

MA ANANDAMAYEE
AMRIT VARTA

A quarterly journal dealing mainly
with the divine life and sayings of
Sri Anandamayi Ma

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MATRI VANI

You will have to turn your mind to Dharma;* for Dharma is the life of your life, the Self (*Ātmā*) that is established in Eternal Truth. Who is that Self? You must certainly get to know it. For how uch longer will you reside in inns and journey on a road that leads astray and is beset with dangers and adversity? It is imperative to find one's own Path, to start out on the pilgrimage to one's Self to renounce the merely pleasurable and adopt what is for one's highest good.

* * * * *

The Guru is God; He has accepted you, depend on Him. His grace and benediction pour out constantly. You must remain facing in His direction. In the measure that one engages in japa, meditation, remembrance of Him and so forth, the mind will tend to become calm.

* * * * *

Do not feel distressed because you are deprived of one's physical presence. It is the duty of the nearest and dearest of the departed to pray that he may progress on his upward path. However if tears rush into your eyes because he has left the body, then cry invoking God. To weep for God is everybody's one and only hope. Also perform as perfectly as possible the duties prescribed by the *Shastras* for the wife and son of the deceased.

* * * * *

On receiving the news of the unnatural death of a devotee's son :

Mataji said : "Write to the parents that there is nothing to be done by them at present except to abide in fortitude and bear the tragic bereavement with heroic strength and clam. Such is the law of God's creation. In some cases events of that kind are brought to an end by a special disaster of this sort. The current of life in the world is indeed made up of joys and sorrows, for man is born to reap the fruits of his past actions. Therefore having been blessed by birth in a human body, it is one's duty to seek unceasingly the path that leads beyond pleasure and pain. Verily, quite often by annihilating misfortune through misfortune God attracts man to Himself.

That you have to-day been plunged into an ocean of grief by the deceased and also whatever he himself has had to suffer, must be understood to be the results of

*. The world 'Dharma' conveys in Sanskrit the idea of righteousness in thought, life and action and implies in addition a sense of inwardness in outlook, purity in aspiration and wholeness in character capable of reflecting the blissful integrity of Eternal Truth.

some very grave *Karma*. Nevertheless you should keep in mind that even through this terrible blow he is advancing on his upward path. Pray to God for the welfare of his soul. Being the offspring of a religious family he has consequently had the privilege of a certain amount of *Satsang*. You know, father, that the Self is indestructible and that only the body is subject to change and decay.

That this body (Mataji) does not usually speak about past and future is well known to you, father and mother. If opportunity offers both of you may attempt to go on a pilgrimage some time. Even though you are suffering unbearable agony through the loss of your son, it is imperative to endeavour to calm yourself by the remembrance and contemplation of God. Also let either of you regularly every day read a small portion of the *Srimad Bhāgavata*, when you have completed the whole of it, start again from the beginning and so on. While reading imagine that your son is by your side listening.

* * * * *

On the journey through life in this world nobody ever remains happy. The pilgrimage to the Goal of human life is the only path to supreme happiness. Try to tread that path which is your very own, where there is no question of pleasure and pain—the path that leads to freedom from egotism and to the highest Bliss.

* * * * *

To remain calm and at peace under all circumstances is man's duty. To form a bad opinion of a person just because one has heard some gossip about him is wrong. Hostility, condemnation, abusive language, ill feeling and so forth, even if kept concealed within one's mind will and must fall back on oneself. Nobody should ever harm himself by harbouring such thoughts and feelings.

* * * * *

Human beings are not all made to the same pattern. From various places a great many people have assembled together in the sole endeavour at finding the highest good. It is then not always possible for everyone to give expression to his inborn tendencies and inclinations (*Samskāra*) and this is why difficulties arise. The ONE who is all pervading assumes particular forms at particular times. If, anchored in patience, you adopt this view, is it not likely that you will find peace? There are some who create disturbance and vexation for others as well as for themselves, but this is not what this body (Mataji) wishes : on the contrary it requests everybody to refrain from such behaviour.

*

MY FIRST *DARŚANA* OF MOTHER ANANDAMAYI

—M. M. Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj

[Continued from before]

The true ideal of *samādhi* which Mother has held out before Her admirers is intended to show that She does not attach undue importance to the Static Brahman realization or to the Dyanamic one. She views the Supreme Truth as consisting of and yet exceeding both these lower truths. The gradual evolution of the human soul in the direction of this Absolute Reality is represented by Her as an integral spiritual movement in which there are certain relative poises. *Chitta Samādhāna*, *Bhāva Samādhāna* and *Vyakta Samādhāna* are the three successive stages of inward development leading to its culmination in what is called by Her *Pūrṇa Samādhāna*. The first stage stands for the incipient condition of the evolutionary movement in which the mind is dried up and rendered light and combustible, owing to the elimination from it of the waters of worldly desires and passions under the influence of inner culture in the form of meditation or otherwise. Just as dry fuel, free from all moisture, takes fire easily and burns, in the same way the mind thus purified catches easily the fire of knowledge and becomes aglow. This spiritual condition, usually known as *Bhāvasuddhi* or purity of *Bhāva*, is called *Chittasamādhāna*. It arises under the influence of the Supreme Reality through different channels of expression. Human nature being divergent, it is not strange that in some cases this state should represent an overpowering of the mental structure of the aspirant under the pressure of divine sentiment.

The second stage, called *Bhāva Samādhāna*, represents a more advanced condition than the first one. In this state the seeker remains immersed in the integral *bhāva*, insensible to the stimuli of outer nature. The body becomes, as it were paralysed under the domination of this *bhāva*. Outwardly speaking, the body loses its mobility and power of responsiveness and becomes more or less like an inert clod, though inwardly the *bhāva* which has influenced it, begins to flow on in an uninterrupted stream. When this state matures into perfection what is left behind is only the play of the Integral Idea having unified the outer and inner elements of human nature. In this stage the individual being is charged and permeated with integral *bhāva* and there is an overflowing of it into outer nature. In other words, the integral *bhāva* fills up the entire mind of the *sādhaka* and flows over into the world outside him.

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 Form and Formless persists.

But in the next stage, which represents perfection and is called *Pūrṇa Samādhāna* all sorts of dualities melt away, having been for ever transcended in Supreme Unity of Absolute Truth. This state is transcendent and yet immanent, is *Nirguṇa* as well as *Saguna*, *Sākara* 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. The stability of the body and the mind is based upon concentration on a particular principle or vision which, in the end, universalizes itself, dissolves the egoistic sense remnant within it and stands out in its unique splendour. In course of time, this sense of basic unity also disappears. What is left behind is beyond the power of mind to grasp or of words to describe. This appears to be the highest perfection of *Nirvikalpa Samādhāna*. Mother says that in this state all the activities of the body, even the vibrations 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 the 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.

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 *sādhānās*, Mother's state, as such, was not evolved in that way. It has appeared with Her and will disappear with Her.

There is a tendency in some quarters to consider Mother as belonging to the category of a *Devatā*. Those people are inclined to think, each according to his own point of view, that She is not a normal human being but is celestial in origin. In reply to the contention of these persons it may be said that there is no specific ground to regard Her in this light. That different devotees see in Her Person different heavenly manifestations is readily explicable on the hypothesis of their unconscious predispositions crystallized into visions of the gods and goddesses associated with their subliminal mind and may also be interpreted as due to the action of the Supreme Power functioning as Will through Her body. That She Herself as an individual did not exercise any will-power is to be assumed on Her explicit disowning of the use of

such a power. It is the intensity of *Bhakti* in a worshipper which visualizes its object in a concrete form. The foundation of the Supreme Power is of course assumed. We know of three layers of beings — one connected with the earth plane, the other with the intermediate plane and the third with the heavenly plane — known respectively as *Men*, *Siddhas*, and *Devas*. Knowing Mother as one does at present, one cannot pretend to say that from the standpoint of *Brahmavidyā*, the distinction of the three classes counts for much. The phenomena attributed to Mother are easily intelligible on the assumption of Her being endowed with *Brahmajñāna* irrespective of the fact that She is Human or *Siddha* or *Divya*. As regards the question of Her descent as a *Siddha* or as a *Devata* it may be studied on the analogy of the problem of Her descent as a *Nitya Siddha* or *Svayam Siddha* mentioned above.

There is another point which needs elucidation in connection with the question of Mother's identity. We always find that in spite of apparently diverse attitudes or poises in Her mind and body, She always feels Herself as one and the same. This awareness of unity in the Self is not affected in the least by *Samādhi* or by *Vyutthāna* which means the three normal states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep. *Samādhi* and its effects on the system are not minimized nor is undue weight attached to Her playful outer moements. Underlying both, the same self-vision persists, neither clouded by the many-sided activities relating to the outer world, nor clarified by the withdrawal of the sense and the mind inwards. In the midst of tumultuous uproar She maintains an unbroken silence and in the depth of Her silence She speaks out eloquently. This shows that in judging of Her we should not allow ourselves to be led by considerations of *Samādhi* or *Vyutthāna*. This being so, we cannot explain the whole story of Her *dikṣā*, *sādhana* and *upāsana* and even of Her illumination and attainment of Supreme Knowledge except as mere play, intended probably to serve as an example to ordinary humanity. One would thus find in Her a dual personality representing on the one hand the luminous peace of the Silent Self and on the other a self-imposed playful attitude displaying like a kaleidoscope the shifting visions of a series of dramatic pictures bound together by certain bonds of affinity or sequence, the secret of which is hidden from the view of ordinary men.

We know very well that in every stage of Her life Mother played Her part admirably well, consistently with the laws of propriety befitting Her role, and that behind all these appearances She has retained the self-same and eternally self-revealed consciousness. It 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 full well that in a higher synthesis even contradictories may meet together. These differences need not be obliterated in the interest of a particular viewpoint. Naturally we do not, and cannot, know all the phases of Mother's life; and the little we know of a particular phase we

know imperfectly. She is too near us to be seen in Her proper perspective and as for ourselves we too shall have to rise up to the height and attain to the broad outlook in which an attempt may be made to study Her properly. What is really needed is to feel that She is the Mother and we are Her children and that as mere children we cannot be expected to know Her as She is, but only as She shows Herself to us in response to our cravings. It really becomes us to behave as infants crying out in the night and to invoke Mother with an inarticulate language for Her actual descent and benediction.

*

"If you pine for Him as a ship-wrecked traveller longs for the shore, as a bereaved mother yearns for her child, if you desire Him with such eagerness you will find that He is with you every second, day and night."

—Ma Anandamayee

**PAGES FROM
"MA ANANDAMAYEE PRASANG"**

[Translated from Bengali]

—Prof. A.K. Dutta Gupta

Dhaka, Ramna Ashram, 29th May, 1945
50th Birthday celebration of Sri Sri Ma

Sri Sri Ma's birthday celebration will conclude tomorrow and there will be Ma's puja in the night. Sri Gopal dada had proposed that this afternoon there will be discussion on the life of Ma in place of Geeta discourse. Devotees will be expected to speak about their own experiences regarding Ma. In accordance with that discussions started from 6 P.M. There was congregation of many people. Sri Sri Ma was sitting on the verandah of the Smriti Mandir.

Sri Bhavani Niyogi, Kamala Kant Brahmachari, Biren Mukherjee and Bhudev Basu spoke on Ma. Sri Abhay read an article. Sri Ganesh Sen also read out a portion from his book on Sri Sri Ma. Sri Gopal dada was the President.

In accordance with his direction I also had to speak something. The discussions continued in this manner till 9 p.m.

Tonight there will be whole night Kirtan of male members only. So I came back home, had some meal and then left with Jatin again for the Ashram. We learnt on reaching there that Ma has left for "Ananda Ashram". Ma returned to the ashram at about 10 and sat on the Smriti Mandir verandah. We also sat on the ground near Ma. Various talks began.

In course of discussion Ma said - "None can avoid through own efforts the *maya* (the great delusion) of the *Mahamaya* (the Supreme Divine *Shakti*). Because She is also the *maya* itself. Through Her grace only this *maya* is gone."

"I am relating to you about a happening. There was lady. Both the wife and the husband used to do much *seva* of Gopalji. They used to be busy, both of them, the whole day in getting Gopalji bathed, feeding Him, doing His *arati* and putting Him to rest and soon after sometime the husband of the lady suddenly died, She thought-"I have done Gopalji's *seva* in such a manner, but in return I have become a widow." Thinking in this manner she stopped doing Gopalji's *seva* altogether and began to cry the whole day and night without having any food. In between she of course remembered Gopalji and also used to get the information that no *seva* was being done for Gopalji But she could not pay any heed to that leaving aside her terrible grudge. After a few days passed in this manner one day she got the news that her Gopalji had

been stolen. Some people narrated to her that they had seen his Gopalji leaving by jumping off from the bed. On hearing this she completely forgot about the sorrow for her husband, for whom she had for the last few days wept for day & night leaving off her meals and bath etc. She forgot altogether about him and instead of grieving for her husband she now began to pine for Gopalji. Excepting only about Gopal she had nothing else to utter. She began to say while weeping—"Alas, as I have not cared for Gopalji, he has left me." There was nothing to console her. A few days passed in this manner. Again one day she got the news that Gopalji was lying in the same manner as he was kept before. Now after getting back her lost treasure all her sorrows disappeared and she engaged herself in Gopalji's *seva* as before. It was not that she forgot completely her dead husband - but the old state of her mind was not there."

After Ma completed narrating the story there was pause for some time. Sri Naren Choudhury told Biren dada that he had cut short his lecture today. Biren dada replied—"What more could I say? Ma had left the place."

This evening when Biren dada was speaking on Ma, then she had left the place for a short period. Birenda was mentioning about the same.

Ma - "I went to see a widow. Previously when I used to come to Dhaka then that woman used to remain with me in the ashram almost for 24 hours. This time after coming it was learnt that half of her body has become paralysed and she was unable to come to the ashram any more. To-day with great difficulty she was brought to the ashram in a carriage to meet me. They were waiting outside the ashram. How long she could remain in that condition, that is why I went outside to meet her for a short while."

That widow has a daughter-in-law. For a long time she had no issue. Long before they came and took this body to their house. They worshipped this body by offering flowers and prayed for an issue of the son's wife. What else this body could say? While sitting there I found that an insect coming out of the flowers was moving towards this body. This body through its own *Kheyal* picking up the insect with two fingers gave to them. After this the woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Today, when I went to meet the widow then I found a boy standing near the carriage and enquired who he was. The lady answered - "Ma, this is that insect." In other words they had infact deemed that insect as the child which this body had given to them." (Everyone laughed)

Gopal dada's Durga Puja

Ma narrated about the Durga Puja which was held last year in Allahabad. Devotees of Ma had decided to perform Durga Puja in Allahabad. The disciples of Gopal dada also performed the Durga Puja there in Allahabad. However, the two Pujas were held in different places. Till that time Gopal dada had not met Ma. On account of the various problems last year his disciples were a bit worried about the

Puja matter. But it was heard that Gopal dada told them with firm confidence - "This year Ma (the Devi) will come Herself and accept the Puja." However, when the Pujas started, at both the places functions commenced with a lot of fanfare. Ma, went to see Gopal dada's Puja at the request of devotees.

Ma related in this matter - "They took me to see the Durga image on the Saptami. There was some speciality in the image. There was no image of Luxmi, Saraswati, Kartik and Ganesh. Only Devi Durga was sitting on upon the lion along with *asura* (Demon). The image Durga was also of a new pattern. There was a knot of hair on the Devi's head tied in an upward fashion. This body was there for a short while. Gopal Baba could not see me as he was busy in Puja affairs. After we came back when his disciples told him that this body had gone there, then Gopal baba forcefully said - "No, Ma has not come". Again on the Navami day this body had gone to see the Puja, when we went we found Baba sitting in the Puja. The special feature of Baba's Puja is that it is a *Bhāva Puja* (doing puja with emotion). In an emotional manner Baba summons Ma (deity), shows care and even grudge and at the same time repeats the mantras. The disciples also says and repeats whatever the *guru* docs. Once the Puja begins that may continue for the whole day. Baba was not concerned whether there were others or not."

"When we reached there Baba was then bathing the *Devi* (Durga). Pitchers of water he was pouring on his own head also. Occasionally he was sprinkling water on the *Devi* also. In order to prevent people from entering into the Puja area fencing was put in between. This body was looking at all this by standing at a distance. Suddenly Baba's sight fell on this body. On that very moment this body had such a feeling that looking at the same Baba had the feeling as if this body was flying away. So Baba shouted - "Catch her, Catch her". In the midst of this body went up to Baba through the space in between the fencing. Then there was a strange scene. We were all drenched with water and mud. After enjoying in this manner for sometime we came back."

Khukuni didi - There happened something else also Why don't you tell about that?

Ma started laughing. Then Khukuni didi began to narrate the same. But Ma began to restrict her by raising some other topic. We could understand that Ma did not intend to speak about that incident either herself and she did not like Didi also to relating the same. But inspite of obstruction Didi spoke about the incident. She said— "When we went there that day to see the Puja we took some fruits and sweets with us. It was learnt that in the afternoon the said sweets were distributed there among many people. But we did not take such quantity of sweets so that two to three hundreds of devotees could get the same. The pot in which the sweets were kept was

covered and distribution was done one by one. When everyone got the same and the lid was taken out the pot was found empty."

After discussion in this manner for sometime Ma got up. We also went and sat near the place where Kirtan was being sung and spent the night there.

30th May, 1945

The Kirtan came to a close slightly before sunrise. Ma was still on bed. When we went to do *pranam* we found that a person was fanning Ma sitting near her. Seeing this Biren dada said to Ma—"Why are you lying in this room in the midst of such heat? Won't you like to walk around for sometime in the ground outside?" Listening this Ma came out. For sometime we also walked with Ma. Subodh Babu* took a snap of us along with Ma so we were a bit late in returning home. Tomorrow Baba Bholanath's statue will be installed. Birendada went for shopping with Manomohan.

In the afternoon went again to the ashram. Then Geeta discourse by Gopal dada was going on. After the same was over Ma came for a walk on the meadow. She sat down at one place after walking around for some time. A certain gentleman sang a few songs before Ma. He sang the songs with great emotion. At that time a few girls came and started singing near Ma. It was heard that they had come from the village 'Kuti' near Kheora (Ma's birth place).

First of all they started singing a *bhajan* (devotional song) beginning with :

"Narayana Narayana Namō Namō Namō Narayana" etc.

The song was so nice that everyone began to listen as if they were mesmerised. Either through the influence of the song or through the presence of Ma or on account of both, for sometime all were immersed in the *bhajan*. There were so many people around, but the ground seemed to be absolutely quiet as if devoid of any human being. It seemed as if the combined sound of the music sung by the girls was dancing around on way to the eternity like the upward movement of the dense smoke of the sacrificial fire depending on the light evening breeze. It occurred as if the whole universe had become inert and with folded hands was singing together -

"Narayana Narayana Namō Namō Namō Narayana..."

Even after the song was over that dense stillness continued to remain for some time.

Ma's Tithi Puja (concluding function)

This day a whole night joyous programme has been arranged. It was heard that two persons will do Kirtan from 10 p.m. and Ma's Puja will be in late night.

Through the initiative of Biren dada puja has been decided to be done on Ma herself this time. Previously Baba Bholanath, had done puja in such a manner on one

* Sri Subodh Dasgupta of Chitragong, who was the first photographer to take photos of Ma.

or two occasions. But I have not seen that. This time the puja will be done in the Panchvati. Intending to be present during the puja I came back home at 11 p.m.

I went again to the ashram at 3 a.m. along with Jatin and my wife. Reaching there I found my friend Manomohan, Narayan Babu and many others present. They stayed in the ashram whole night. Brahmachari Nepal dada* just then came after taking bath in the pond. He did the puja.

The puja commenced at about 3 a.m. Ma was lying down on the *vedi*. (altar) of the Panchvati and there were a lot of women on three sides of her. We began to see the puja by standing at a distance. Ma got up as soon as the concluding function started.

It was very early morning - there was ray of light on the eastern horizon. Birds started chirping sitting on the trees of the Panch vati. A gold crown was put on Ma. On the neck there was a huge garland of various types of flowers and leaves. Flowers and leaves were lying strewn on all sides of her. Ma was sitting with a mild smiling countenance. The face looked to be exceedingly luminous in the glowing light of the rising Sun. This appeared to be the dress of the queen of queens. Once looked at the vision could not be turned around. It so appeared as if whatsoever there was pure, nice and beautiful in the world everything appeared to have been condensed together and found blooming in the form of Ma. Nepal dada was offering leaves and flowers at her feet by getting them tinged with fresh blood oozing out from his chest. Ladies were uttering auspicious vocal sounds occasionally. After concluding worship Nepal dada began to recite the famous *stava* (recitation in prayer to Goddess) :

*"Yā Devi Sarvabhutesu Kshānti rupena Samsthītā Namastaswai Namastaswai
Namastaswai Namō Namaha....."*

[The Goddess who exists in all beings in the form of forgiveness, salutations, salutations to you again and again.]

Looking at Ma it was found as if she was in *samādhi* the eyes were closed, body was still. Ma was looking exquisite in the mild morning light, being covered with flowers. It did not appear to be the form of a human being, but as if the Mother of the Universe Herself has come in physical form to accept the puja being offered by devotees.

Nepal dada being overwhelmed-with emotion started reciting *stavas* again —

*"Sarva Mangalamangalye Sive Sarvārtha Sādhike
Sharanye Trayambake Gauri Nārāyani Namostute"*

*. A resident of Varanasi, who afterwards took *Sannyas* and became known as Swami Narayananda Tirtha.

*Srīsthi sthiti vināśānām śaktibhute śaṅātani.
 Guṇāśhrāye Guṇamayē Nārāyaṇi Namostute
 Saranagata dīnarta Parītrana parayane
 sarvasyārti hare Devi Nārāyaṇi Namostute"*

(The One) who does the wellbeing of all, beneficent and fulfils all desires, I take refuge in thee, O Gauri, the Goddess of three *guṇas* (qualities), salutations to thee *Nārāyaṇi*.

(The One) who is the power behind creation, existence and annihilation who is eternal (attributes)

(The One) who is the shelter of all *guṇas* and also full of *guṇas*, salutations to thee *Nārāyaṇi*.

(The One) who is ever the saviour of all those who take shelter in thee and those who are humble and afflicted

Thou take away the afflictions of all, salutations to you O *Nārāyaṇi*.

A strong flow of pure feelings was being felt in the hearts of all who were present. A few were found looking astonishingly at Ma with eyes overfilled; Naren dada and others were dancing while singing kirtan; Joshiji, Pandeyji and others were reciting *stavas* in Hindi, as if losing all sense of the outside world. A strange situation was created as a result of unusual conjunction of place, time and beings. Everything seemed to be as if unearthly.

The wave of feelings in the minds of devotees somewhat lessened. But Ma continued to sit in the same manner as before. Biren dada prayed (to Ma) to give permission for allowing to do *pranams* by touching her feet today. But who will give the answer? Ma herself only knew in which universe she had been moving around. A few of us came out of the *Panchvati* to have *prasād*. When we went back to *Panchvati* after sometime then we found her lying down. Birendada and others were allowing all to go near Ma and do *pranam* by touching her feet and immediately they allowed to go out through another direction. This arrangement for doing *pranam* was completed in a disciplined way as a result of proper arrangements made by Biren dada.

Thereafter we also came back home.

(To continue)

GOD AS LOVE

—Akshey Kumar Datta Gupta

God is Love, say the wise. But it may be asked : Is not there also Law, the natural antithesis of Love, which rights wrongs, decrees penalties, and so upholds the moral order of the world? So it has been said in the Gita that the Lord incarnates Himself from time to time in order to protect the good and destroy the wicked for the rehabilitation of *dharma*. Here certainly the Lord speaks more of Law than of Love as the *raison d'etre* for His direct personal intervention in the affairs of this world.

In fact, however, the antithesis between Love and Law as applicable to the ways of God to men is more apparent than real. They are like the two faces, obverse and reverse, of a coin which in essence is the same. Love in fact is the fulfilment of Law.

In past aeons when the passions were more elemental and, therefore, more subversive and more catastrophic, God had to come down in person the more quickly and effectively to make short work of them. But as stated in the *Durgā-Saptasati* (*Chandi*) the Divine Mother, instead of reducing the *asuras* to ashes by a mere glance, took the trouble of engaging in open battle to kill them in order that being purified by the weapons hitting them, they might have access to heaven. And again "In Thee alone, O Divine One, that dispensest blessings, in all the three worlds, is to be seen ruthlessness in battle combined with compassion in the heart."

Indeed such were the circumstances in those days that Lord Krishna in his early sports (*Līlā*) in Vrindaban, designed chiefly to show how to love and be loved, had nevertheless to go apparently out of his way to kill Putana, Agha, Baka, Kāliya, and a few other demons, not to speak of Kansa, Kesin, Sishupala and others who were disposed of after the Lord had left the serene precincts of Vrindavan.

Circumstances would appear to have changed very considerably since then. Even in this much maligned Kali Yuga the Divine does not have to descend in person to kill or otherwise to deal condign punishment to the wicked. That is left to be accomplished by Law, the wheel of which grinds quite effectively, though somewhat slowly. So Buddha's message was *ahimsā* (non-violence), forgiveness and mercy and according to the Mahayana School, the essential nature of a Bodhisattva is a great loving heart (*Mahā Karuṇā Chitta*) and all sentient beings constitute the object of His love. So Christ's message was forgiveness and charity (love), and "forgive" was one

*. चित्ते कृपा समरनिष्ठुरता च दृष्टा ।
स्वयमेव देवि वरदे भुवनत्रयेऽपि ॥

of the last words that fell from his lips before his spirit left the mortal body. Nearer home we see Jagai and Madhai overwhelmed less by Sri Gauranga's call for the *Sudaršana Chakra* than by the matchless love of Sri Nityananda who is supposed to be the second self of Sri Gauranga.

If, therefore, agreeable to changed circumstances of the present epoch of the so-called iron age, the milder way of love commends itself to the Divine about to operate in human form for the rehabilitation of *dharma* by encouraging the good, sustaining and energizing the despondent and weaning the wicked from sinful ways, what more appropriate and attractive form can the Eternal Formless One assume than that of mother? For in all human relations, the Mother alone is all love. You may be peevish, you may be rude, you may be cheeky, you may give pain and offence in a hundred foolish and inconsiderate ways, but your mother is ever the same soft, patient, self-forgetful self that hugged you to her gentle breast in your infancy and is ever ready to forgive and forget. When weary or despondent or ill, no matter how old you are, you go to your mother and without any ceremony recline on her lap as a storm-battered ship betakes itself to the nearest haven for shelter and safety. So it has been truly said by Sankaracharya : There may be a bad son, but never, never a bad mother.*

Christ preferred to call God as Father, and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitute the Christian Trinity. (पिता नोऽसि) "Thou art our Father," says Sruti (Yajur-veda). But the *Śakti Tantra* which originated and flourished in Bengal at least a thousand years ago, knows only the Mother and would not recognize any other independent reality by Her side on the same plane. For *Isvara* or *Śiva* is only an emanation from Her and waits for enervation by Her before setting about his appointed task. So says the well-known *Ananda Lahari*, "Only when joined by Sakti can Śiva function. Otherwise he lacks even the pulsation of life force."** Bengal has been worshipping the Divine as Mother from the time when the *Śakti Tantra* was revealed to her and that was some centuries before the advent of Vaishnavism, the other popular creed, from South India. The Mother cult is still going strong here. Not so long ago Ramprasad Sen (d. 1775 A.D.), the great poet-devotee, attained *siddhi*, that is, the goal of spiritual endeavour and aspiration, by his songs, beautifully rich in emotional fervour and reflecting in a superb way all imaginable moods, stable or fleeting, of filial love and devotion. Ramprasad's songs still ring in the throats of all classes of Hindus in both parts of Bengal. Many other devotees on this side of India, including even a few Bengali Mohammedans, have invoked the Divine Mother by means of songs instinct

* "कुपुत्रो जायेत स्वप्तिदपि कुमाता न भवति" ।

** "शिवः शक्त्या युक्तो यदि शक्तः प्रभवितुं,
न चेदेवं देवो न खलु कुशलः स्पन्दितुमपि" ।

with beauty and emotion of no mean order before and after Ramprasad Sen. The great Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who is now regarded as an *avatārā* by many, also was a devotee of the Divine Mother, often singing entrancingly, as only he could sing, the songs of Ramprasad and others. If, therefore, the Divine chose to operate here below in the role of Mother, what other region in all India might be thought to be more worthy of the honour of receiving Her on its lap than Bengal? Besides, dire misfortunes including vivisection after vivisection planned from political motives and attended by orgies of murder, rapine, rape and famine were ominously in the offing. As dispensations of Law of Karma of the Hindus, who have suffered the most, these could not perhaps be prevented, but it was most necessary that they should not be left to wander miserably adrift on the uncharted sea of life at the mercy of the winds and waves of adverse circumstances, cut off from their age-old spiritual moorings.

It must also be said here that if Bengal's condition was much graver, the whole of India was standing on the edge of a precipice.

So here you have Ma Anandamayi come to give you the much needed spiritual succour. A tiny peaceful village in a remote corner of a remote East Bengal district, Tippera (Tripura), was elected to have the glorious privilege of first receiving Her on its lap in the holy month of *Vaisakha* of the Bengali year 1303, that is, 30th of April 1896 A.D.

Here the reader will kindly put up with a little digression. The district of Tippera, like most East Bengal districts, has long had a preponderingly Mohammedan population, mostly descendants of converted Hindus. But when Mother was born, there were as yet no base communal feelings rampant in any part of Bengal and little religious acrimony. Indeed there had been a few well-known and esteemed members of that community in the Tippera district who sang of and worshipped the goddess Kali. The place where Mother was born was surrounded by houses of Mohammedans, mostly illiterate peasants, and was some years later purchased and occupied by a Mohammedan family.* Mother in Her childhood used frequently to visit the houses of those Mohammedan neighbours who all loved and liked Her, as She also had a soft corner of Her heart for them. No religious scruples were violated. At one time the revered Ramani Mohan Chakravarti (later called Bholanath), Mother's late husband, was employed as keeper of Shahbagh, a garden at Ramna, Dhaka, belonging to the well-known Nawab family of that town. He had his quarters within the extensive compound of the garden. Mother had already attracted many devotees who performed *Kālī Pujā* within the garden, without any objection raised by or on behalf of its owners. Indeed some members of the Nawab family, both ladies and gentlemen, soon learnt to appreciate and respect Her. There was within the compound of Shahbagh

* The place has since been acquired by the Ashram.

the grave of a *siddha fakir* supposed to have hailed from Arabia. On one occasion Mother had the *kheyāla* to go quite close to the grave and at once felt like performing *namaz*, uttering words She knew not of what language. A Mohammedan worker in the garden saw all this and soon a report of the incident reached the ears of the owners. They came in great curiosity and the ladies among them earnestly requested Mother to repeat the performance; and though She at first declined, the old feeling came upon Her again when She was taken by them to the vicinity of the grave. They recognised that She was repeating portions of the *Quran*. Mother gave out later that the long, long departed fakir had revealed himself to Her with a disciple in his company at Bajitpur, the former place of Bholanath's employment, and invited Her to come and stay in Shahbagh where later She again saw him.

Another long departed saint, not a Mohammedan, who also played some, though not fully revealed, part in Mother's *īla*, may be mentioned here. He followed Mother in the not very attractive form of a cobra at Vindhyachal (U.P.) and Dacca and lastly when She was going in a boat along a *beel* in Tippera District. He also was accompanied by a disciple. He bit a toe of Mother's foot at Vindhyachal, and at Dacca meekly allowed Her to tread on his reptile body. About the bite Mother said later that it had been no more than a caress. The saint had been interred at a spot in Ramna which later was chosen to be the site of Mother's Ashram in Dhaka. The snake was given architectural commemoration and honour round the top of a small temple erected over the spot where the mortal remains of the saint were supposed to have been buried. A *lingam* was installed in the temple.

The whole of East Bengal and the Dhaka town in particular, falling some years later into the jaws of a rabid communal spirit, it is small wonder that the above ashram has not been spared the tender mercies of fanatics and this in spite of the fact that Mother was held in great respect not only by many members of the Nawab family of the town but by many other highly respectable persons belonging to the Mohammedan community there as well as elsewhere.

Now to return to Mother's birth and early life. The more than cherubic looks of the baby charmed everybody, as they have done ever since. The proud Mother named her darling *Nirmala* (Taintless) and no truer name could be given to the One whom *Sruti* has described as "शुद्धमपणविशुद्धम्", "holy and immaculate." About three decades later a spiritual son (the late Jyotish Chandra Roy) in a flash of genius called Her "Anandamayi" (All Joy), and the name caught on instantly, side-tracking the one given by the parents who had brought Her into the world. It was Mother's son's triumph over Her own mother, as perhaps it should be.

One or two years' very irregular attendance at a moribund lower primary school the only educational institution available for Her, was the only schooling She has

ever had. Even rapid reading was not one of Her accomplishments when She left the school to be married. But is She or the world any the worse for it? Thousands have listened and still listen, to their intense delight and incalculable benefit, to the words of supreme knowledge and wisdom acquired at no second hand but welling up from Her nature. Long established custom which allowed to be transgressed only in the interests of tradition and had also at that time just begun to be defied in the cities by English education (both of which circumstances were absent in this case) required that girls should be given in marriage before they acquired either physical fitness or desire for motherhood. So the humble parents selected an equally humble husband for their girl before She completed Her thirteenth year, and She went to live in the husband's family in Dhaka district, hiding Her angelic face under a cubit long veil, as village girls of those days invariably did for years after their marriage. Something unworldly was noticed in the girl even in Her childhood. She was often absent-minded, seeing or dreaming of we know not what, but nothing connected with play or work in hand. This trait developed after marriage into frequent fits of apparent insensibility to external surroundings, sometimes involving repetition of hymns or *mantras* in a tongue or tongues unknown to anybody near Her, although at other times She was perfectly natural, doing all that She was required to do to the satisfaction of every person concerned.

At first these fits were suspected to be hysteric or some distemper of that class. But they occurred generally, though not invariably, when religious chants came to Her ear and they had certain other characteristics that clearly marked them off from any morbid state of the mind. The result was that the young husband felt awestruck in Her presence and soon enough ceased to look upon Her as wife proper. Thus in spite of marriage and staying with the husband, She continued a *Kumārī* (*chaste virgin*), under which living form the followers of *Śakti Tantra* have worshipped the Divine for ages.

[To continue]

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MATAJI

—Collin Turnbull (Premananda)

The world is shaken by a series of wars, it is filled with suspicion and hatred, there is no peace for the body, mind or spirit. That is how we of the West felt at the end of the last World War, and we feel the same today. Everywhere there is disunity, unhappiness, and emptiness in our innermost lives.

The last war was, in some ways, necessary for our spiritual welfare. It shook us all into a momentary realization of our need for a firm spiritual foundation for our lives. The churches were filled and for a while it seemed that we were turning to God at last. The war ended, however, and the churches became empty again, and God was forgotten; man returned to his normal humdrum life, moved mainly by purely material considerations. Material considerations were, in fact, our only guide and standard, even morality was largely a matter of social convenience. There was a spiritual emptiness and although many were too engrossed in their whirl of activity, there were some of us who felt only a great loneliness, and a longing for something deep and lasting on which to build our shattered lives. Our eyes had been opened and we could no longer remain satisfied with a way of life which not only ignored the world outside our own small society, but ignored the very deepest meaning and purpose of life itself.

I left my home and came to India for the sole purpose of discovering what it was that was missing in my life, and of filling that spiritual emptiness which made life seem so pointless, I had studied Indian philosophy and had a number of Indian friends, and felt convinced that in India I would find not only what I myself wanted, but what the whole of the western world needed.

It was not easy at first, although the Hindu family with which I lived in Baroda treated me as their own son. I learned to live the Indian way of life without too much difficulty, but all the time I was aware of some intangible difference between us, something which they had and I had not. Then I came to Banaras and settled down at the University to a serious and concentrated study of Indian philosophy. I found an increasing amount of intellectual satisfaction and yet that "something" still eluded me. Argue and reason as I might, I could not break that chain which anchored my inner life to the West and prevented me from feeling at one with my Indian friends. As long as I concerned myself with the intellect the Spirit eluded me.

I had read many books on yoga, and although again I could find myself in com-

plete intellectual agreement with the system, yoga meant nothing more. Then, one day, a friend at the University told me that there was a woman in Banaras who was regarded as a saint and would I like to meet her? My immediate reaction was "No", but when I saw some of the articles in that book compiled by her devotees I felt less certain. It was Anandamayi Ma, and although I still felt that my western ways of thought and conduct revolted against the idea of a woman saint, I could not help feeling a curiosity, and beneath that something more—irresistible attraction, which came through the pages of the book and filled my thoughts as I sat in the Guest House reading it.

It was through no will of my own, it was something inevitable, like the action of a magnet, and one evening I found myself wandering through Lanka and down to Assi, and then through the narrow twisting lanes until we came to Anandamayi Ashram. There were three of us, and we had all come to India from the West for the same purpose, the other two were Americans; one went to Ramana Maharshi and the other to Sri Aurobindo not long after the day we first met Anadamayi Ma.

I cannot describe that first meeting; there was a large crowd, all sitting on the lovely terrace over the Ganga. And there in the midst of us, in simple white clothes, was Anandamayi Ma.

The first sight of Her unsettled me, and made me feel as though the precarious hold I did have on life was being swept away, and after She had said a few words to us I felt almost glad to get away and return to the safety of the University. It was, I suppose, the natural reaction to the impact of two worlds. I had been on the borders between East and West still holding grimly on to the West because it was all I knew, but now I had been plunged into the unknown by the mere sight of a woman.

The very next day, in the morning, I was again making my way to the Ashram, and this time I sat for an hour or more in the hall beneath the terrace listening to the *kirtan* and to Anandamayi as She spoke and laughed and sang. She sang and She seemed to be singing to me. All the time She was asking me the question She had asked one of my friends the evening before: "Will you surrender, will you do whatever I tell you, without question?" Those were Her terms if I was to get any further, and again I felt a wild urge to run away. One of the devotees, (Dr. Panna Lal) even asked me directly, in English, and although I opened my mouth I could say nothing.

It was not long afterwards that Anandamayi became "Mataji" and I became "Premananda", and from then onwards there was never any question of doubt. Mataji filled exactly that emptiness I had felt in the western world, and through Her I learned how to lead a whole life, how to carry the Spirit into the every-day world, how to lead an every-day life that is at the same time a dedicated life, and intensely spiritual.

The combination of spirituality and practicality is one of the most valuable gifts that the East has to offer to the West; and Mataji taught accordingly.

In Her ashrams I felt the bond of brotherhood which will eventually unite the world, and in the mutual love and consideration which pervaded all those gathered around Mataji, I found a way of life which is yet but a dream among the majority of the peoples of the western world. There was no question of rich or poor, good or bad, high or low, there was perfect brotherhood among all. I think that perhaps the greatest things I learned were a love for Truth and a love for all my fellow-beings. Truth can be a hard master, but there are none better, for Truth is one of the ways in which the Spirit is revealed. Those around Mataji could not help but be impregnated with this wonderful ideal, and at the same time feel all the petty differences and distinctions which normally surround us, disappearing. Here was life as it should be led, life for the One Self, not for the little individual self, a life in which all of us could join equally, no matter how feeble and weak we were.

I find it impossible to describe Mataji, and have given up trying to do so. She is both a woman and not a woman, for in Her bodily form She gives us a living example of what life should be like — and just to see Her is to know — and yet after a few minutes in Her presence you know that the body is a mere shell, and that Mataji is essentially far beyond its narrow confines. Mataji is everywhere and at all times for those who want Her, and nothing is more delightful than complete surrender and a great plunge into the ocean of Truth, Goodness and Beauty with which Mataji surrounds Herself. She has something different for every one of us, each according to his innermost nature and it seems almost wrong to speak or write about such a person, as that immediately limits Her. Not long before I left India to return to the West a number of us were returning in a bus from visit with Mataji to Pawa Puri and Nalanda. It was a tiring journey, but we were all singing *kirtan* for the first hour or so. We seemed to exhaust the possibilities of even this but one of Mataji's fondest devotees went on signing "Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma," until we reached home.

We tried to persuade him to introduce some variety, but he resisted our attempts and even refused to add "Jay Ma, Jay Ma" for our benefit. He was right. How useless words are! And if we must use them it is better to confine ourselves to as few as possible. For him Mataji was the only reality in the world. He was a *sannyāsi* and wanted one thing only — he could see that one thing in Mataji. So why sing elaborate *kirtan* when he could do just as well by singing the name of "Ma" only?

Over here in the midst of the turmoil and trouble of western life I often think of that bus ride, and as I sit in the evenings and think of Mataji I find that all words and thoughts leave me, and I am conscious only of "Ma" and all She stands for. It is the

only thing which makes life worth while under such conditions, and it is an additional proof that it is in the eternal Truth which is so perfectly revealed in Mataji that the world today will find the foundations on which to build a happier future. Mataji has a message for each one who comes to Her, but in Her very being She is a message for the whole of mankind.

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"If you can develop inner beauty, and enshrine Him, the ever-Beautiful in the glorious temple of your heart, you will then be able to perceive beauty in everything."

—Ma Anandamayee

MOTHER

—Durga Singh (Yogi Bhal)

A mother is the most loving being in this world. When a child starts babbling, the first word that comes out of its mouth is "Ma", i.e. Mother. The affection of a mother is such that the most worthless child is as dear to her as the most worthy one. Her love is as unselfish as it is impartial and deep. It expects no return. Everybody else in the world loves from some selfish motive and in one form or another wants a return for his love or devotion. Looked at in this light, Śrī Śrī Ma Anandamayī is a true mother. She loves all of us alike. Some of us may not at all be worthy of it, neither as regards our characters nor our dealings with other people. But this makes no difference to Her attitude towards us. I am an utterly worthless fellow, but still I am not turned out of Her fold. That shows the breadth and greatness of Her heart. Mother knows all that everyone does, but She never despises anyone. She is all-powerful and yet behaves like an innocent girl and takes pleasure in calling Herself a little child. This supreme simplicity as well as complete absence of egoism are the most remarkable features of Mother's great personality, not to speak of other qualities which are countless. The infinite can never be described fully.

I had my first *darśana* of Mother in Solan in the year 1934. In the preceding winter I had gone to Calcutta with my wife. It was my first visit to Calcutta and naturally I was full of excitement. I had previously read the life of Śrī Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva and had a great desire to visit the Dakshineswar temple. I consider myself fortunate that this desire was fulfilled. The whole place appeared to me very attractive and charming. The image of Goddess Kali gave rise to feelings in my mind which I cannot fully describe. I silently prayed for Her *Kripā* and soon after that I had the *darśana* of Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi. I have no doubt that it was by the kindness of Mother Kali that I met Mother Anandamayi. To me both are one and the same. When Mother Anandamayi came to our side of the country, She went direct to Salogra where She remained for some time. There is a small cave in Salogra where She stayed. This was built by one Nath Babaji. Salogra is about four miles from Solan. It was there that I had the good fortune of having Mother's *darśana* for the first time. When Mother was in Salogra, the late Bhaiji (J.C. Roy) of blessed memory was with Her. One day I had to go to Simla for some work. It was raining the whole day. On my way back I stopped at Salogra to see how Mother was faring in that heavy rain. I found Her sitting in the cave with water running all round Her inside it. Bhaiji had made fire in a basin to keep Her warm. As soon as Mother saw me, She asked me

to come into the cave and when I did so She laughed heartily. I shall never forget that pleasant and radiant face of Mother. I requested Her to come with me to Solan lest She should catch cold in the cave; but She said that She was quite happy there. I requested Bhaji also to persuade Mother to come to Solan. But he replied that Mother would act only according to Her own inclination. My motive in asking Mother to visit Solan was twofold. First, She would be better protected against rain and cold and secondly, my mother and wife would also have the opportunity of having Her *darśana*. However, I was not successful in inducing Mother to come to Solan on that day. After this, I visited Mother another day and sought Her permission to bring my mother and wife over there for *darśana*. But Bhaji said that as Mother Herself would go to Solan, it was not necessary to take the ladies to Her. As far as I can remember, Mother visited Solan the next day and came straight to my place where arrangements had been made for Her stay. She, however, did not enter the house, but preferred to sit in the tennis-court which was near it. There my mother and wife were fortunate enough to have Mataji's *darśana*. The present Ashram of Mother in Solan is on that tennis-court. Mother returned from Solan the same day to Salogra.

It would not be out of place to mention here that when Mother visited Salogra, there was an old saint, known as Sri Shoghi Babaji, in Solan. Many people from different places used to come to him for *darśana*. Mother decided one day to visit Shoghi Baba without any previous intimation. She came in a car and went straight to Shoghi Baba who was staying in an old school-building in Solan. To the utter surprise of everyone Shoghi Baba received Mother most cordially and had a very hearty talk with Her. Babaji was known to be a man of a somewhat stern disposition and often of rude behaviour towards those who dared to go to him without first obtaining his permission.

This was the first meeting between Mother and Shoghi Babaji. After this She visited the *sādhu* often when She came to Solan. When the first meeting between Mother and Babaji took place, I had not yet seen Her. It was after this that I went to Salogra to have Her *darśana*. I have already referred to Her second visit to Solan when my mother and wife saw Her. We failed to persuade Her to stay overnight. It was on Her third visit that She stayed in Solan for some nights in a small mud house near the Narsingh Temple.

One day I had a memorable vision. Mother was sitting in a crowded room. I was in a corner facing Her. Suddenly it occurred to me that people said that Mother was an incarnation of Goddess Kali; should I be fortunate enough to have some proof of this fact? All at once I noticed a fly sitting on Mother's face. Sri Hansa Dutt Tewari, who had come from Dehra Dun with Her, tried to drive the fly away, but it was

repeatedly trying to sit on Mother's face. At this Mother started laughing heartily and to my great surprise I noticed that the complexion of Her face was changing. It looked quite dark for a few minutes and then resumed its natural complexion. I silently offered my *pranāma* and congratulated myself on my good fortune. No doubt it was due to Her *kripā*.

Mother's views are so catholic that men of all shades of religious thought and belief come to Her, and everyone feels satisfied with what he sees and hears. I fully believe, as I have already stated, that our Mother and the great Goddess at Dakhineswar to whom I offered my obeisance as the one frequently invoked by Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, are one and the same. She has appeared in the present form for the salvation of all of us.

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"If you cannot do anything else, atleast peer at the open sky whenever you have the chance. Little by little the rigid knots will be slackened, and you will find yourself becoming free.

—Ma Anandamayee

MA ANANDAMAYEE*

—T.S. Nagarajan

One day, forty years ago, a staunch follower of Ma Anandamayi mustered all his courage and asked the mystic the two questions which were bothering him most : "Who are you?" and "What are you?"

The Mother smiled graciously and answered. "What a childish question to ask! What I was before, I am now, and shall be hereafter. I am also whatever you or anybody may think. I am... The yearnings (of seekers of truth) have brought about this body. You have all wanted it and so you have got it. That is all you need to know."

"But this is not a satisfactory answer," persisted the devotee.

"What more do you want to know? Tell me.... What more do you want to know?" pressed Ma. The eloquent questioner had by now become silent.

The devotee was Bhaji, one of Ma's most ardent followers, who later had the distinction of giving her the now famous name of "Anandamayi". Ma has no movement to support, no mission to fulfil. Yet there are millions who seek light from her : men and women of all faiths. Some of her devotees believe that she is "*Mānush Kālī*", the incarnation of the goddess. The erudite call her a "*sādhikā*", a realised soul. But Ma prefers to call herself simply, "this body".

It was by accident that I saw Sri Anandamayi Ma for the first time at her Varanasi ashram some years ago. I was at a loose end that rainy morning and someone suggested visiting the ashram. I went there.

I saw her again at Allahabad on the bank of the Ganga at the Kumbh Mela in 1970. I was busy photographing a swarm of pilgrims and someone mentioned that Ma was near by. I rushed to see her.

Even when she was a little girl her friends called her *Khusir Ma* (the happy mother) instead of *Nirmala*, her real name. She was the pride of Kheora, the village (now in Bangladesh) where she was born. Barely thirteen, *Nirmala* was married to *Ramani Mohan Chakravarty*, a simple villager, who later became better known as 'Bholanath'.

Initially, *Bholanath* found his pretty wife somewhat difficult to live with, although her devotion to him was unquestionable. The entire village talked about her serene

*. Reprinted from the famous weekly. "The Illustrated weekly of India " published on April 30, 1972 on the occasion of Mother's 75th Birth Anniversary.

disposition. Nirmala was tall and slim, with long black tresses flowing down to her knees. Her compelling presence attracted attention, making her conspicuous in the village.

A Prophecy Comes True

But this is not what bothered Bholanath. He found his young wife not at all interested in a conventional married life. She would think of God all the time, spoke very little and often went into trance. One day while she was on her way to the village pond to fetch water, a man suddenly fell at her feet and reverently called her "Ma".

An embarrassed Nirmala pulled the veil over her face and whisked herself away.

The man said : "Now it is only I who calls you Mother. But the day will come when the whole world will call you 'Ma'."

The husband was the first to prove this prophecy—much against the wishes of his people, who did not like the strange ways of his wife. They even advised him to ask for a separation. But Bholanath accepted Nirmala unreservedly, despite her unconventional ways. "You are very young and childlike. It will be all right when you grow up," he told her. ("But I never grew up!" says Ma.)

For Bholanath, too, Nirmala became 'Ma'. Her face took on a faraway look. She spoke little but the little she said was profound. Word went round of Ma and her occult ways. People came to see her out of curiosity but went back as converts. Their numbers swelled. Bholanath decided to leave the village and went to Dacca. But people followed her wherever she went. To them she was no longer Nirmala, Bholanath's wife. She was Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma. They did not go to see her but to have her *darshan*. Her home became a temple and Ma its presiding deity. Her kirtans drew large crowds. Ma sang in praise of the Lord :

Hare Murare, Madhukaitabhare

Gopala, Govinda, Mukunda, Saure

Today, Anandamayi Ma occupies a unique position in the cultural milieu of India. She has travelled widely and has ashrams all over the country—especially at Varanasi, Delhi and Vrindavan. She has a big following of devotees, from the Prime Minister downwards, for whom she is a fountainhead of wisdom. And like all saints, she has her share of sceptics too. Even to this day they ask questions as bluntly as Bhaiji asked Ma forty years ago. Can she peep into the future? Does her touch cure the sick? Any miracles? What has she to offer for the poverty of her countrymen—and of the world? Pertinent questions, because acceptance of the Divine has also to start from cold reasoning. It was in such a frame of mind that I first went to see Ma at Varanasi.

This ashram, in which Ma spends most of her time, is a two-storeyed house built at the end of lane, not far from the Ganga. The main door opens on to a vast courtyard in which I find women in white saris. Some are in a silent huddle, others move up and down the staircase leading to the first-floor balcony. I go up and find myself amidst a throng of devotees waiting for *darshan*. I manage to sit next to a patriarch, probably in his sixties, and let my eyes wander around.

Waiting For "Darshan"

We squat in front of a room in the middle of which there is a large picture of Ma. The women sit a little away from the men. On the wall there is an array of framed pictures of Anandamayi. I count as many as thirteen showing her in many moods. One of them shows her as a girl in her teens, clad in a white sari and standing in ankle deep water on a windy seashore. It is a trifle contrived. Two women bring a wooden *pitha* and place it in front of us.

"Where is Ma?" I ask a neighbour. He points to a room at the end of the balcony. The door is shut and some devotees with closed eyes are leaning their foreheads on it. They have marigold garlands in their hands.

I feel a mesmeric force, but I resist it and fall into a conversation with my friend next to me. He describes himself as one of those who built the ashram. "Ours is a backward country : only great souls like Mataji can make us go forward." He overwhelms me with a flood of eloquence in praise of Ma. He has known Anandamayi Ma for over two decades. He describes vividly how he once saw Ma in a state of *bhāva* during a *kirtan*. The rhythm of the music moved Ma into an ecstatic dance. Her face glowed and her body went through many movements. Slowly she started swinging and soon the pace increased. She was now swirling like a top. Her frame looked like a piece of cloth caught in a tempest. Somewhere a conch sounded, and all of a sudden she became still, frozen and slumped to the ground, her face flushed and radiant.

"What does a *bhāva* like this signify?" I ask, cutting in with much hesitation.

"It is a state of *samādhi* possible only to a realised soul," he answers.

More people have by now come up, but I don't find any sign of Ma's arrival. I venture to ask the experienced devotee next to me whether he has seen Ma perform any miracles. At first he does not seem to like the question and shrugs his broad shoulders." I persist. He ruminates on the form in which to couch his answer and says : "It all depends on what you consider a miracle. She is not a magician. Do you expect her to hold up a hailstorm or call down showers of rain? Ma has extraordinary powers." I prefer to keep silent and tell myself that one ought to learn to listen when among men of faith.

(Later I queried many close devotees of Ma at her ashrams in Delhi and Allahabad on this much talked-about aspect of her personality. What I got was curious mixture of hearsay and actual happening. Being unlucky not to have been blessed with any kind of personal experience, I found it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.)

The wait for Ma continues. The impatient crowd has fragmented itself into small talking groups. Two young Europeans walk in, managing to find their way amidst the devotees. The boy, in kurta and pyjama, teaches the girl, in jeans, how to squat on the floor. The crowd enjoys the lesson. After this interlude, I go back to my conversation with the neighbour. He surprises me by saying that for years Ma has not been eating with her own hands. She is fed by her closest devotee Khukuni Didi, the way a mother feeds her child.

"What is wrong with her hands?" I ask, rather innocently. "This is one of her many resolves. It means that for hands that pray eating is secondary," he says. This appears to me only his own explanation.

A few months later, I had an accidental meeting with Khukuni Didi herself at the Anandamayi Ashram in Delhi. This grand old lady in her seventies gave me what should be the correct version regarding this subject. Since 1924 Ma has not been able to eat with her hands, however much she tries. Her attempts to carry food to her mouth failed because her grasp slowly slackened and most of the food fell from her hand. Khukuni Didi started feeding her forcibly with her own hands to save Ma for herself and the world. Quite often Ma has abstained from taking any food for long intervals. "Once this body lived on three grains of rice per day for five months. It looks a miracle. As a consequence of *sādhana*, it is quite possible to live without what we call food." Sometimes Ma has eaten incredibly large quantities of food, saying: "If I start eating, none of you will be able to provide for me, however rich you may be."

A hush descends on the devotees. The door opens, snapping the marigold garland. A bespectacled young woman comes out first. Ah, there is Ma behind her! A picture in white wreathed in a smile. Flowers toss up in the air. I look at her. She has the face of a dreamer. Her hair is jet black, her eyes extraordinarily tranquil and luminous. She walks quickly like a girl in her teens and settles majestically in the *pitha*.

The crowd moves closer to Ma and queues up to prostrate before her. As they get up, some of them leave currency notes and coins at her feet. The lady in glasses efficiently removes the money. One of the women tries to touch her feet. But Ma quickly withdraws them. The devotee says something to her. Ma smiles, strokes the woman's hair and says something in Bengali.

It is my turn now. She looks at me and my camera rather strangely. The calm eyes look into me. She lays her hand in blessing, turns back, picks up an apple and gives it to me. I pull my faculties together, bow and depart, clinging to the apple and the camera. An elderly woman, sitting closest to Ma, starts singing. I close my eyes, wondering where I am. I hear the song and smell the sweet incense rising around me. Moments pass. I open my eyes and find Ma *rising* in dignity to depart. The music is still in the air but order makes way for chaos.

*

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR MOTHER ? SISTER EARTH

Have you felt our Mother's foot steps
as She walked across your endless lands
planting the seeds
of creation and dissolution?
Have you heard her singing her sweet song
of compassion and love?
If so, tell her that her child
who loves her so very much
has awakened from his long nap
and yearns to hug his Mother once again.*

(Courtesy : Soft Moon Shining —Journal Peace)

THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY : MY PATH

—Jai Jai (James Johnson)

[Continued from before]

Pilgrimage to India, 1981

A Dream on the Eve of Departure : 15 September, 1981

Walking down a road with others, I look toward the setting sun clothed with cloud. Shafts of wondrous rainbow light pierce the gathering dark.....joyous, expanding rainbow rays in which I begin to see figures which appear to be cut out of the rainbow light.....beings of another dimension.....a girl with flowing hair...a mountain goat descending a rocky cliff.... and many more. I long to be with them and am soon drawn in.

A holy woman welcomes me with a smiling embrace and then seats me beside the girl with the flowing hair at the foot of an immense white marble statue of the Mother Goddess. The woman says to me softly, "It's amazing how comforting it can be just sitting here." Tears of joy fill my eyes. I wake with tears.

Dear Mother, wake me from my slumber.

Supreme, free me from this dream of carnal bondage.

Anandamayi Ma — Vrindaban, Krishna's Childhood Home

India is a severe trial for a novice Westerner; it is particularly difficult for one with no plans, little money (after buying an Indrail pass), completely in the dark about customs and transactions and reticent to ask questions. Wearing the Indian pilgrim whites I had bought made me stand out sharply from the universally black-haired, shorter Indians. Many heads turned with eyes wide as I passed to see a tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed pilgrim. The smell of excrement, the beggar children with purposely deformed limbs and gouged-out eyes printing "Baba, Baba" with cupped hands, the heat and dust, the crowded and confusing streets, the push and shove and ticket counters and train platforms : All were overwhelming.

I had little money or knowledge of where or how to buy food or find lodging. In the time it took to get to Vrindaban (I did do a little sight-seeing on the way from Delhi; the Qutub Minar in Delhi, the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Agra), I had barely eaten, been pushed and prodded, stepped on, grossly overcharged and had slept in some very dingy rooms. Half drowned, I finally fetched up in the Baba Neem

Karoli ashram in Vrindaban, needing seclusion, if not therapy. I was grateful for the bare, quiet concrete room with a cot, a picture of Krishna and Radha and chartreuse geckos on the walls.

Over the next few days, having been purged by fasting and finally able to relax in one place, having been taught by a female pilgrim from Australia how to buy yogurt and fruit from vendors and having found a tank to wash my clothes and self, I began to regain my balance and to see the beauty of the place. I saw that this was an ancient and holy farm grown up to a now-crumbling village, its golden age long past, swamped by successive waves of conquering cultures. Old walled compounds with *mandirs* (temples) at their centers and now turned to cow pastures stretched to the misty horizon as *bhjanas* (songs) and Vedic chants floated on the air and peacocks called. My meditations were becoming very joyous.

And being in Ma's presence had begun to work on me. I was becoming quite recollected in meditation, though something always seemed to hinder seeing or being near her amid the throngs that attended her every movement: At evening meditation, the gas lantern would be placed on a stool directly between my face and hers and it was too crowded to move an inch; or I would end up behind a pillar, or when Ma threw out *prasad* (blessed food) everyone caught some but me. Yet I was content, knowing my unworthiness, and that I was not in control of anything.

One day, one of my last in Vrindaban, I took the 10 kilometer *parikrama marg*, a sacred circumambulation of the whole village and along the Yamuna River. After visiting the sites sacred to Krishna along it (I followed a sadhu and stopped to bow down where he had stopped and prostrated), I was about to place my foot in the original footfall (hidden under a bush to preserve it) with which I had begun the journey, as I had been instructed was proper. Astonished, I saw, right there in the footprint, a peacock feather, Krishna's symbol! A thrill went through me.

It was approaching noon and I was hot, tired and very thirsty. I began to imagine how good it would be to drink the cool water from the clay pot at Ma's ashram and so, almost in a daze, began to walk there, buying some bananas for lunch on the way. Once there and having refreshed myself with water, I noticed that everyone was leaving to rest for the afternoon and that the bookseller was packing up his wares. I bought a book of Mataji's discourses and wandered back to her residence, which was hushed; no one was about. I sat down on the steps in the full noon sun and began to read, all the while ready to faint and thinking to myself; "...mad dogs and Englishmen, out in the noonday sun."

Then suddenly a woman stuck her head out of the screen door and whispered, "Do you wish Ma's Darshan (blessing by sight or audience)?" I was overjoyed and

quickly began to unlace the long leather and steel ankle braces I then wore because both my ankle ligaments were torn in childhood. I knew it would not be right to wear leather in her house. I finally got them stripped off and, throwing them down, wheeled around, rushing to the door and cracking it open. I no more than got my head inside when a male devotee whispered a sharp order, "Stop! Do not come in". Head inside, my eyes slowly became accustomed to the dark interior. I made out a circle of perhaps a dozen disciples standing in a semi-circle around the dark silhouette of Ma against a bright window. She was seated in an elevated chair with handles for carrying it as she was too frail to walk much any more. She was facing the door I peered in from, about ten feet away; she had been watching me the whole time.

The woman came over and whispered to me again, "Do you have anything to offer Ma?" Joyfully I remembered the bananas I had bought for lunch, clearly the price of admission, and quickly fetched them. Then I was let inside where I threw myself down in a full *pranam* (prostration) before Ma, my face on the floor, eyes streaming with tears of joy; I was really in an altered state. Presently someone asked as I lay there, if I had anything to ask of Ma. My mind was an utter blank, but then I heard my voice asking for "Ma's eternal Grace". I heard someone translate, "Ma's Kripa," as the fruit was taken from my outstretched hands and replaced with blessed apples. Presently I heard some movement and looked up through my tears to see Ma's back as her chair was carried upstairs for the rest.

This whole time I never saw her face. First my eyes were not adjusted to the dark, then my face was on the floor, my eyes filled with tears, then her back was turned to me as she was carried up.

I stumbled outside in disbelief at my good fortune. Soon a gentleman older than me came up and said, "My name is Professor Moitra. I teach English at the Bhagat Singh College of the University of Delhi and I am in charge of the Fulbright scholars in India. You have been placed under my protection. If there is ever anything I can help you with while you are here in India, do not hesitate to call me. Here is my phone number." Then, after a slight pause, he tilted his head to one side and said softly, "I know you couldn't see this, but Ma granted your request for eternal Grace, she indicated that she had. And you know...it was quite remarkable...it was almost as if your body was transparent as you lay there...we could see right through you to the floor." I was left with a profound sense of wonder and gratitude.

A few days after that, I travelled on in my pilgrimage, wanting to see more of India while I was there and to learn how to function in the culture with less fear. Having heard of Swami Ramdas' and Mother Krishnabhai's wonderful and generous Anandashram in Kanhangad, Kerala, I travelled there. It was truly a joyous place.

Swami Ramdas, an ecstatic devotee of Ram, who achieved enlightenment through the Grace of Ramana Maharshi at Arunachala, had passed away some years before, but his samadhi radiated divine bliss as I circumambulated it. Mother Krishnabhai was advanced in age by then and very ill but she still inscribed a photo of the two of them with Swami's mantra, "*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.*" The ashramites were extremely courteous and loving. As soon as I arrived I was shown to a comfortable room and food was brought to me in brass tiffin. They even asked whether I would like rice or wheat chapatis.

I also visited Sai Shirdi's samadhi (tomb) and then Satya Sai Baba's ashram, Prisanthi Nilayam, but I did not feel at all drawn to him. I roamed with a Canadian Indian from Vancouver named Harminder. The food in the dining hall was fiery with chilies. It consisted of a big scoop of rice plopped down unceremoniously on the plate, then covered in a watery sauce seemingly of pure chilies. Even the bread had chilies in it and was too hot to eat. I fasted most of the time I was there. Then one day Harm, a long-time disciple of Sai Baba, said that he had arranged that we would get a portion of the food which Swami's family prepared for him every day. The night before Sai Baba had given a harangue about the evil of hot spicy food which was ruining the stomachs of the people. So I expected his food would be mild. Wrong. It was hot enough to light a fire with. I understand that today, however, one can get excellent food there in the Western canteen, even lettuce salads, unheard of in India.

I had resolved to travel back north to Kankhal, across the river from Haridwar where the Ganges bursts forth from the Himalayas; it is a site sacred to Shiva. Mataji was to celebrate Durga Puja there at the *Sangha's* headquarters. This nine-day festival of Navaratri, which includes the five-day Durga Puja, is an important event in the ritual life of Hindus; a large painted clay image of the Goddess Durga slaying the demon Mahisha is symbolically brought to life with elaborate rituals and *mantras* over the course of the festival and worshipped. Then, the life having been withdrawn on the concluding day, the image is taken to the Ganga and tipped into the powerful current to dissolve. The devotees worshipped Mataji as the incarnation of the Goddess Durga. I had also conceived a strong desire to ask Ma for initiation during this auspicious festival, though I hardly knew what that meant.

[To continue]

MAHA SAVITRI YAGNA*

—Kanhaiya Lal

It is a far cry from atom bomb for the destruction and annihilation of everything for petty territorial gains of power, to Maha Savitri Yagna for the preservation and for the good of all humanity and yet pursuits of both are carried on, the one with the fanfare of publicity which modern science and commercial art makes possible, while the other with that great modesty and humility which has always characterized Indian actions, and which has helped this country to come out unscathed from all the tribulations through which it has passed from time to time, and thus it has kept its inherent high moral standard in every thing that is worth while.

It is not for nothing that even in these days of materialism, when we are apt to be laughed at for turning towards Godhood, that help is sought from those unseen hands which never fail. One of these is the performance of Yagna for specific purposes like the Maha Savitri Yagna, which after three years of regular performance with strict rituals is to finish today (Jan. 14) at Sri Sri Mata Anandamayeeji's Ashram at Banaras.

Why of all rites and ceremonies, of all observances and activities the Yagna occupied a central place not only in the Vedic India but also in Pauranic and later-day India?

Yagna (worship) has been defined in Hindu *Shastras* as the dedication of any article to a deity. Yagna, though generally translated by the English word 'sacrifice', is not fully explained by that term. Sacrifice is an act in which some thing (generally but not always, an article of food and drink) is devoted to God.

It is interesting to know how prevalent the cult of sacrifice was among different religions in different times. Sacrifice in varying forms was fundamental in all primitive religions and has been prominent in more advanced religions, such as Zoroastrianism, the system of Greeks and Romans, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jewish religion, and even in Christianity in some of its phases. Of sacrifice in Christianity a well-known European author writes : 'It is offered to the Father and to the Son, and in it Our Lord offers and is offered and receives the sacrifice On the Cross and the Eucharist there is one sacrifice.' It is again written, 'It is not a symbol of sacrifice but really a sacrifice, in which that which is offered in sacrifice is the body of Christ, and in which the moment of sacrifice is when the bread and wine are changed into

*. An article published in a leading newspaper on January 14, 1950.

His body and blood called transubstantiation.'

Coming now to the cult of sacrifice in India, Yagna was always associated with fire and some offerings therein. In this respect it can be compared with the fire worship among the followers of Zorostricism. Animal sacrifice was not always a necessary part of Hindu Yajna, as it was not in almost all other religions. The part that fire plays in the Yagna of a Hindu is that of an intermediary between the sacrificer and the deity. This is clearly shown by the *Mantra* uttered in the Yagna '*Agne Vih Voushat*' which means let fire consume it and carry it to God.'

The ritualistic side of a sacrifice can be divided into various categories according to the occasion of the rite, objects to be achieved, form of the rites, and the ingredients used therein..... It is also divided as periodical and occasional. The division is important in most of the higher religions in which the sacrifice is practised as a cult; the former class is compulsory, while the latter is only facultative. It may be noted that in regard to the mode and performance of the rites the Hindus alone developed a complicated series of rituals and ceremonies.

Vedic sacrifices formed the first and foremost manifestation of the sentiments of faith and worship in India and sacrifices were the first *Dharmas*. (*Tani Dharmani Prathamani asan*. Rigveda 10,90). But the Yagnas, as prescribed in the *Shastras* of *Sanatana Dharma* have today fallen into disuse. They were, however, in vogue not only several centuries before the Christian era but also centuries after the advent and spread of Buddhism as we learn from the inscriptions and historic records. The Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads, the Sruta and Grihya Sutras as found today indicate a state of things when the institution of *yajna* formed a part of the vital observance of religious rites when different priests were required for the sacrifices who used *Mantras* in sacrifices. Moreover, the Brahmins or the Vedas are replete with anecdotes of the occasions of sacrifices performed by Kings, Seers and Sages. The epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the Puranas like the Matsya, Vayu, and the Bhagawat contain numerous references to the celebration of solemn Vedic Yagnas like the *Agnistoma*, *Ashwamedha*, *Rajasuya* and various others. In ancient India sacrificial sessions were held for years together. Kings aspiring to be called *Samratas* performed the *Rajasuya* and *Ashwamedha Yagnas*. They gloried in establishing the institution of solemn and grand *yagnas* that were falling into disuse. The reason for the decay of this institution was mainly the complicated and elaborate nature of the ritual necessitating a huge expenditure beyond the means of ordinary members of society. So the performance of Yagnas was confined to Kings, nobles and wealthy people.

Notable Yagnas

Rama performed a yagya in which Sita being absent he had to make use of her portrait. Yudhistira performed an Ashwamedha on the advice of Vyasa. In the Bhagawat Purana occur references of Yagnas, in one of which Lord Krishna was assigned the duty of washing the feet of invited guests to the funtion Sonapati Pushya Mitta, King Kharvel, Samudra Gupta, the Traikutaks, the Pallavas, the Wakatakas, the Kadambas, the Salankayanas, the Chalukyas, the Vishnukundins, the Andhras and other dynasties all have left records of their performances of different noteworthy *yagnas* like the *Ashwamedha*, *Rajasuya*, *Agnistoma*, *Gavamayana* and *Angirasamayana* and so forth. The well-known Dasashwarnedh Ghat at Banaras, where countless pilgrims from different parts of the country even today assemble to take a dip in the holy Ganga, is said to have received its name from the performance on that spot of ten *Ashwamedhas* by the famous Bharashivas as known from the Wakataka copper plates. In the 18th century Sawai Jaisingh of Amber performed an Ashwamedha, and the performance of Yagna by Shivaji is well known. In the Muslim period the practice languished and in the last hundred years or so the solemn Vedic sacrifices have become rare and few and far between.

Types of Hindu Yagnas

Broadly speaking, Hindu Yagnas are *Srauta* and *Smarta*. The Srauta sutras describe the rituals for the former and the Grihya Sutras for the latter. The *Srauta yagnas* are divided into the Isti, Pashu and Soma. The famous Yagnas like the Ashwamedha, Rajasuya, Agnihotra, Agnistoma, all are *Srauta Yagnas*. These have mosly gone out of practice. But the *Smarts* or *Girhya Yagnas* are still observed by most Hindu householders. These are the *Pancha Maha Yagna*, viz *Brahma Yagna*, *Deva Yagna*, *Pitra Yagna*, etc. These yagnas are simple. The *Kamya Yagnas* are the incidental and special *yagnas* occasioned by special wishes for special results by a sacrificer.

Five were the essential constituents for a *yagna* according to the Satapatha Brahmana which says *Pungto Vai Yajna*. These five constituents are detailed in the Vayu, Matsya and Brahmanda Purana. Thus there must be a deity unto whom the offering of oblation should be made by a priest along with the utterance of a *Mantra* of a yajamana. The priest receives his remuneration (*dakshina*). Today in a typical *Yajna* is needed a *Yajna-shala* constructed according to the Shastras at the centre of which is constructed a *Kunda* or pit where the sacred fire is kindled.

In Vedic times there used to be three fires. These fires were set on three sides of a square altar constructed in the centre. The most complicated Yagna of the Vedic

times was the *Soma Yagna* which called for numerous ingredients, many priests and a huge expenditure. That is why it was excluded from the *Nitya* (daily) performances. The *Soma Yagna* is an ancient observance of the Aryans even before their entry into India. Even the ancient Iranians performed this *Soma Yajna*. They called Soma by the name of *Haumia*. We have thought it necessary to make special mention of this kind of Yagna, because the Parsis in Bombay are said to have kept up the tradition of its observance. The other principal type of Vedic Yagna namely, the *Pashu Yagna* has practically disappeared. The sacrifice of an animal is occasionally made today in the worship of a goddess according to *Tantrik* rites. Here the sacrifice forms no part of a Yagna at all. Of the *Isti* type of Vedic Yagna the simple ones like the *Darsapuranamasa* and the *Chaturmasyas* are performed to some extent even today.

Another kind of Yagna that we hear of in the Vedas is the *Purusha yagna*. The legend of the sacrifice of *Purusha* preserves for us the idea that the world as well as mankind originated from the sacrifice of a primeval being. This idea reminds us of a similar conception among the Christians.

Savitri Yagna

The presiding deity of this Yagna is *Veda-mata* Savitri also called Gayatri. It is very much like Rudra Yagna and Vishnu Yagna. Each *Ahuti* in the *Savitri yagna* is offered to the accompaniment of the well-known Gayatri Mantra, and while the purpose or object will vary from person to person according to his wishes the general tone is for preservation as opposed to destruction or conquest possible by many other *mantras*. Here the *Maha Savitri Yagna* which has been performed at the Ashram of Sri Sri Mata Anandamayee has been with the grand and profound object of satisfying (or pleasing) the different *Ishtas* of all living creatures (literally as mentioned in the *Sankalp* of the *Yajaman* as follows '*Nikhil Srishti ke jivon ke apne apne Ishta preetyarth*').

ESOTERIC ASPECT OF YAGNAS

What was and is the idea with which the sacrificer made and makes offerings into the sacred fire? Is it only for some material gain? Sometimes, it may be. But in the other type of *yagna* the ritualistic side is a subsidiary means to a spiritual end. The esoteric observance has meaning and reality only in its esoteric significance and purpose. All the formalities of the complicated *yagyas* are rooted in the idea of dedication of one's self, of one's best possessions and dearest acquisitions, for consecration and final communion with the Creator. That the same technique of *Yagnas* could be utilized in a concrete manner as well as in a subtle manner becomes; clear from the

Vedas. The process of *Ātma-Yagna* mentioned in the Upanishads is the technique of *Yagna* employed by Sadhakas of *Inana Marga*. The followers of *Karma Kand* took to the exoteric observance. Again the exoteric act never lost its comprehensive and deep interpretation and significance. The grand propositions of the Gita bring out in full relief the hidden meaning of *Yagna*. It is the first act of creation *Saha yagna Praja Sristva*, etc. The Gods performed sacrifice by means of sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice. *Yagna* is the only act that leads to freedom from the bonds of the world. All acts performed as *Yagnas*, that is as offerings or dedication to the Creator, lead to happiness and freedom. Others only add a link to the chain of bondage. In this way *Yajna* and its meaning find profound and mystic exposition in the Hindu scriptures from beginning to end. The ritualistic aspect of sacrifice has been discarded due to various reasons and yielded place to the subjective psychological and spiritual aspect of the ceremony. Shri Aurobindo, a great seer of modern India, has also given a spiritual meaning of *yagna* in his Essays on the Gita and his writings on the Vedas.

The greatness of the *Maha Savitri Yagna* at Sri Sri Mata Anandamayee Ashram lies not only in the very special features which have marked its beginning, continuance and its conclusion, but its greatness lies in the sublime motive which actuated it, the peaceful objective that was kept in view and the profound and meticulous care that was taken to see that everything was done in strict conformity with injunctions in the sacred books, for after all the object was to preserve and not annihilate so much contrary to the modern conception of what are classed the most advanced countries and powers of the present day world.

The beginning of the *Yagna* was made, unknown to anybody when about 25 years ago at the *havan* after Kalipuja in Dhaka. Mata Anandamayee suggested that the fire kindled there be kept alive. This was done; and some years later the fire was brought to Vindhyachal and kept burning till it was brought to the *Havan Kund* at Varanasi for the *Maha Savitri Yagna*.

*