is threading through everything like a string in the garland. Both upheld and reconciled the various spiritual paths in their times and showed the unity of their goals. Ma said, She is the 'Supreme Abode' concentrated in Her visible body. The words She used were '*Ghanibuta Paramālaya*'. Shri Krishna said that He is the Supreme Abode attaining which there is no return. He used the words "*Tat Dhāma Paramam Mama*" He told Arjuna, "Bow to Me, adore Me and leaving all other duties, surrender to Me". Ma indicated how to surrender to Her by saying, "What I want is one must shake one's mind free from pride, desire for glory, anger and sorrow, from self-conceit and self-will which makes a man think he is a free agent in all his actions." Sri Krishna assured deliverance to Arjuna if he surrendered. Ma indicated the same and said, "Under whatever name anyone may seek God, this child heartily welcomes Him".

The study of Shri Krishna and Ma is enlightening and makes it clear that the same *Paramātmā* manifested as Krishna then and Ma now. One question still comes up as to why God comes as father sometimes and mother sometimes. Krishna had to eliminate the evil doers using weapons at times. Ma did not show that aspect of eliminating evil doers through Her manifested person. Swami Sharanananda said that when we address God as Mother, the fear element is not there is our mind. Thus, Ma attracted all people to the spiritual path through

motherly love and not through fear. But we can see that the big tyrants and the dictators of this age have been destroyed after flourishing for a time. The unmanifest divine power of Ma must have accomplished this task, unseen by others. Of course, the simplest answer as to why She came as Mother is that it was Her *Kheyāla*, for which no cause can be ascribed.

It may surprise many who believe that Kaliyuga has still many thousands of years to go, whereas Ma said that Satyayuga is coming. She explained that She has seen its coming the same way people can see from far the engine light of a train coming at night. According to one school, Satyayuga started on 22nd April, 2004, the auspicious Akshaya Tritiya day. But the symptoms of Kaliyuga have not yet abated and this is explained by stating that there is a period of transition in which these symptoms will steadily come down while those of Satyayuga come up.

Our scriptures state that the four yugas, Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali are cyclic. *Dharma*, the principle which sustains the universe and the living beings in it, is generally translated as religion but is actually an all-comprehensive principle. It is allegorically considered as a cow standing on all four feet in Satyayuga and progressively losing one foot in each yuga until it is struggling on one foot only in Kaliyuga. The detailed symptoms of Kali are given in Srimad Bhagavatam. Anybody reading it will be struck by the accuracy of what was stated about our times now in that ancient scripture.

As Satyayuga ascends, all the Kali symptoms will change. *Dharma* will be at its peak again. There will be harmony between all peoples and they will pursue their respective spiritual paths for *moksha* with conviction and without conflict with others and lead clean and ethical lives. The pursuit of wealth and fulfilment of desires (*Artha and Kāma*) will also be on ethical lines.

All the spiritual paths and ethics of proper living for man to retrace his steps back to the Creator were given by God at the very beginning of creation. This knowledge received by godmen called *rishis* are the Vedas and Vedic practices. With true dedication to God, no *rishi* appended his name to any part of Vedic revelations received by him. Also, over the time, there were countless number of such godmen showing the infinite number of paths revealed to them and practised by them. The Vedas are the repository of all that knowledge and the composite *dharma* coming from the Vedas is called the '*Sanātana Dharma*' or the Eternal Religion. God is infinite and the ways to reach Him are also infinite.

But there are ups and downs in the outlook of people as time passes and *yugas* change and there are many periods in which this Eternal Religion appears to have declined or degenerated. Many civilizations have come and gone in the world but it

is unique to see that in India, the land of '*Sanātana Dharma*', God has incarnated every time that *dharma* declined to a dangerous level and restored it. In the period between two such full incarnations, His representatives or angles were sent to help the people to tread the right path.

In the world outside India, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ and Mohammad came in this age. In India, Buddha, Mahavira, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Nanak, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came earlier and infused spirituality into the people. Coming nearer to our time, we have Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Babaji and his line up to Paramahansa Yogananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sai Baba, J. Krishnamurthi and Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi. There are many other great saints also in the country and in the Himalayas, helping the world silently.

That was Divine Grace on the world and the culmination of all that was the descent of '*Purna Brahma Nārāyana*' in our midst. Ma upheld every spiritual sect and religion and at the same time revived and revitalized the Vedic knowledge and traditions. She brought *Sanātana Dharma*, in its pristine glory, as the all encompassing knowledge of God, spirituality and human conduct, back into focus in the country and in the world.

We can now see the import of Ma's indication that Satyayuga is coming. Purushottama Krishna came at the end of Dwaparayuga and cleaned up the world before the onset of Kaliyuga. *Purna Brahma* Ma came at the end of Kaliyuga to restore *Sanātana Dharma* and transform people and thus prepared the ground for the onset of Satyayuga.

Knowing Ma in 'Reality'

Knowing Ma in reality means attaining Her and becoming Self Realized. This can be seen from what Sri Krishna said — "My birth and activity are Divine. He who knows this in 'Reality' does not take birth again and attains Me".

In spite of the great good fortune of our seeing Ma and receiving Her blessings and inspite of our taking *diksha* and pursuing a line of sadhana do we really know Her? For most of us, our understanding of Ma is at the level of our mind and intellect. We observed Her in the world and have some impressions in our mind, aided by our feeling and intellect. But Ma said, "The manifested world is only one quarter of THAT (*Bhagavān*). The remaining three quarters is unmanifested. Even in the manifested part, you have to search a lot to know something." Therefore, the search through senses and mind cannot take us far in finding the Absolute Truth. But intellectual understanding is a necessary first step for the real search to begin. Ma said, "First listening, then reflection and last of all translation into action." With that, a beginning is made. That itself is due to the grace of God.

On the question of grace, Bhagavān Ramana Maharshi said that, 'it is the beginning, middle and end'. That is, grace is required in the beginning for one to come on the spiritual path, in the middle for him to continue and in the end to reach the goal. In the teaching of Vasishtha Muni to Sri Rama in the 'Yoga Vasishtha' the stress is totally on self-effort and it is stated there that self-effort is itself Grace. Again Grace is viewed in three parts - one's own grace on oneself (*Ātma Kripā*), guru's grace and God's grace. Without *atma kripā*, we cannot begin or sustain self-effort. Guru's grace and God's grace can operate only when there is our grace on ourselves. This *atma kripā*, has to translate itself into determined self-effort with conviction in guru's guidance. Even with that self effort, progress on the path is generally not smooth because latent tendencies (*samskāras*) and ego (*ahamkāra*) obstruct the seeker in subtle ways. Guru's grace is necessary to overcome these obstacles.

The final goal of Self Realization may still not be easy to reach. Ma said- "Who is going to comprehend Him unless He allows Himself to be comprehended and when He allows comprehension, it is He who will be realized". Thus the key to final realization of Ma is with Ma Herself and it is only by Her grace we can know Her in Reality and become Self Realized.

The last question therefore is — 'What helps us to invoke His final grace ?' The two supreme points that come from the sayings of Ma and Sri Krishna are, 'Single minded devotion' (*ananya bhakti*) and 'Total surrender' to Guru and God (*sharanāgati*). The way Bhaiji left his job and family when Ma called him, without giving any notice, to go with Her and Bholanathji to Dehra Dun leaving Dhaka permanently, is a supreme example of that devotion and self surrender.

Though we may not be at the level of Bhaiji, there is hope for us also as Ma said, "As to self-surrender: by constantly endeavouring to live a life of dedication, it will come about one day."

Prospect for Devotees of Ma

What Ma said on some occasions and the assurance She gave to Didima (Her mother) are a source of great strength and hope also to devotees of Ma. Some instances are given below :

1. Didima got the assurance thrice from Ma (appearing as the helmsman of the boat in her vision) that all Her devotees would be taken across to the other side of the 'ocean of birth and death' (*samsāra sāgara*).

2. During the Durga puja at Allahabad in 1958, the devotees sitting in front of Ma during a *satsang* raised this point. One of them asked Her, "Ma, so many of us come to you. Are all of us going to pass or will some fail also ?" Ma replied back immediately, "Do you come here by your own free will ? You are caught and brought here" That means all devotees who are drawn to Ma and picked up by Her, all of them are blessed by Her. In some incidents covered earlier, we have seen how Ma was watching everybody from Her unmanifest state also. The way a large number of devotees from all over the world are coming to Ma's Samadhi Mandir at Kankhal shows how She is drawing them.
3. Ma also said, "Even those who have not seen me or even heard of me swim into my vision, the moment they need me and I do the needful for them."
4. Finally, there is a general saying that for those under the care of any *sadguru* and strictly following all his instructions, it will not take more than three lives (or births) for final emancipation. When a close devotee of Ma asked Her about this, Ma said categorically that it may take only one life for their emancipation. For a genuine devotee, the above words of Ma are an assurance of deliverance. Let me end this narrative with a prayer to Ma to bless all humanity and all creation.

Jai Ma.

THE DIVINE MOTHER

— Dr. Premlata Srivastav

[Continued from before]

Sri Sri Ma's teachings

Ma has given special attention to the upliftment of women's social and spiritual status. It should not be misconstrued with women's lib. She has done it in a very easy manner. As men held kirtan recitals, women also did it overnight in Kheora village. Ever vigilant Ma arranged for their safety. Flowers were not available there. So Ma taught ladies how to make garlands with leaves and wood chips. Bejewelled with these garlands and sandal paste marks, the ladies sang kirtan all through the night, overwhelmed by Ma's company.

Ma gave much importance to also women's education. Her opinion that women should have as much spiritual education as men and so together they should reconstruct the society. Didi paved the way to start the Kanyapeeth with just two girls students in 1938. This institution is now under Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi and also recognised by the State Govt. and Govt of India.

Ma's *kheyāla* to allow selected ladies to wear the sacred thread is also a significant step. Ma once told that when She did Her sadhana She Herself wore the sacred thread and did all the rituals in strict discipline. But for others when asked the opinion of the learned pandits of Kashi the reply was, "that it was practised in ancient times is so written in the scriptures. However, for the present, this cannot be permitted." For this Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj was then consulted, who said, "There are lots of proofs of this practise prevalent in ancient times. Ma's *kheyāl* itself is *shāstra*, so there is no need of other opinions." Listening to the opinions of the learned pandits of Kashi and Kavirajji Ma said 'Now, no more authenticity is required. This body had a *kheyāl* and so wanted to know whether it is in accordance to the religious scriptures or not; many may even raise fingers. This body does not want to re-introduce this system in general, but only to suitable and selected ladies only."

At Tarapith on 14th January 1936 Didi and Marani (grand daughter of Bholanath's sister) were given the sacred threads following all the rituals. Bholanath initiated Marani, while Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya initiated Didi. Ma told Didi, "Wearing this thread is no child's play. You must become an ideal Brahmacharini."

The marriage ritual of Marani was held at Tarapith. Bholanath did the '*kanyādān*' as she was brought up by Bholanath in ashram as his daughter. Thus Ma relieved Bholanath of his obligations before he could restart his sadhana later in the Himalayas.

Thus in the field where only men had a single-handed entry since hundreds of years Ma introduced selected ladies giving them the right to pronounce Gayatri Mantra. In later years few more girls were investitured with the sacred thread by Sri Ma.

It will not be out of place to mention here the reply Ma gave when asked whether ladies have a right to pronounce the Gayatri mantra. Ma said, 'Women have certain structural knots so that uttering of the *Pranava* is not possible, but if they change then it becomes possible for them also to pronounce the *Pranava*. Women who cannot pronounce the *Pranava*—this may have a different meaning also. Who is a woman? The one who is weak! The one who seeks refuge. In this context all are women; only the structure of a male does not make one a man. As women take refuge from men, men too ask for the same from women. In this way both are equally weak. Everybody is stretching arms before the Supreme Being".

Ma further elaborated—"It is said, women do not enjoy the right to pronounce the *Pranava* whereas it is also said "*striyā samastā sakalā jagatsu*". From this saying it is assumed that only women have the right to pronounce the *Pranava*. You say *Pranava* is the primordial creation. Creation means work; who else will work without *shakti*. Thus it is only '*stree*' or '*shakti*' who can also pronounce the *Pranava*."

Women taking *sannyās* is rare. In this direction also an important event was Didima's *sannyās* on 14th April, 1938.

Generally *Narayanshilā* is not worshipped by women. Here also Ma first gave *Narayanshilā* to Brahmacharini Udas saying, "Now you have got the fruits of your worship after wearing the sacred thread for 25yrs. Now God has come to you in this form."

In another incident Ma gave Brahmacharini Chandan the *Naryanshilā* belonging to Didima's maternal family. This was discovered at Ma's *kheyāl* on Didima's request after a lot of search at Agartala. Brahmacharini Chandan continues to worship this *Narayanshilā* daily to this day at Kankhal ashram where she lives.

A breif mention of Ma Anandmayee Kanyapeeth will not be out of place here.

As already mentioned Ma's *kheyāl* and Didi's efforts took shape on September 25, 1938 as Anandamayee Kanyapeeth. It was Durga Puja Navami when in Ma's divine presence with only two students the Kanyapeeth made a humble beginning

on the lines of the ancient *Gurukula* system at 'Peet Kuti' at Haridwar. Later it shifted to Varanasi ashram in 1945 at Ma's *kheyāl* when it became a big institution where beside academic education with Sanskrit as the main subject, music is also taught. The girls are also trained in various methods of stitching, embroidery, knitting, cooking etc. In addition to all this they are trained for a strong character building.

Between 1947-50 Varanasi ashram was the venue for the Savitri Mahayagna. Ma frequented Varanasi during this period. As the number of students in the Kanyapeeth grew, the administration of the Kanyapeeth also got a shot in the arm. The disciple of Santdas Babaji, Ganga Devi who was given the charge of the Kanyapeeth to look after, organised an excellent Jhulan Festival in 1947 in Ma's divine presence. First she seated Ma as Sri Krishna in the holy *Jhula*. Then with the girls, played Divine *leelās* with Ma as the cynosure.

Once a Brahmacharini came to Didi and said, '*Dādā Bhāi*, to administer and supervise the Kanyapeeth we need a lot of hands. Most of the girls who study here leave the institution after completing their studies. My suggestion is that please amend rules to make compulsory living in the ashram for those who study for *Shāstri* and *Achārya*.' "It is Ma's Kanyapeeth", said Didi, "She will look after it. I am serving the *kumaris* on Ma's directions. The girls grow up here, it is Her kindness. Whether they stay or leave, it is all upto Her *kheyāl*."

Most of the girls after their study go home and also get married; but with the strong foundation of knowledge gained and *brahmacharya* at the Kanyapeeth they prove themselves as ideal housewives. Some girls stay back in the ashram and take the path of *sadhana* for spiritual attainment.

In this context, Ma once said—"Bhaiji had some original ideas about the Kanyapeeth and the Vidyapeeth (for boys). He had said only the fortunate ones will stay here. The students of these institutions will be trained as per their respective inclinations, someone is inclined to *Shiva bhāva* someone else to *Krishna bhāva*—they will be helped in furthering their interest in respective directions. Religious bend of mind, studies of religious scriptures should remain the main theme amid all the academic education. Kumaris will engage themselves in service and care, their *sadhana* and education will go together. Those who will marry afterwards will carry with them the reflection of the education they received here."

[To continue]

OUR LAST VISIT TO BHIMPURA ASHRAM

— Shraddha Davenport

It was December twenty-fifth when we returned to beautiful Bhimpura and found that the Mahantji was holding our former room for us at Ganganath Temple. We felt very much at home. The Desjardin party and Melita had rooms in the Mahant's house, The mid-day meal was being served, so we all took our meals together in that house. We then walked along the narrow road leading to Mother. Just three weeks before, when we left Bhimpura, we thought it was most likely the last time we would walk along that road. I smiled, thinking of all that had happened and of how She plays with us.

When we reached the ashram it looked so peaceful. Hardly anyone was there except a few village people working on the grounds. Panuda greeted us and we sat with him beneath the great banyan tree. Chitra came out to gather the laundry from a small clothesline. Swami Paramanandaji stepped out from his room. He smiled as we pronamed to him. Melita arrived from Ganganath Temple and we walked briefly with her. A village man sat on the steps of the satsang hall with garlands for sale. We were his only likely customers, and he gave two garlands to us.

Soon we were allowed to come up the stairs and to the window of Mother's room. She sat upon Her bed near the window just as She had when last we were there. Satya and I offered our garlands to Mother as we pronamed. Udasji placed them together in a heart shape by where Mother sat. Mother touched them, then Udas gave them to us. We moved to the side window where Mother and I had our usual intimate conversation. She asked, "Acchha hai?" and I replied in my very best Hindi, "Tik hai, Ma." The breadth of our exchange was small in size, but the depth to me, was infinite. Any personal attention from Her is a priceless treasure. I looked upon Her sweet face, soaking up the precious moments which She so lovingly gave to us.

Downstairs we talked with Bhaskaranandaji for a brief time, then walked back to Ganganath Temple and had our evening meal before retiring.

Darshan was set for around 5:30 p.m. We were so thankful to see Mother at all. We were careful not to interfere with the program.

On our second evening we sat before Mother's large front window for quite some time. then everyone else who was there left the roof. We stood up to leave and had stepped to Mother's door to do pronam. She kept holding us with Her eyes

and we did not want to go. It was as though there was no creation outside of those eyes and no being outside of that embrace; then we were asked to go downstairs.

We waited by the satsang hall to see Chitra. She was always busy and it was difficult to catch a minute with her. When she came to speak with us, she had a beautiful cotton chaddar for me. She said that she would give Mother's chappals for Chaitanya and some other things after darshan the next day. Chitra was scheduled to leave Bhimpura on January first and I was very sad that she would be going so soon.

Following dinner at Ganganath Temple that night, Satya got a few vegetables from Dattubhai, the cook, so that he could make soup the next day.

After our usual breakfast, Satya made soup as I washed our clothes. We had the delicious soup for lunch, bathed, and leisurely walked towards the ashram. In the distance over the gently rolling countryside we saw small, brightly colored kites soaring and dipping against the clear blue sky. We could not see the children who held the kite strings, but I remembered reading Paramahansa Yoganandaji's account of his childhood adventures with his kite. I envisioned his small hand clutching the line as he gleefully guided the playful kite to do his bidding.

It was 4:30 p.m. when we arrived at the ashram to meet Chitra. She had brought Mother's chappals for Chaitanya and a pair of Mother's little white socks as well. Chitra took the letters which I had asked her to read to Mother. She would return them to me later along with Mother's replies. Even though she had many duties to perform, Chitra always took a few minutes to talk with us.

Darshan that day was on the roof. Mother's bed had been placed outside near the corner. We sat on grass mats before Her. She wore dark glasses and held a towel in front of Her mouth. After darshan there was a private; then Chitra called for us to come back upstairs. I had brought some cymbals and silk scarves that Mother blessed for me. I tried to ask a couple of questions but what more could I possibly have to ask ?

The next evening at 5:00 p.m. other people were upstairs, having a private. Mother was in Her room and we could see Her from where we stood near the kitchen. Satya took some movies and Mother kept looking out at us. Soon Chitra called for us to come upstairs. Satya and I stood by Mother's door. She had been in a serious mood for the last two days, but still She looked at us lovingly. We sat down by Her door and I could feel a certain remoteness.

After darshan we talked with Chitra for a while. She told us that everyone was feeling Mother's serious mood. Even Udas complained because Mother was not calling her by name. We could not deny that Mother seemed to be making less and

less of an outward play. It was not something which we liked to think about. As we walked to our room that night, a serious mood enveloped us also.

Panuda was sitting beneath the banyan tree when we arrived at the ashram the following evening. We sat with him and talked for some time.

Quite a few people found out where Mother was and came there even though Mother had requested that no one do so. She was given no chance to rest because they were there all that day. When we went upstairs Mother was sitting in Her room. About seven people were sitting on the floor at Her feet. Someone did arati and sang to Mother. She sat with Her beautiful little hands folded. Once Her tiny toes poked out from under Her cloth. The bottom of Her foot and toes looked like a baby's foot-so fresh and new-looking, not like they had been on this earth for eighty-two years. I reflected sadly that this would be the first trip when I had not touched those holy feet. Not only did that prove to be true, but neither did we receive the *kripa* of Her touch during those days.

Earlier Chitra had offered prasad to everyone there. I had wished for an orange but was given a banana. Later as we stood at the side window, Mother sent Udas into another room to get a basket of oranges. She blessed them and had them given out with special instructions that we were to receive oranges. Udas even came to where we were to see that we got them. Mother knows every thought that I have and takes notice of even the trivial ones.

Mother looked at us and I gazed at Her beautiful face in the dim evening light. Fragrant incense filled the air and the devotees sang beautiful bhajans. I so wished that moment would never end. But a moment was all that it was and it will never return.

We decided to walk into Chandod next day. There were two ways to get there: the road upon which we first arrived by car, or a walk along the sand by the river. We chose the river. It was a little longer walk, but definitely the more attractive. We saw women doing their laundry upon the rocks at the water's edge, some little goats scampering up the embankment, and handsome monkeys of light color whose faces looked as if they wore small dark masks. It was not a long distance but the noon heat left me exhausted.

We purchased some soaps, biscuits, and fruits, but there were no oranges.

Chandod was a charming village with a beautiful wide *ghāt*. Satya took movies of the timeless scene. It could have been two thousand years in the past as we watched women with shiny pots walk down to the water's edge, fill their pots with

the sacred waters, then climb the steps balancing the full pots upon their heads. How graceful they looked, almost regal as they walked with perfect posture.

There were sailboats for hire at the ghat and we engaged one to carry us down to Ganganath Temple. A gentle breeze filled the sail for our short voyage. At the bottom of the Ganganath Temple *ghāt* we saw Ram Sevak an ashram servant, washing Mother's clothes. After greeting him, we climbed approximately one hundred and fifty three steps of the *ghāt*. Then I was truly ready for a short rest.

A German girl named Heidi had arrived the day before, and when we got to the ashram she was having a private with Mother. When it was finished we went to stand at Mother's window. It was a great blessing to actually look at Her while addressing Her in prayer. How natural it was felt to do so and how extraordinary it really was. The electricity went off for a few minutes and She sat illuminated by the pale moonlight until the lights came on once more. After darshan we all prostrated and started to go downstairs. Then heard someone call my name. Mother was calling for me. I quickly came back to Her door and She tossed a dhoti to me. Chitra had told Her that I wanted Her dhoti for my puja. I caught the cloth and touched it to my head prostrating, I bowed to Mother with joy at receiving that treasure.

Downstairs we saw Chitra briefly. I held Mother's dhoti close as I thanked Chitra and said good night. As we were leaving we were delighted to see Raju, who had received permission to rejoin Mother and had just arrived. We had missed him and were very glad to see him again.

During the next day we were able to visit with several friends and devotees. Most of the day was spent on the ashram grounds. In the evening we stood at Mother's door as She blessed us with several loving looks and smiles. When darshan was over we all prostrated at Her door, then Satya and I stood back a little and just looked at Mother as the others prostrated. Everyone else then went downstairs and a lady who was attending Mother asked if we had finished. I said, "Yes, if one can ever be said to have finished." She smiled and walked away, leaving us there. We expected to be asked to leave at any moment, but for some reason no one did. Mother looked so sweet and She did not seem to mind our being there. Udas and a brahmachari brought two Shiva lingas in for Mother to see. She moved Her fingers over them as She made some comments.

Chitra came into the room and Mother indicated that something was wrong with the index finger of Her right hand. After Chitra got a flashlight she and Udas looked at Mother's finger. Then Udas got another flashlight and turned off the overhead light. Mother, Udas and Chitra all three looked at that little finger by the

light of the two flashlights. I do not know if they found the problem or not. Udas came to the door and pronounced to us. We pronounced to Udas and then to Mother. It was 7:10 P.M. when we went downstairs. It had been heartwarming to share in those few intimate minutes with Mother.

We did not take our evening meal and went to bed early.

The next day was January first, 1979, New years Day and Chitra's last day in Bhimpura. She was in the kitchen when we came to the ashram at 9:00. a.m. After taking lots of photos of Chitra and others there we were permitted to go upstairs to Mother. She gave Satya a special *tulsi mālā* and allowed him to take some movies. Her lip was swollen and She held Her cloth in front of Her mouth. A Shiva linga sat beside Her and She held a small golden Gopal as I took Her picture.

Then She gave a dhoti to us for Bhakti.

Chitra took us downstairs and gave us something to eat. She had prepared fried flat rice with peanuts, some sweets, and pappar (very thin bread).

Once again we went upstairs to do pronam and gave Mother two roses. She had come outside for a private with the newly weds. Satya took some more movies and we came back downstairs. A family had arrived from Ahmedabad and I took polaroid photos of them and a few others who were there including Kanti, a little orphan boy from the village. That child was quite unusual and had a very spiritual quality.

It was midday and very hot as we walked to Ganganath Temple for our meal.

After a short rest and a bath we returned to the ashram at 5:00 P.M. Chitra was taking laundry off the line, then took it upstairs. Swami Virajanandaji was seated beneath the banyan tree. He looked so nice there that I asked to take his picture. All the trees of the *Panchavati* were growing around the ashram. I asked Swamiji if he would let take leaves from each of them and help me write their names correctly. Where I was living I could not hope to grow those five trees, but I could at least put the leaves in a frame surrounding pictures of Mother, and in that fashion have my *Panchavati*. He agreed to help me and it was done. That beautiful *Panchavati* is still with me.

When we were allowed to go upstairs I stood at the front window. Mother looked at me as I inwardly spoke to Her. Then She looked over at Satya who was standing by the side window. Chitra came into Mother's room and sat on the floor near Mother. I could not see her from where I was, so I moved to her side window next to Satya. From there I could see Mother and Chitra.

Chitra was so beautiful. I will always remember Her sweet face and lovely eyes as she sat gazing at Mother. She looked exactly like her Krishnaji. Mother looked

tenderly at Chitra for a very long time. My eyes filled with tears at the thought that I might never see either of them again. As darshan was ended we each prostrated at Mother's door, then slowly left the roof.

Chitra came down just behind us. We said our good-bye at the bottom of the steps. I could not help crying. Chitra held my hand, then patting my head and shoulder said, "God knows when we shall meet again". She asked me to write to her before I left India, then she went back up to Mother.

We were given *khir* which Mother had told the girls to hold back for us .

Panuda came to tell us good-bye. We did not know that he was also leaving and told him how much we had enjoyed the chance to visit with him.

It was about 7:30 p.m. and all the other Westerners left the ashram. We waited to see Chitra one last time before she left. When she came downstairs she went to say good-bye to Swami Paramanandaji, then got into the waiting car. As the car slowly drove out of the ashram I could see her face through the rear window. Her eyes were turned up toward Mother's room, and I saw her do prostrations as she was carried off into the night.

Chitra had always been very special to me, much more than a friend. Many of my most intimate moments with Mother were as Chitra sat at my side. It was fitting that I cried that night, for I was never to see my dear Chitra again.

[To continue]

MA ANANDAMAYEE— A CONFLUENCE OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

— Dr. Rakesh Kumar

While speaking or writing about Ma Anandamayee (1896-1982) we can strike a note of hope, a note of cheer, inspite of knowing it fully well that contemporary human conditions are murky and depressing. It is the ancient philosophy of the Vedanta that sustains us all through the life with hope and assurance. We can live with a conviction that though things are very dismal around us, they need not continue to be so. We know very well that after the dark night the sky becomes rosy with the approach of dawn and soon the sun rises on the horizon dispelling all darkness. Such an idea brings solace and satisfaction. At the same time, we should have faith in God and other incarnations in this world. Some great luminaries of the spiritual world like Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Ma Anandamayee came to this world and gave solace to many. Ma Anandamayee was an incarnation of Goddess Durga: according to some reputed Indologists. She was a confluence of love and compassion. Everyone realised this, came close to her and remained in her vicinity.

It is the mission of the Vedanta to help to unfold the tremendous spiritual possibility worldwide. When people all over the world begin to understand this great Vedantic truth of the divine nature of man and to realise it a tremendous source of spiritual energy will be available to us. Ma Anandamayee also preached more or less the same thing. She was very much hopeful about the future of mankind and She believed in the spiritual richness of the human heritage. She inspired many people, who regained their lost inward spiritual strength.

In fact, people respond to the Vedantic message of the inherent divinity within themselves and many of them are experimenting with the varied methods of sadhana for its true realisation. Ma Anandamayee though did never herself practice traditional methods of God-realisation or traditional yogic practices. But meditation, came naturally to Her by Her own *kheyala*. However. She believed in obtaining divine bliss by adopting such methods of sadhana, dhyana and japa. She used to say that when you swim on the surface, you get cheap shells, but when you dive deep. you get pearls. She used to sing a song in this regard in order to leave an imprint of Her words on the minds of Her devotees.

Ma always emphasised the principles of universal religion and universal brotherhood. To Her all faiths and religions are ultimately one and the same. That is why She advocated in favour of faith in all religions. She was able to know and understand all the intricacies of every religion with its diverse approaches to human life. She did not only lay emphasis on this rather she went to the limit of attaining the higher goal in spiritual life. She advised devotees to attain liberation which is the contended condition of life. She prescribed different spiritual methods to different devotees so that they would be able to preform their duties and attain the final goal in life.

Ma was so kind and compassionate and so full of love that She was a source of hope, courage and inspiration to all human beings. It must combine with the eternal principles of Vedanta as enunciated in our ancient scriptures. We often come across some devaluation of norms and values in almost all spheres of life. In order to overcome this vacuum Sri Ma laid due emphasis on both the methods, ritualistic and philosophical to follow up in our practical life. According to Her, there is no discrimination of any kind in performing the rituals in spiritual life. Different rituals are suitable for different *sadhakas*. Apart from this, Sri Ma was always of the opinion that the problems can be solved through direct, practical and real approach. She emphasised that one should know the proper ways and means by which their application in spiritual life is possible.

Ma Anandamayee frequently visited different places in the country. She moved from one place to another and she continued to move around as per Her own *kheyala*. The devotees got together to construct about 29 Ashrams in India and Bangladesh. However, it did not serve the purpose of restricting Her movements. She did not choose Her companions; it was a large gathering which surrounded Her all the time. People from different areas and from different walks of life came and mingled together in a holy atmosphere of brotherhood.

During Her life time, She blessed nearly all the political dignitaries of the country who rose to power after independence. They did not talk about state affairs with Her, She only talked to them on religious and spiritual matters. She did never encounter any Guru who could have exerted any influence on Her life and personality. She did not take shelter in a particular place to become a *sannyasin*. She only spoke to all around Her on every possible aspect of religion and spiritualism.

Many religious and Vedic ceremonies were organised by Ma's devotees from time to time in different ashrams. A great Savitri Maha Yajna for three years was organised and started at Varanasi in the newly built ashram in the month of January, 1947, which came to a close in January, 1950. The aim behind organising this Vedic Yajna was to obtain peace and prosperity for all mankind. Sri Ma was so kind and compassionate that She inspired all the organisers and devotees all

through. Under Her supervision the Yajna proceeded peacefully and reached its completion without any hindrance. It was attended by almost all great dignitaries, a lot of most renowned *mahatmas*, artistes of repute and also common people. Surprisingly all such ceremonies and religious functions attained an extra-ordinary glamour in Her presence. This Savitri Maha Yajna, grand in itself, was overwhelming in its impact on the participants, devotees and even common people. The last great Vedic Yajna in Mother's presence was performed at Kankhal in May, 1981 and was known as Ati Rudra Maha Yajna.

However, Sri Ma started the process of withdrawing herself after the Gurupurnima in 1982. All the devotees of Mother knew it very well that sometimes illness had happened to Her because it was not in Her *kheyala* to deny their access to her body. Sri Ma had been seen at times to perform certain Yogic *Kriyas* to get rid of her ailments. Her last *kheyala* seemed to have been for the performance of the Ati Rudra Yajna at Kankhal, Hardwar, Perhaps, this was the greatest of the Vedic Yajnas under Her guidance and supervision. It was celebrated with all splendour and magnificence. However, She had withdrawn herself from public for all practical purposes. Ma was so kind and considerate that She never wanted to disappoint Her devotees at any moment of Her life. Gradually, She stopped taking food by her own *kheyala* so as to avoid the physical ailments. Ma spent her last days at Kishenpur ashram at Dehradun. She became unmanifest in the evening of August 27th, 1982. As Sri Ma had said earlier that She did belong to everybody and so everybody, including the Prime Minister Indra Gandhi rushed to bid farewell to the body of Ma at Kankhal.

Nevertheless, Sri Ma will even remain with us in the form of Her immortal sermons, the dearest of which is - "Ma is here, what is there to worry about". Undoubtedly, such messages of Ma help us in our movement on the way to higher goal in life. In turn, it will certainly help in the development of humanity. Sri Ma saw no basic difference in all faiths and religions. According to Her all faiths are true paths to God realization. She could always bring all people around Her in accepting Her request to begin the search for Him, who is hidden in the cave of the Heart. According to Her, all bondages are destroyed on realizing Him, who is here and yet beyond. Really, that would be a blessed day for us and for the whole world when we start adopting the saying of the Holy Mother and following Her message in the true sense and spirit.

"Lead us from the unreal to the Real !
Lead us from darkness to Light !
Lead us from death to Immortality !"

