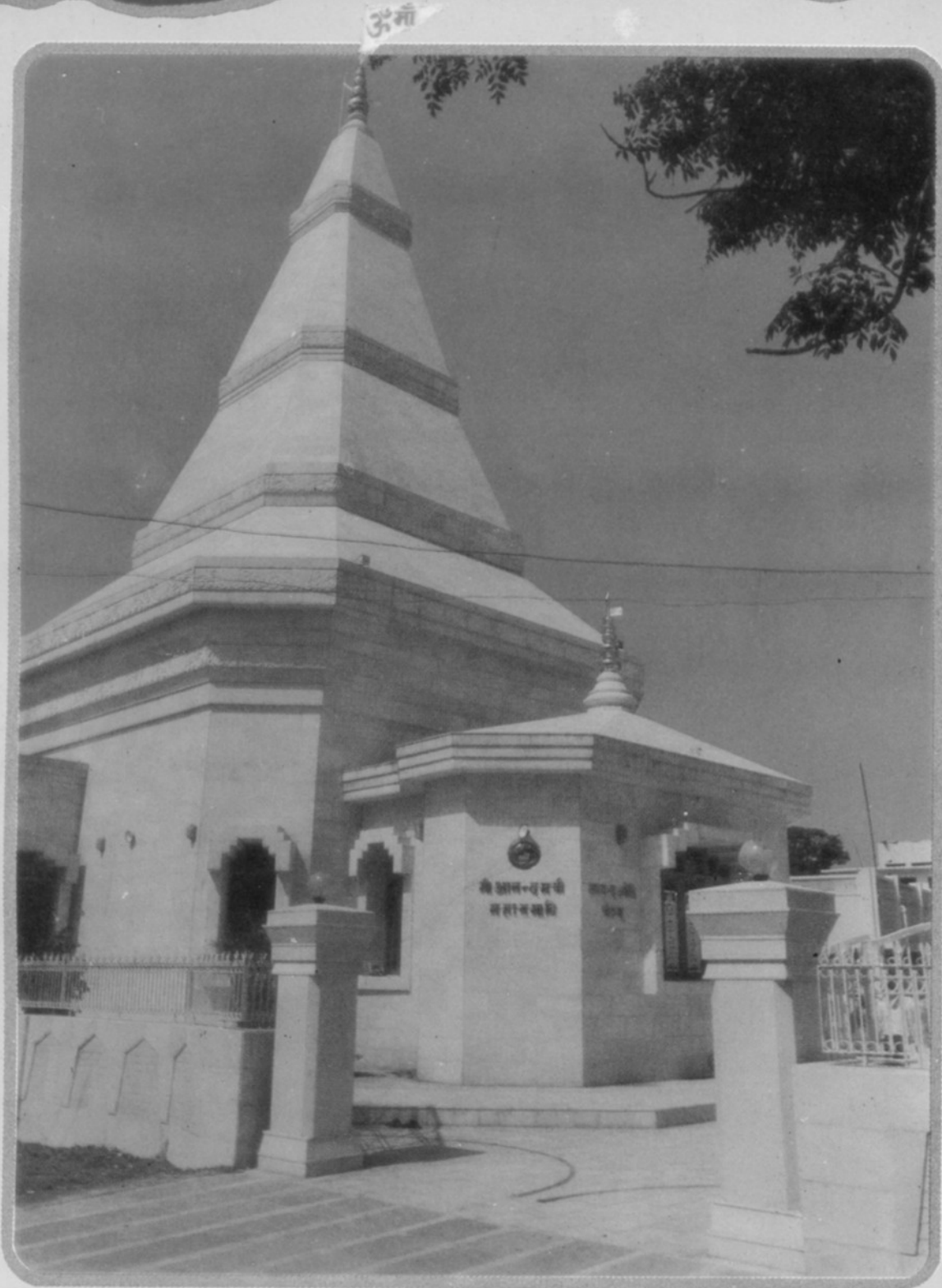


Amṛta Vārtā



Vol. I

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No. 1

आनन्द ज्योति पीठम्

AMRITA VARTA

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

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- * Toward an understanding of Sri Ma Anandamayi's presence in our midst
- * How a devotee of Anandamayi Ma becomes a Buddhist monk
- * From the notes taken in Sree Ma's presence
- * Some of Mother's ways

**"VERILY, I AM ONE WITH EVERYONE;
AFTERALL, THERE IS THE ONE
SUPREME BEING ALONE, ISN'T IT ?"**

—SRI MA ANANDAMAYI

We are happy to announce that we are now in a position to bring out a quarterly journal *Amrita Varta* in four languages, that is, Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati and English, devoted to the task of perpetuating Sri Ma Anandamayi's Amar Vani or sacred utterances and the recounting of her manner of being with us in this world.

We consider ourselves fortunate that the First Number comes out on the eve of the Centenary Celebration which will begin on May 3, 1995. We shall be able to reach out to the large family of devotees with news of the festivals, informations regarding many activities and various programmes to be undertaken under the aegis of the Sangha.

We shall look forward to the possibility of getting the attention of a wider public who would like to know more about Sri Ma herself and read about her inimitable programme of ceaseless travels which united and brought together people of different religions, provinces, even countries and languages. Indeed Sri Ma belongs to the world. She herself has said many times: "I belong to everyone" or "whoever or whatever *you* think, I am".

We are aware of the grave responsibility which devolves on us for disseminating the news of this joyous descent of Grace; we shall be grateful to all those who will come forward to help us in this work of making the journal a success. We pray that the *kheyala* of our compassionate Mother be with us in this new venture.

Jai Ma



CIRCULAR

All devotees, who would like to be enrolled as regular subscribers of the new quarterly journal "*Amrita Varta*", are specially requested to note the following :

1. Annual subscription for all the four issues proposed to be published in 1995 amounting to Rs. 60/- only along with an additional sum of Rs. 15/- as being the concessional price of the next October, 1994 issue should be sent at the earliest.
2. Intending subscribers, while very clearly giving their correct postal addresses with Pin Code numbers, should also mention *without fail* which particular editions of the journal: Bengali-English, Hindi-English, Gujarati-English or purely English they would like to subscribe from the next October, 1994 issue.
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●

MATRI-VANI

Universal love and permanent peace are won only through perfect power.

* * *

It is through the search after truth that man can elevate himself. This he should regard in the life as a duty.

* * *

Man must go out in search of that which is concealed behind the world. He should choose an abode, that will make it easy for him to proceed to his true Home.

* * *

Human beings have to be dwellers of the inner cave, so that the Supreme Being who resides within may be revealed.

* * *

Man must aim at the Superman, at real greatness. The traveller on the Supreme path may hope to attain to the ultimate Goal. This is man's main duty.

* * *

Verily, abounding sorrow is the essential characteristic of life in this world. Fix your mind upon God.

* * *

Since every thing belongs to him alone, there is no other means but to lie prostrate at His Feet. If there is to be anxiety, it must be solely for Him.

* * *

Set your mind on God. Whatsoever, He, the Fountain of Goodness, does is the very best that could have happened.

* * *

At every moment sustain the flow of His Name and the consciousness of his Presence: Never be without Him.



SRI SRI MA

—LATE JYOTISH CHANDRA ROY,
("BHAIJI")*

It is beyond our common intelligence to comprehend what Sri Sri Ma stands for and what she is in reality. Though She always says: "I am only a crazy little daughter of yours," still in all Her ways of life, in Her ever delightful *lilā* amongst us, all the powers of the Divine find expression in tangible forms.

In Sri Ma we find a perennial fountain of joy and sweetness, though She is surrounded day and night by the noise and bustle and a thousand entreaties of all classes of people. Her calm and serene looks, Her gracious, ever smiling response to all queries, Her exquisite sense of humour bring satisfaction and delight to every soul. Her ways of life are so universal and all-embracing that She may be called Motherly Love incarnate.

Some say that She is the Supreme Goddess of the Universe in human form. Others again are of the opinion that She has reached perfection through spontaneous psychic evolution without any effort on Her part. To us She appears to be whatever anybody may consider Her to be. At the first sight of Her, one becomes animated with a religious fervour, even if one happens to be almost impervious to spiritual ideas. In Her presence thoughts of God and His glory flourish with all their brilliance in hearts as dry as dust and the vibrations of one universal, all-pervading life overpower one's heart, as it were, with endless surges like a vast ocean of bliss.

When at one time She was asked who Her preceptor was, or from whom She had received initiation, She remarked: "In earlier years my parents were guides ; in household life my husband; and now in every situation of life, all men and things of the world are my Guru. But one thing is certain, the one Supreme Being is the only Guide for all."

From the standpoint of worldly people Sri Ma is an ideal daughter, wife and mother. To an aspirant after spiritual life, Her words and behaviour have deep significance, indicating various modes of spiritual culture and yogic practices, as well as the basic truths of dualism, non-dualism, dualistic monism and other philosophic doctrines. The physical changes that become manifest in Her body lead one to the inference that She is a confirmed *Vaiṣṇava*; in the Tantric worship of *Śiva*, *Kālī*, *Durgā* and other gods and goddesses or in the performance of Vedic religious sacrifices She has evoked admiration from eminent philosophers of the East and the West. The only difference that we notice between Sri Ma

* Reprinted from: "Mother as revealed to me" by the same author.

and the Great Masters who have reached perfection through *bhakti yoga*, *jñāna yoga*, and *karma yoga* in their special lines, lies in the fact that in Sri Ma all the paths of *sādhana* have reached a wonderful synthesis. It is through this harmony of the various modes of approach to the Divine that all types of people receive inspiration from Her presence.

Her genial and sweet appearance, Her uncommon patience and endurance, Her spirit of sacrifice and simplicity, Her ever joyful humorous ways of dealing with men, women and children, Her unsullied clear vision and good-will for all living beings, Her love for all men irrespective of caste, creed, community and nationality, Her absolute freedom from pleasure, pain and the like, make Her a unique figure in modern times. One cannot say that She has attained perfection through Self-effort, for, those who have watched Her from Her infancy assert that She has been the same in Her thoughts and actions all through Her life. Nobody has yet seen Her perform spiritual or religious exercises of any kind.

The natural or super-natural phenomena that became manifest in Her body occurred spontaneously for the welfare of all human beings. Those manifestations did not depend upon Her will nor did they function against it, nor were they the result of any devotional effort on Her part. When clarified butter with other oblations are offered into the fire on the altar, the flame flares up by a natural law, but the perfume that emanates, purifies and enlivens the whole atmosphere. After a little while no trace of the sacrificial offerings remains, but the flames keep on burning in purity and brightness. In exactly the same manner when Sri Ma's devotees bring their offerings to Her feet with the best of their love and reverence, the very touch of these gifts, causes the fountain of Her heart to burst forth, like the natural flow of milk from the mother's breast at the touch of Her infant's lips. So in the case of Mother, Her speech, Her looks, Her face, all express love for Her children. With a divine flame Her face brightens up for a time and soon after resumes its normal composure.

There is no conflict in Her, no urge to action or inaction disturbs the serenity of Her will. She is completely steeped in the light of that Supreme Truth which forms the bed-rock of all principles and practices of religion and of the moral codes of the world which has been revealed to the human mind in different ages for the good of the universe. A glimpse of that Truth, a suggestion thereof shines forth in all Her actions, words and songs. Her life illustrates the great fact that man, while doing his everyday duties meekly, joyfully, and maintaining social relations can yet advance on the spiritual path.

The time has arrived for us to take stock of the amount of good that is being done to our social life by the crowds of people that are swelling the numbers of *samnyāsīs* and *sādhus*. Stepping out of the boundaries of family life and the pale of civic rights and responsibilities, to try to open up easy paths of spiritual uplift for family, society and nation

is not a very simple matter. There are persons who have reached high levels of spiritual greatness by retiring from the world and living a life of seclusion in solitary ashrams or mountain caves. Their individual greatness does not pull up the general level of culture of the masses of people to any appreciable extent, nor are the standards of mass-life raised higher. Through their inspiration many ashrams are established in different parts of the country, the spires of the temples erected therein may shoot up high into the sky, the glamour of worship and the hymns and devotional music sung morning and evening induce many people from far and near to spend more and more upon the enterprise, free distribution of *prasāda* may attract crowds of hungry men like flies from the surrounding regions. But the influence of such institutions built up at the expense of so much labour and money hardly helps to make our social life healthier and brighter neither by spreading knowledge and literacy nor greater love for men nor again by fostering a more ardent desire for the life Divine. Our society is getting more and more crippled through mutual jealousy, rivalry and petty squabbles over trifles. Those who are strong at heart with a spirit of social responsibility and selfless service, hardly find scope for real and efficient social work, being half paralysed by stagnant, social ideas of the class seclusion of orthodox olden times. On the other hand one meets at every step opposition to all efforts at reform. The culture by which physical and mental health is made secure, which makes man strong and hardy through the realization of God's grace in all walks of life, which refines and transforms our narrow, selfish impulses into an unselfish spirit of service and self-sacrifice irrespective of caste and creed is fast disappearing from our country and there is hardly any doubt that the scope and field of such culture is gradually shrinking amongst us.

It is time for us to enquire as to what has brought about such a state of affairs. We have fallen into the narrow grooves of time-worn cults and prejudices. The ideas and ideals of olden times and those of the present age have met face to face and have produced a slack-water in our social and religious life. Sri Ma stands at the parting of ways.

We always find in Her life and in all Her activities an ardent desire to secure the welfare of the world, throwing the burden of looking after Her body upon others, and releasing Herself completely from all cares for Her own bodily comforts, She has thus made Herself absolutely free to advance the cause of the helpless and oppressed, of the sick and destitute, as well as to help the rich and powerful who ever suffer from the various physical and mental maladies of their surfeited and pampered lives.

Her life is an eye-opener to us all. She shows by Her everyday activities how we can link every minute detail of life to the Infinite and how we can cultivate a new outlook in our relations with men and make this world a place of new joy and hope and peace.

From the worldly standpoint She possesses nothing to call Her own. All places of the common man, temples, *dharamśālās*, public ashrams and huts are now Her only places of residence,—places where all people from the highest to the lowest may flock freely to Her without any obstruction. She has devoted Herself wholly and completely to the good of the world. All living being are Her own kith and kin. As mentioned previously, She says: "I find the whole world to be one vast garden, you all are flowers blooming in this garden with your individual beauty and grace."

"I move about from one corner of it to another. What makes you feel so sad when I leave you, only to be in the midst of your brothers over there?"

On another occasion She said: "I have no need of doing or saying anything: there never was any need, neither is there now, nor will there ever be in future. What you found manifested in me in the past, what you see now and what will be observed in the future is only for the good of you all. If you think that there is something peculiarly my own, I must tell you that the whole world is my own."

The glories of the creative activities of the Universal Mother that we find revealed everywhere in this world, can be noticed in all Her words and actions, in Her social intercourse with all classes of people everywhere. To those who are devoted to Her, She is like a little child demanding tokens of their love for Her; to those who are distressed owing to disease or other worldly troubles, Her motherly anxiety to give them relief takes shape in various acts of redress. All these attitudes proceed from a reservoir of a mighty spiritual power always working in the background.

She shows equal regard and reverence for all religions, for all social institutions and laws, for all types of education. This illustrates the great truth that everything in this world is the embodiment of one Supreme Being. She says: "All religious thoughts flow in one direction, as all streams flow into one ocean; and we are all one". If anybody puts the question to Her: "To what caste do you belong? Where is your home?" She at once answers with a laugh: "From your worldly standpoint this body belongs to East Bengal and is Brahmin by caste; but if you think apart from these artificial distinctions, you will understand that this body is a member of the one human family."

At times She has been heard to say: "Have faith in this body. Your whole-hearted faith will open your eyes." She also says from time to time: "I know nothing, I say what you pour into my ears." And then: "This body is but a toy-doll; just as you desire to play with it, so it goes on playing."

From these and other remarks it is evident that in Her Person the Power that lies behind this phenomenal world has assumed shape. Her activities emanate from one fountain-head and flow back into it. She has no sense of duality. She often says either: "Only Thou art, and Thou alone." Or: "I Alone am, and all is contained in Me."

On one occasion She said: "Is there any essential difference between myself and yourself ? Only because He is, there are also I and you. If with staunch faith, strong devotion and a heart overflowing with love, anyone of you can exclaim: Mother, come, come to me, Mother, I cannot pass my days without you, rest assured, the Universal Mother will spread out Her arms towards you and clasp you to Her bosom. Don't look up to Her only as a mysterious refuge in your hour of distress. Remember always, She is very, very near you, guiding all the forces of your life. With that conviction proceed; She will take the brunt of all your responsibilities from your shoulders and give you strength to bear the cross."



"A *Guru* is called He who, out of deep darkness, can reveal the hidden Truth. The *Guru* is none other than the world-teacher."

—Sri Sri Ma

MOTHER*

—M.M. GOPINATH KAVIRAJ

What is the mystery of Mother's Being and personality ?

But, it hardly becomes us, children as we are, to analyze and dissect our Mother, nor is it possible for us, crying ourselves for light in the darkness of night, to shed any light on Her.

I sympathise with those to whom Mother is verily a riddle. She is so very unlike ordinary or even extra-ordinary persons known to us that it is extremely hard to make any positive statement about Her with any degree of confidence or accuracy. We know that similar difficulties leading to misunderstanding were experienced in the case of some of the supremely great persons of the past and that as a result many of these persons actually felt that they were not truly appreciated and were even misunderstood by those among whom they lived and for whom they worked. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, for instance, complained that most people—some of the gods as well—not knowing his true nature looked down upon him as an ordinary mortal. Gautama, the Buddha, too, in a subsequent age spoke in the same strain saying that very few people understood him properly.

That Mother's life, even Her earliest life, should abound in extra-ordinary incidents is not surprising, we are accustomed to such incidents in the lives of genuine saints, mystics and yogins. They exist and have their place of honour in those lives. But all these pale into insignificance before the wonderful poise and bliss of Her sweet but magnificent personality—a personality which, strong as it is, blends into the Impersonal, nay, is utterly undifferentiated from it.

It is well-known that the illumination and liberation of saints and mystics presuppose an earlier stage of ignorance and bondage, followed usually by a period of aspiration, personal exertion and austerities. This stage is usually found in the present life itself, or, in exceptional cases, in a pre-natal state of existence. But in the case of Mother, we are told, that such a prior state of ignorance never existed at all. The possibility of an ante-natal embodied existence is ruled out on Mother's definite assurance that Her life is not subject to the laws of natural causation and that She has no prior life to account for Her present existence. And even what looked like a path of discipleship in Her pre-marital and early post-marital life was not, as we shall see presently, more than a playful representation of self-imposed discipline in which She condescended to take part merely as a matter of sport. It had no meaning for Her subsequent life in any way.

* Courtesy : "Selected Writings of M.M. Gopinath Kaviraj" (1990)

Among the well-known mystics of the world we seldom find any in whom we do not observe a period of gloom and subjective torture antecedent to the descent of Light. Mother had no experience of darkness in Her life, either of the soul or of the spirit, nor had She any experience of the descent of Light, except as a matter of play. It is said that from Her very birth She was aware of what She had ever been and what She would always continue to be and that there was no possibility of a deviation from Her self-conscious stature for a single moment.

Her self-knowledge, we are assured, did not arise under the impact of an extrinsic element outside of Herself—it was always with Her, being a state of Her nature. It was there already in its fulness, requiring no effort on Her part, nor any grace from above, to bring it into greater perfection.

Ordinarily three sources of illumination are recognised, viz. (a) *Daiva*, (b) *Ārṣa* and (c) *Pauruṣa*.

In the first case knowledge dawns on the soul absorbed in contemplation of some heavenly form, as illustrated by the knowledge of Arjuna coming from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This contemplation may or may not be accompanied by the descent of self-conscious grace from the form of the deity concerned; and in the case of descent of grace it may be gross, subtle, more subtle, or even the subtlest, depending on whether it is effected through touch, speech, vision or mere thought. Apart from the difference in degree of grace there may be difference in the quality of the grace infused, according as it results in the unification or otherwise of the soul with the source of its knowledge. There are cases known to history where such knowledge is not found accompanied by conscious grace at all, e. g. the knowledge of the analysis of the five-fold sheath of the soul which was received by Bhṛgu from Varuṇa, or the particular Vidyā which Yama imparted to Nachiketā.

The *Ārṣa* variety is called *pratibhā*. It is not derived from anybody's verbal instruction, but is produced from within spontaneously. Its classical example is Triśaṅku, who was engaged in continued *upāsanā*, identifying himself in thought with the Supreme Brahman. This gave rise in due time to the actual intuition of *Brahman*.

The third or *Pauruṣa* type is the normal variety in which a human Guru communicates his wisdom to a human disciple as Śuka Deva did to Parīkṣit. This type of Brahma-Jñāna arises in one devoted to one's teacher on account of the virtuous acts of one's previous lives having come to maturity. In this case too the possibility or otherwise of conscious Śaktipāta from the human teacher as an accompaniment is to be considered. Whether there is *Śaktipāta* or not, the alternative of *upāsanā* or its absence is also there. The quantitative classification as in the other types is possible even here.

We can easily dismiss the first and the third, as both of them imply the origin of knowledge from a separate source, divine or human, and as they refer respectively to one

who meditates on God or who is devoted to Guru. The second variety is also discarded as it refers here to cases of persons who having attained to some degree of perfection have subsequently experienced a fall from the height. It is not true *Jñāna* at all. As regards genuine *pratibhā* we shall revert to it later.

Now what is the nature of the self-knowledge which was innate with Mother ?

It is clear from what has been said above that though self-knowledge, on the analogy of lower knowledge, has its roots within, its exciting cause is usually outside, as it is initiated by force working without us. But it may also be as already pointed out, due to initiation from within, in which case the external agencies would be no more than merely propagating forces. History records instances of illumination of both these types. The Divine Grace is the most important factor, not only in the awakening of religious consciousness in man but also in its subsequent development in him till the union with the Divine is accomplished. Granting this as a necessary pre-condition of active spiritual life, what is needed in ordinary cases is the operation of a mediating factor through which such grace may become accessible to man. For the bodily and the mental mechanism of an average individual is not capable of bearing the strain involved in the direct transmission of Divine Grace. As a rule God's Grace is said to act on a receptive vehicle free from contact with matter, i.e. on an unembodied soul in a pre-creational state. But if the soul in the process of creative evolution happens to take on a body of impure matter it can no longer receive grace directly from the Divine source, but receives it only through a medium. The medium would be an embodied being whose body may be of exclusively pure matter or of pure matter mixed with impure. Barring the immaculate bodies of the heavenly brotherhood entrusted with the guardianship of the world and with the task of imparting knowledge in the beginning of creation we have to consider in this context the hierarchy of Teachers consisting of three well-known groups (*Ogha*), viz. *Divya*, *Siddha* and *Mānava*. The *Divya* or celestial and *Manava* or human correspond loosely to the *Daiva* and *Pauruṣa* mentioned above. Between these two the *Āgamas* place the *Siddha* or superhuman group. This medium serves the purpose of an *Ācārya* or Guru to the uninitiated seekers after knowledge.

Thus, Grace acts freely and immediately in the case of souls which are not clogged with material vestments. This is possible where Grace does not require any external support for its manifestation (*Nirādhikaraṇa Anugraha*) and it acts indirectly through pure bodies on recipient souls endowed with bodies of *māyā*. This is an instance of Grace acting through a support as its medium (*Sādhikaraṇa Anugraha*). By the term 'Grace' we should understand here the special Grace of the Lord and not the general grace which confers benefit other than Supreme Realization.

There are thus two ways of approach to Grace in Indian cultural tradition and the two ways generally meet and seem to be really two aspects of one and the same way. Both are concerned with one's outlook on Guru as the Principle of Divine Grace, functioning in one view by itself, and in the other through its concrete expression in a manifested form available for the purpose. In fact there appears to be no substantial difference between the two trends of thought. In actual practice the object of veneration is held from both these standpoints to be above the entire creation. But one should remember an important point in this connection which is likely to be lost sight of. During Manifestation each of the different Aspects of Pure Order beyond Time, where the sequence is only logical, involves complexities in its features, but in the simple Unity of the Eternal Self-luminous all complications are conspicuous by their absence, for the Transcendent is above all categories. For instance, Guru as an abstract principle is one of the eternal varieties. The Universal Being pervades All and is one with All; by virtue of its presence it occupies every position simultaneously and is identified with each and yet it retains its transcendent character and uniqueness. An individual human being on the other hand by virtue of the spiritual elevation may very well occupy the position of a Guru for the time being and perform the function connected with this position. This however, is tentative and endures so long as the merit of the incumbent is not exhausted, whereupon he retires giving place to another individual of the same kind, who continues the function and keeps the chain unbroken. This shows that Guru is both human and divine, human in view of the transitional character of the medium adopted by the Divine Power for its own purpose, and divine in consideration of the Supreme Principle of Compassion which is eternal and inspires the medium concerned. The Power of God functions through a man or any other embodied being. For this reason it is enjoined that even a secondary Guru, human, super-human and even celestial, should be looked upon by the disciple as divine. Strictly speaking, the Divine Being is free from all attributes incidental to contingent existence and does not deserve to be called by any of the names associated with human activities.

Those in whom the supreme intuition does not arise from within, have naturally to depend for its origin either on illuminated persons or on revelation. But to one in whom it flashes up spontaneously revealing Truth fully and immediately, external aids are held to be unnecessary. Such a man is believed to be a master of every phase of spiritual life and possesses the ability to impart it successfully to the needy. It is said that the process of his so-called self-initiation is in reality a process of introversion of senses and their subsequent unification with the true Self which awakens the latent divine consciousness. This is the secret of his self-acquired authority. He never feels any urge for resorting to external teacher for interpreting the sacred word, for his inner sense reveals it to him. This is an illustration of how Pure Light, free from intellectual and conceptual elements, comes into

manifestation. In the matter of communicating his wisdom to others, he is guided solely by the consideration of the receptive capacity and other qualities of the seekers. Thus, if the minds of the recipients are absolutely pure, the beneficent Will of the Master is by itself sufficient to kindle their spiritual sense. But if they are not so pure, external accessories of a formal character consistent with their inner demands may have to be conceded to suit their requirements. Such a unique person is a Guru unto himself and is known as *akalpita Guru*, possessed of Full Knowledge and Power manifested from within.

But when this self-derived knowledge and power is imperfect, he has to remove it and bring the knowledge into perfection by some means or other, e.g. through a mental act viz. *bhāvanā* or contemplation or *Japa* or yoga. Thus by constantly turning in his mind the thought that he is verily one with Brahman or by repetition of a potent mantra or by some such means he has to supplement the knowledge he has acquired from within. Such a person is called *Aklpita Kalpaka*. The difference between the two is that while in the former or superior type of self-illumination the co-operation of the mind, *prāṇa*, senses or body is not essential, in the latter it is indispensable.

A superficial observer might find in Mother's self-knowledge some resemblance to the illumination of one of the two types mentioned above. If Her subsequent course of life be interpreted as a real process of *sādhana* intended to bring into perfection what She has derived from Her inner Self it would come, they say, under the second category. But, if it means simply an outer expression of what She found within and does not convey the usual significance attached to *sādhana*, it would fall under the first category.

A little reflection would, however, show that Mother's case is exceptional and does not come under any of the two categories. The mere fact that Her knowledge did not originate from a Guru does not take us very far into its mystery. In Vedic tradition we hear of one *Trīṣaṅku* as being blessed with such spontaneous illumination due to his deep contemplation on his self as identical with the Supreme Brahman. Recently we know also of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624 A.D.) of Germany, the "God-taught philosopher", as blessed with some sort of intuitive *Jñāna* directly from within or from above.

(to be continued.)



SRI ANANDAMAYI MA

—"UMANANDA" (STEPHEN QUANG)

"THE PUREST FLOWER
THE SOIL OF INDIA
EVER PRODUCED"

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

Steeped in the universality of the Sanatana Dharma, firmly established in the experience of absolute oneness, *kaivalya*, and brimming over with intoxicating bliss, Anandamayi Ma personified the highest ideal of Hindu spiritual achievement. Since her early years, when she had the spontaneous experience and fulfilment of yogic, Vedantic, tantric and devotional sadhanas, she had the capacity to answer any and all questions without premeditation or hesitation.

During over 60 years of spiritual instruction, the eternal wisdom of the ages flowed from her lips in an endless stream. Speaking in her native Bengali tongue, Ma revealed the deepest mysteries of life in quaint, pithy phrases, potent with mystical implication. Her words echoed the Upanishads: "There is only one all-prevading *Ātmā*, naught else except the One. You yourself are a barrier unto yourself in the form of *samskāras* (impressions). The destiny of every human being is to destroy the veil that hides his own Self".

A keynote of Ma's teachings was remembrance of God through repetition of the names of God. Whether evoked through mantra japa, kirtan or congregational singing of devotional songs (bhajan), the name of God was the sure solution to all of life's problems. "If one loses one's being in the contemplation of the Divine Name, one can merge oneself in the ocean of Heavenly Beauty. God and His symbolic names are one and the same".

Sri Ma was an enchanting singer, her vibrant voice captivating, transcendental, magical in its power to elicit the deepest feelings of devotion to God. This feeling of the immanence of God was emphasized in temple and deity worship: "Worship is not a ritual; it is an attitude, an experience".

She stressed purity: "It is the pure, undefiled flower that finds a place at the Feet of the Lord and nowhere else. Take great care to spend your life in spotless purity. Speak about Him, meditate on His Glory, try to see Him in everyone, Him who is the Self, the breath of life, the heart of hearts".

Sri Ma was ravishingly beautiful, in a completely wholesome and spiritually uplifting way, unforgettable. For her, true *darshan* (sight of the Divine) was: ".....to see That

which when seen, the wish to see anything more vanishes forever; to hear That which when heard, the desire to hear anything else does not awaken".

Often asked whether she was Goddess, a Divine Incarnation, a *siddha* (yogi with powers), or a tantric sadhaka, (kundalini adept) she would usually be silent or deflect the question. But once when she was asked, "Who are you ?" she said: "*Purna Brahma Nārāyana*". Later she added, "I am what I was and what I shall be; I am whatever you conceive, think or say. But it is a supreme fact that this body has not come into being to reap the fruits of past karma. Why don't you take it that this body is the material embodiment of all your thoughts and ideas. You all wanted it and you have it now."

On the nature of the guru, Ma said: "The guru actually emerges from within. When genuine search takes effect, his genuine manifestation is bound to occur; it cannot possibly be otherwise. The One, assuming Himself the shape of the guru, of his own accord brings about His manifestation. Once the relationship to the guru was established, then surrender and obedience is essential. Carry out without arguing whatever I say, but be certain that it is for your best," Ma directed.

Resolute dedication to the path of enlightenment, without compromise, was her constant admonishment: "How much more time will you spend at a wayside inn ? Don't you want to go Home ? How exquisite it all is ! One is in his own Self the wanderer, the exile, the home-coming and home. One's Self is all that there is".

Ma advocated the practice of surrender and equanimity as universal keys to spiritual development: "In whatever circumstances you may be placed, reflect thus: It is right. This was necessary for me; it is His way of drawing me close to His Feet, and try to remain content".

Sri Ma was often lost in *bhāva samādhi* and other forms of trance-like ecstasies. Once she stayed in samadhi for five days without any response to outside stimuli. When asked about it, she replied, "It is a state beyond all conscious and supra-conscious planes—a state of complete immobilization of all thoughts, emotions and activities, both physical and mental—a state that transcends all the phases of life here below".

In her later years, the *bhāva samādhi*, so common in her early life, came less frequently. She was stabilized in *sahaja samādhi*, the natural state of effortless abidance in the Self, regardless of one's external circumstances. When questioned whether she had descended to a lower level, she replied: "Whatever anyone may say is all right. But there is no such thing as higher and lower levels".

During these transcendental *bhāvas*, she would be oblivious to differences of caste, colour, creed, race or even species. There were occasions when she shared food with those of other religions and even 'untouchables'. On occasion she ate off the ground with stray dogs. Later in life, she mysteriously lost the ability to feed herself, and was hand fed

by her attendants for her bodily sustenance. Throughout all these unusual circumstances, Sri Ma displayed indifference to hunger, thirst, heat, cold, pain or pleasure.

Despite her own sometimes unconventional behavior, Sri Ma usually encouraged her devotees to follow the strict codes of conduct. Interestingly, during the 1970's, when "hippies" flocked to "exotic" India, there was a Hindu backlash against their immodest dress and "un-Indian" conduct in ashram environments. The management of Ma's more than two dozen ashrams also became more strict in their enforcement of caste rules. Some of the Western visitors were on occasions even excluded from entry, worship or residence in her ashrams. But Ma privately assured them that in their personal relationship to her, caste, creed and nationality meant nothing. She loved them unconditionally.

For more than half a century, Sri Anandamayi Ma was treated like the spiritual queen of India. She was regarded by many as the protector and confidante of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, many cabinet members and countless government officials. She was also universally revered by millions of sadhus, saints, and devotees. In January, 1962, she was specially invited by the heads of various religious orders in India on the occasion of Kumbha Mela to join them as the 'head' and rode a caparisoned elephant to lead the procession of thousands of sadhus marching toward the holy Ganga.

She was verily called *Ādyā Shakti*, the incarnation of the highest Spiritual Energy, by the great savant-saint of Benares, Gopinath Kaviraj. Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, offered her the ultimate accolade, calling her "the purest flower the soil of India has ever produced"*.



* Courtesy : Journal-"Hinduism Today". (North America Edition), October, 1992

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF SRI MA ANANDAMAYI'S PRESENCE IN OUR MIDST.

—BITHIKA MUKERJI

It is said that modern age has the mark of secularism on it. In India, a dissatisfaction with one's own inheritance may be glimpsed together with the tendency to believe in norms which are universally acceptable. A distrust of other-worldly values hasn't quite gained ground in this ancient land, mainly because our saints and savants have uniformly highlighted them for us, and kept our heritage alive and meaningful for new generations. It cannot be denied, however, that by and large an urge toward a spiritual goal of life had been steadily losing ground in this century, which is now drawing to a close.

In point of time, we are too close to the phenomenon of Sri Ma Anandamayi to evaluate the effect of her presence among us. Perhaps half a century later it will be seen that it had required a personality of her eminence to hold the tides of secular forces in abeyance and re-establish the supremacy of renunciation as a worthwhile goal of human life.

By renunciation she did not mean a forsaking of one's duty in the world or a turning away from it, but a re-orientation toward it. She herself never forsook her own family, never retreated into remote, unapproachable places nor did she assume any extra-ordinary measures of rigourisms. Her whole life was a joyous song of delight in everything, everywhere, and in all people irrespective of religion, language, age or sex. It will be recalled that she never gave public speeches or exhortation toward a religious way of life. If she were asked for advice or prayed to for a message, she uncompromisingly declared again and again: "To talk of God alone is worthwhile, all else is pain and in vain". (*Hari kathāi kathā āār sab vr̥thā vyathā*).

In her was reconciled the contradiction of total renunciation and a delightful participation in almost all things mundane. Her understanding of the problems besetting modern man and her compassion for his helplessness characterised all her teachings, rather her advice to those who sought help at her feet.

Of late years when Sri Ma was requested to say some words of advice, she would often commence like this: "All of you have so much affection for this ignorant little girl; will you do something for me if I plead with you, beg of you, just for a very little thing?" When her audience promised enthusiastically (or in some cases perhaps with some reserve) to grant her request, she would say, "Out of the 24 hours give me just 10 minutes of your time. I beg of you this *bhiksha* (alms) for me. At the same hour, every day for ten minutes you will devote yourself to God-remembrance; or turn your attention inwards in self-

meditation. All the 24 hours you are engrossed in the world as if in a continuous (*akhanda*) stream. This is a thin wedge to be inserted in that ever revolving disc to break its rhythm. This is not to say that your activity in the world is to be eschewed—only it is to be viewed in a new light. Who knows, but a time may come when the wedge becomes the whole and life in the world becomes one glad hour of the realization that there is nought else except God".

The ten minutes which were donated to Sri Ma, were to be devoted to God, as understood by the person concerned. He or she (or a child) at that time would concentrate his or her thoughts on the Image of God most familiar to him or her or on the words of a prayer. In case the person is not so familiar or unaccustomed to prayers—he should simply empty his mind of all worldly thoughts and pray thus, 'O God; I do not know You. In Your infinite mercy let me know You and come closer to You'.

A list was prepared with names and addresses noted with the hours of their choosing for the 'ten-minutes' meditation programme.' It came to light that hardly anybody offered to meditate during the hours of the night. Sri Ma herself gave a happy solution to this problem, by suggesting that the timings from the larger family of foreign devotees and friends would nicely fill up the blanks in Indian Standard Time. In this way a chain of many links was forged to go round the world, not once but many times; as if a garland of many coloured flowers was being threaded together daily by the pilgrims of many countries and many religions—as if an *akhanda* (unbroken) prayer were being offered by a World Community to Him who is everywhere, as well as well-hidden in all hearts.

The central theme of all her talks was: "Truth is your heritage, do not live in forgetfulness of your real purpose in life".

In this context, in one small gathering an old gentleman remarked rather sadly, "Ma, why do you trouble yourself with us; what will you do, we have no appetite for this way of life". Sri Ma immediately reminded him that 'a loss of appetite' is considered to be an unhealthy condition and should be treated by wholesome food and medicines. In this case, the wholesome food is 'satsang', that is, keeping company with the devout, or reading scriptural works and so on; the medicine is the daily dosage of *nāma-japa* (the repetition of the Names of God) or any other form of God-remembrance. If taken in small measures, the appetite is sure to revive.

The recipient of this advice said dispiritedly, "Ma, I am too old, it is too late for me". Sri Ma Anandamayi sat up straight and said in an unusually forceful manner, "Never think it is too late ! Anytime is the right time. Why don't you say, 'Yes I can, and I will': With strong resolution one must pursue one's goal. You are used to employing your will in affairs of the world, that is why I urge you to determined efforts. As a matter of fact when

you begin you will realize that he Himself is doing all that is needful. A turning around is all that is required of you".

Sri Ma Anandamayi repeated such utterances in a hundred different ways to all who came to her. It is as if she were here to repeat and lend force to the Upanishadic behest :

*uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata /
kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā
durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti //*

(Kāthopaniṣad II-14)

[Arise ! awake ! Approach the great (sages) and learn ! The wise say that the road (to Him) is difficult to traverse as the sharp edge of a razor]

The behest, however, is not sufficient. The other end of the spectrum, namely, the fulfilment, which is *ananda* must also be brought within the purview of understanding. One way of looking at Sri Ma Anandamayi's sojourn in our midst is to think of her as the entirety of the spectrum itself; she enkindled the urge, she was the guide for the journey, and lastly her presence itself was the promise that the journey's end is ever at hand, here and now, forever possible for ordinary men and women of the world.



"The light of the world comes and goes, it is unstable. The light that is eternal can never be extinguished."

—Sri Sri Ma

HOW A DEVOTEE OF ANANDAMAYI MA BECOMES A BUDDHIST MONK

—"PREMANANDA" (LOBSANG RIGDOL)

When I was recently at Anandamayi Ma's Ashram in Varanasi, my old friend Panuda (we had come to know each other in that same ashram, nearly half a century earlier !) asked me to write something about Mataji and Buddhism. I don't think I would have the arrogance to write about either as such, for there is so very much I do not know. I am very much a beginner. So all I can do is to try and explain how, for me, the move from the one to the other was not really a move at all. My becoming ordained as a monk in the Mahayana fold of Buddhism is a natural development, and indeed I believe a fulfilment, of everything that Mataji taught me so many years ago. Those two years with Mataji (1949-51) were probably the most important two years of my life, and have affected and instructed and moved me ever since.

I came for academic study at Banaras Hindu University, but that quickly got pushed further and further to one side. I never did get my doctorate there..... for one thing, I never submitted even a draft dissertation ! Mataji had already taught me how little I knew. I had not been at the university many weeks before I was tempted, very much against my will, to go down to Bhadaini to meet this 'saint'. That is not the kind of language that appeals to a rather stuffy young Oxford graduate, come for strictly intellectual study. And when I heard the "saint" was a woman, my male chauvinism revolted even more strongly. But out of politeness I went. I don't think Mataji said one word to me until we were leaving, then she told me I was welcome to come back any time.

So, out of politeness again (I am less sure about my motives this time) about three days later, making my way down the river front, I saw the ashram above and thought I had better at least call. Once again Mataji, who was talking with a large gathering of disciples, ignored me until I was about to leave, then she turned and fixed me with that look of hers, a look that demanded total honesty, and said,

"Have you come to stay ?"

Of course, being an Oxford graduate I opened my mouth to say "No !", and of course, Mataji reached right inside me and pulled out the truth and made me say 'Yes' ! And so it all began.....for this lifetime at least.

Mataji, in my experience, was not one to impose her thoughts on those who believed differently. She offered what she had to offer, and if you chose to disagree and go your own way, that was your affair. She seldom gave the same advice twice to those who

ignored her the first time. So Mataji laughed with her contagious laughter when she asked me what *yoga* I wanted to follow, and still having my work at the university in mind I answered "*Jnana yoga*". Then, knowing me a lot better than I knew myself, she gave me my name, a name I have treasured ever since, but only use when somehow connected with the ashram. The name was Premananda. As she gave me that name, all her own love flowed into me, and I felt that I had made a terribly wrong choice, that Love was the path I really wanted to follow, not Mind. But Mataji said no, I had made my choice, and I had to live by it. Ultimately she sent me back to spend the rest of my working life teaching in universities.

But first, as if to test me, she sent me south to other great teachers who were still alive then; Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry; Sri Ramana Maharishi at Tiruvannamalai, Sri Swami Ramdas and Krishnabai in Mangalore. It was also through her that I visited and learned so much from Theravadin Buddhist monasteries in what was then still Ceylon. But I always came back to Mataji. And seeing that I was still dissatisfied, she sent me up north, and outside Kalimpong I made my first contact with Mahayana Buddhism. And THAT was a tussle ! But Mataji won, and I went back to Benaras again.

Mataji also took me to Bodh Gaya, Rajgir and Nalanda, and of course to Sarnath. So is it any wonder that when I met the Dalai Lama's elder brother in America, not long after, I became more and more involved with Tibetan Buddhism ? Thubten Norbu had himself been a monk, and the Abbot of Kumbum Monastery in Eastern Tibet, until the Chinese invaded and drove him out. Now he was a layman, also shortly to become a Professor. We wrote a book together, and while I never even thought of forgetting Mataji, Buddhism became more and more a part of my life. I always had a little shrine to Mataji, whether I was living in an apartment, as I was when I first arrived in New York, or later on, when I was more wealthy and had a large house, Mataji was always there. My friends knew it, and my closest friend, seeing how important she was in my life, sometimes criticized me and said I was not worthy of Anandamayi, though he only knew what I had told him about her. He knew enough to tell me when I was not living up to the standards she had set.

And they were the same standards set by the Buddhism I was coming to know. When those two years were over and Mataji told me I had to leave and begin my career as a teacher, I remember crying, because I could not bear the thought of leaving her. She leaned over and touched me so gently, on the head, and told me not to worry, she would call me when it was time to come back, when I was ready. And that gave me comfort.

I am not sure what I expected—perhaps a letter from someone at the ashram telling me that Mataji was calling for me ? Or some kind of "vision" in which Mataji would beckon me ? But nothing of either sort happened. Years passed, and I made a couple of attempts to get back to India without that call. Both times I failed. Once because pressure of work

made me abandon the idea of taking such a long time off. The other time because the Indian academic authorities did not approve of my research proposal. Perhaps they saw it was a flimsy pretext to get back to Bhadaini !

Then finally I DID get back, on another research project, but a much more serious one, looking at pilgrimage. That was 1979. Mataji was still alive. But everywhere I went to find her, she had just left and gone somewhere else. Obviously I still was not ready. So I did my research work and after a few months moved on further east. Those few months in India revived all my old interests in Hinduism, but they also revived all my earliest experiences of Buddhism, both Theravadin and Mahayan. And I was more convinced than ever that this was what Mataji wanted for me. So I worked harder than ever, at living up to her ideals. Probably my "professional life" suffered, for living according to those ideals became much more important than "name and fame". And there was no question of choice.

So when it came to retirement, why did I not go straight back to India ? Simple. I still was not ready. Mataji had always said she would guide me, so when the idea came out of nowhere to go and live on an island in the Pacific, I did just that. First I gave everything I had away—I had no more use for it. I just kept enough to get me to where I was going, and retained my retirement income. That was more than enough. But at least it was a first step in renunciation of attachment to things of this world. And I was living happily in Samoa when a Samoan friend, visiting the big island of Hawaii, told me of a Tibetan Buddhist monastery there, founded following the flight of so many monks from Tibet with the Chinese invasion. So I got rid of more things, not in any self-serving and self-righteous display of "renunciation", but simply because it was a lot easier than moving the things I had brought from America, and had accumulated in Samoa, over to Hawaii. I ended up with six cardboard boxes all of which I sent by mail.

And finally the call came, but not from Mataji, but from my old friend Thubten Norbu. He heard that I was at this monastery, so he phoned me from America, and told me to come and stay at the Tibetan center he had founded in Indiana. But really, of course, the call WAS from Mataji. I knew it, and went as fast as if it had come from Mataji herself in India. And within a few months Norbu had encouraged me to go to Dharmasala and seek ordination. Which is what happened.

There, of course, I ran into some very stern Tibetan academics, who at first were not so sure about my former allegiance which was, they thought, to "Hinduism". But my allegiance had been to Mataji, and it still was. Buddhism insists that the disciple revere his Guru just as if his Guru was Buddha himself. And that was how much I knew I revered Mataji. It did not make me have any less respect for my Buddhist teacher and Spiritual guide, there was simply no contradiction.

And so with the teachings. Although the academically trained Tibetan teachers, themselves monks, were ready and able to point to all sorts of technical differences between the Hindu teachings and those of Buddhism, these were largely philosophical. And indeed just the same points of difference were argued about between the different schools of Buddhism, just as they were argued about between the different schools of Hinduism ! And I was tired of academic games. I had had a long and good career in the academic world, and now I wanted to give my mind a rest and be Premananda again. And, as if it had all been planned, the Tibetan name I was given, no ordination, suggested just the same combination of heart and mind, with heart coming first.

And when it comes to practice, rather than theory, I have to confess I find little difference between what Mataji had taught me and what my Tibetan teachers were telling me. Mataji had taught me love and compassion, the two key elements of Mahayana Buddhism. She also taught me the virtues of generosity, moral discipline, patience, effort, contemplation, and wisdom. These are of course the "Six Perfections" of the Buddhist, and basic to my training as a monk. It was like coming home.

And while the Tibetan Buddhist, like the Hindu, believes in the law of *karma*, but pursues it in some very different ways, the net result for me is the same—the basic teaching that Mataji gave me, so long ago, was not to do with details of this or that form of after-life, this or that form of hell or heaven, but rather in the imagery of the teachings of so many great religions, that "we reap what we sow".... cause and effect.

I have learned many new things from my training as a monk, but then I probably would have learned them had I stayed longer with Mataji. I can not for the life of me see ANY way in which the final outcome would have been different. For above all Mataji taught me that there is a greater reality, a greater truth, an infinitely greater beauty, than the one we so often think we have right here in *samsara*. THAT was what she wanted me to work for, with both my mind and my heart. THEN, perhaps I would be "ready". And in becoming a Buddhist monk that is exactly what I am doing and, I believe, with all the devotion that Mataji demanded, to exactly the same ultimate truth.



**FROM THE NOTES TAKEN
IN
SREE MA'S PRESENCE**

—'KIRPALJI'

24th April, 1959, Rishikesh

In the midst of the Samyam Saptaha at Rishikesh. During Matri Satsang period.

Sree Ma—"Amrita ? Amrita means immortal, where there is no question of this mortal world. That is Amrita".

30th November. 1955, Kalkaji Ashram. New Delhi.

One Mexican lady asks Ma—

- i) What should be the conduct of living ?
- ii) Cannot one realize God from the state where one is ? What is the necessity of being born if one has to leave everything ?
- iii) Are we here for some thing else or only for always trying to realize God ?
- iv) Will Monsieur Serano *ever be able to get what he is searching for ? He is always torn between the conflicts of life on one side and desire for God on the other.

Sree Ma—"There is no need (for you) to worry about the world, keep your thinking on yourself. One had the desire to come into the world, therefore, one is born. Your desires have necessitated your birth.

The lady—Is that the reason for everyone being born, to satisfy the desires ?

Sree Ma—"Leave the world to itself. As long as one is driven by one's desires (*vasana kamana*) that is the law of the world. One's duty is to keep one's thinking on God—to live only for the realization of God. Wherever one is, in whatever condition, try to realize God, and whatever is necessary will be provided of its own. What to relinquish and what to get attached to—leave that aside".

The lady—How does one thank you ?

Sree Ma—"Thanks are only to Oneself".

The lady—Why to oneself ?

Sree Ma—"Because everyone is one's own".

* Monsieur Miguel Serano, Ambassador for Chile in India, a highly gifted person very much devoted to Ma

29th Septemeber, 1956—Vindhyachal:

Sree Ma was relating how once at Vindhyachal Ashram Abhay, Dr. Pannalalji and others were talking of supernatural experiences. At night they went to meditate on the raised platform outside (in front of the Ashram) under the tree for the midnight meditation (*mahānishā dhyān*). They thought that Ma had forgotten. But Ma came, and soon after they all saw a very bright light which lit up all their faces in the dark. Ma clearly saw an old mahatma practicing *tapasyā* under the tree and there were also many others nearby.

30th September, 1956—Vindhyachal:

Sree Ma—"When this body once went to a certain temple, Krishna Mandir or Rama Mandir, a strong light emanated from the *vigraha* (deity) towards this body, a very strong attracting force indeed. This body would not become unconscious, but a sense of becoming *one* with all creations, the trees and the flowers and the walls would be there.

"Once Makhan Babu took this body to Jagannath Mandir (Puri) to see the *vigrahas* (deities). As this body was approaching, breathing became faint and steps slowed down. Makhan Babu said-'*Chalo, Ma*'. But what this body was infact seeing ? The three *moorties* (images) of Balaram, Subhadra and Jagannath had taken one form and around the neck were three beautiful garlands (not such as you prepare here), one below the other and one large garland around all the three touching the feet of the deity and out of a small opening came a strong powerful light".

Question—What benefit did Makhan Babu get ?

Sree Ma—"Yes, though he was unable to perceive the vision, he was ofcourse recipient of the divine atmosphere".



SOME OF MOTHER'S WAYS

—SRI VIJAYANANDA
(Dr. Adolphe Weintrob)

I certainly am not so presumptuous as to claim to understand Sri Ma's methods. In this short article I should merely like to give some idea of my impressions concerning this subject. These impressions must of necessity be limited and, as it is with everything personal, are not to be entirely relied upon. For to really understand Sri Ma would mean to have had the vision of the *Paramātmā*; this is why one's words are like arrows that fall back having missed the target.

What has particularly struck me is Sri Ma's extraordinary mastery in dealing with human beings and their feelings. She gives me the impression of a great magician who knows thoroughly all the strings that cause the marionettes that we all are to move, and which She pulls with consummate skill.

When I use the word "magician" it is only for the sake of simplicity of expression, for Sri Ma never imposes on anyone any point of view or way of thinking. She leaves everybody absolutely free and does not give orders, only suggestions, and even what She suggests is always what is most suitable for us. If we do not accept Her advice, She does not insist, but very often proposes another solution. In our blindness She guides us where, from the very depths of our being we really want to go—towards the Great Illumination. Only under exceptional circumstances, when it is Her "*Kheyal*" She may give what seems to us a definite order and then we feel compelled to obey.

But what I wish to refer to here is not a guidance expressed in words, but one which emerges from our inner being. We ourselves choose our path, prompted by the Dweller in the human heart, the *antaryamin*, the *hridayavāsini*, of whom Sri Ma is the visible aspect which we perceive through the veil of our ignorance. Our destiny, our *prārabdha karma** comprises a number of possibilities, the total of which cannot be changed, yet may be utilized in various different ways. Just as for instance when several brothers inherit equal shares of their father's property, each one of them may use his heritage in his own way. The first might squander it on riotous living, the second use it parsimoniously and the third make it the basis of a huge fortune. Mataji teaches us how to manipulate wisely the share of wealth that destiny has bestowed on us, namely, to transform it into *paramdhan*, Supreme Wealth.

* **Prārabdha karma** is that portion of one's past actions which is bound to fructify in the Present life and cannot be averted.

In order to cure us from the disease of ignorance and delusion and to direct us to our Supreme Goal, the great healer of souls whom we call Sri Anandamayi Ma employs innumerable remedies and techniques which vary according to the needs of each individual.

Perfect and lasting happiness is what all of us seek, consciously or unconsciously. Our discontent is the result of our feeling that we are incomplete, that we lack something. The happiness we hope to find in family life, friends and possessions is nothing else but Reality Itself, viewed through the distorting prism of words and emotions; we look for it in the wrong direction. (I am repeating here, possibly not quite faithfully, an idea that I have heard expressed by Sri Ma.) We chase our own shadow that can never be caught. It is by looking within that the solution of our problem is to be found. But this great pilgrimage can only start from the point at which we happen to be. Here, I feel, lies the incomparable universality of the message of Sri Anandamayi Ma. Most sages address themselves only to those who already are aspirants on the spiritual path, whereas Sri Ma can help anyone at any stage or level provided he possesses a spark of good-will. She Herself is free from ego or individuality. Divinity and Love Eternal flow from Her in great abundance. She radiates the happiness which we seek in vain in the objective world and which in fact is nothing else but our own essential being, our own true nature. Thus She is able to alter the course of our feelings and thoughts, focussing them entirely on Her own person. The psychiatrists would call this an emotional transference. But this is only the first phase of the operation She performs on us. For to limit the Divine to one form, however inspiring, however noble, is not the ultimate goal. Love for one particular form can never be real 'Love', it is *moha*, attraction through delusion, attachment. So long as the idea of duality persists there must always be a mixture of attraction and repulsion. True love is the realization of the Oneness of all things.

Once I heard Sri Ma use the following simile: (Again I am only giving the gist of what She said, not Her own words); "In order to wash one's face one has first to use soap, but afterwards it has to be rinsed away with pure water." In a similar way She cleanses us from our attachment to the world by attachment to Her own person and later teaches us how to divert this love towards the source of all love.

Let us now consider the second phase of the operation. By Her radiation of Love Divine and by Her Grace She awakens in us a taste for Divine things. According to the temperament of each individual seeker She greatly intensifies his *sadhana*, be it *kirtan*, *japa*, meditation or any other practice.

Finally, at a third phase, when we have become sufficiently engrossed in the path that leads to Self-realization, She gradually breaks the bonds of our personal attachment that bind us to Her. She makes us understand that the joy that we feel in Her presence has its

opposite, the pain of separation when She is far away, and that this is the same with all things belonging to the objective world: whenever one has a taste of pleasure or happiness it will inevitably be followed by pain or suffering. She makes us see that these joys as well as sorrows are impermanent and as fleeting as a puff of air. Mataji often says that enjoyment derived from sense objects (*vishaya*) is like poison (*vish hai*). Certain very exceptional bhaktas may avoid this painful breaking of their attachment to Sri Ma's person by transmuting it directly into the Divine Love that is revealed through Her. But such bhaktas are of a rare type.

The way to the Knowledge of Reality leads through the jungle of our innumerable desires. One by one they have to be uprooted and it is ourselves who have to do this work, who have to recognize our errors and abandon them. Nevertheless Mataji gives us powerful help in this. I should like to draw the attention to one special point in Her way of dealing with a situation. It resembles very much the use of vaccination or inoculation by doctors. If for instance virulent bacilli of cholera are absorbed into one's system, one is almost certain to catch the disease, which might possibly prove fatal. But if these bacilli are modified in a certain manner by a laboratorial product that is then injected into the human body under favourable conditions one will most probably develop a little fever, in fact cholera on a very reduced scale, which however will render one immune from this particular disease. In a very similar way, Sri Ma sometimes arranges circumstances for us so that we may reap the fruits of a desire already conceived, but under conditions that will not harm us, only to make us conscious of our error and thereby cure us from it.

I shall now describe a personal experience that will elucidate this point. Last summer I travelled to Solan to spend some time in Sri Ma's presence, after having lived for a whole year in Her Ashram in Almora. At the end of that year it seemed to me that there was nothing left to justify my staying on in India and that to renew my contact with my family, my race etc., would prove a definite aid to fresh spiritual progress. I had decided either to return to France or else to visit Jerusalem, the holy city of the Western people. Soon after my arrival at Solan I solicited a private interview with Sri Ma so as to learn Her opinion on the matter and to obtain Her permission to under-take the journey. But She does not only read our thoughts even before we have clearly formulated them in our own minds, She also understands our hidden motives of which we ourselves are unconscious. Usually when asked for an interview, She grants it almost at once or at any rate very soon. In this case however She postponed it from day to day and when finally, two months later at Dehradun I got the chance to talk to Her, the sweetness of Her presence had in the meanwhile melted completely the crust of ice that had held me enclosed and I had quite forgotten my intention to leave India.

Nevertheless my desire had been intense and according to the psychological laws it would have sooner or later had to bear its fruit in action. When Mataji left Dehradun for Vrindaban She advised me to remain for a time in one of Her ashrams near Dehradun. There I found myself among a group of people who treated me with great kindness and affection. Their friendliness, conditions in the Ashram in general, the whole setting, friends, neighbours, the climate—everything co-operated to give me a taste of my home in France. I came to understand the futility and perhaps even the harm from a spiritual point of view that a confrontation with my home atmosphere might have meant. I therefore finally gave up the whole idea. After a time I left Dehradun and stayed in the Ashram at Benaras. There I became friends with a young man from Israel, a fine and serious type of person. He seemed to me to represent the people of Israel and the Holy Land. Through this friendship I came to realize that a visit to his country would have been entirely different from what I had imagined. I then understood that the Guru is the true father and mother, the *dharmapitā* and the *dharmamātā*, that all those who have chosen the Path of Immortality are my brothers and sisters; that the dwelling-place of the Supreme is my real motherland and whatever helps towards Self-realization my *svadharma*.

This is how by Sri Ma's Grace I learnt to recognize and renounce my mistake at very little cost, whereas according to the ordinary laws of nature I should have had to undertake a long and tedious journey, beset with all sorts of snares and dangers, inimical to the spiritual life.

It is well-known that Mataji neither gives *mantra diksha* nor claims to be a Guru or to have disciples. One day I asked Her what I should reply when people wanted to know, as they often did, whether I had received *diksha* and who was my Guru. She told me that I might reply in the affirmative to the first question. As to the Guru I should say, "God alone can give *diksha*; there is only one Guru, namely God Himself". (Whenever I quote Sri Ma it must be remembered that I usually do not recall Her exact words, but am only giving the meaning of what She said).

On various occasions I asked Sri Ma whether I might regard Her as my Guru. Once She said: "God Himself is the only Guru". On another occasion when I was very insistent, She replied; "I am what you think me to be". Yet thousands revere Her as their Guru.

What underlies the apparent contradiction between what Sri Ma says and what seems to be a fact to us ? What exactly is a Guru ? Surely the One who opens up the path that leads to Self-realization and guides the disciple till the final Goal has been reached. Initiation by Mantra has real value only if it is instrumental in opening up that path. The opening is really a communion with the Divine and it is the Divine Itself, the Supreme Guru who brings about this communion. The physical Guru acts as a focus, a channel for the Divine Power. But in the case of Sri Ma there is no difference between the physical Guru and the

Supreme Guru. I once heard Mataji say: "The Guru is not a human being. It is sin to look upon him or her as a human being. One must have the same attitude towards the Guru as towards God (*Ishwara bhāva*)"

It is the illusion in which we are caught that makes us limit Mataji to the physical form we perceive. The perfect sage is by no means confined to what we see and call his body.

If in these few pages I have attempted to describe some aspects of Sri Ma's methods, it must be taken as entirely from my own limited and unenlightened angle of vision. For only one who has direct knowledge of the Supreme Reality which functions in the body, which we call Sri Anandamayi Ma, will be able to understand Her*.

"If the Guru is all-powerful he will, by his very touch or gaze, take the disciple to his final goal. The Guru can pass on only as much wealth as he possesses."

—Sri Sri Ma

* Reprinted from : "Ananda Varta", Vol IV, No. 1.

BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF SRI SRI MA

The birth centenary celebration of our Divine Mother, which is going to commence from 19th Vaisakh, 1402 (according to the Bengali Calender), corresponding with 3rd May, 1995 is indeed a very momentous occasion for all of us who had the greatest privilege to come in contact with Her.

Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, the all-India organisation founded with the principal object of properly managing all the Ashrams, Temples and various other social-service Institutions functioning in Her Divine name, has already taken a number of important steps in order to celebrate Ma's birth centenary in the most befitting manner.

The year-long programme, which will continue till May, 1996, is proposed to be held in different States of India, in Bangladesh and also in various other countries of the world.

A very detailed programme has been thoughtfully planned, the principal items of which are as follows :

1. **Spiritual :**

1008 Durga Saptasati *Path*, 1008 Bhagavad Gita *Path*, 108 Bhagawat Parayanas, Parayanas of all the four Vedas and of the eighteen Maha Puranas, 108 recitations of the Ramayana, 108 times Rudrabhisheka, Akhand Nama Yagnas, and a number of various other items of great religious significance.

2. **Cultural :**

- i) Special Radio talks and discussions on Ma.
- ii) Panel discussions on Ma on T. V. by eminent scholars and philosophers of national and international repute.
- iii) Seminars/Symposia on Ma in different universities and various other places all over the world.

- iv) Spiritual conferences on "Ma's Divine Life & Message to the World" to be attended by leaders of different faiths.
- v) Special *Rama Katha* programme in Varanasi by Sant Morari Bapu.
- vi) Preparation of a full-length Tele-film on Ma.
- vii) Exhibition of Ma's photos and books etc. in principal places.
- viii) Setting up of a Central Archive at Kankhal where all articles personally used by Ma and valuable articles offered to Her by devotees would be preserved and put on display on permanent basis.

3. Literary :

- i) Publication of a special "Souvenir" on the occasion of Ma's 100th birthday celebration, mainly containing :
 - (a) Reminiscences of renowned *Mahatmas* and other distinguished persons
 - (b) Principal events of Ma's life in chronological order
 - (c) Selected pictures of Ma in chronological order
 - (d) Pictures with brief details of various Ashrams & Institutions founded in Ma's name.
- ii) Publication of a dignified "Centenary Volume" in five principal languages, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati and English, containing among various other items mainly the following :
 - a) Details of Ma's close association with all principal *Mahatmas* of Her time.
 - b) Record of Ma's meetings with renowned national and international leaders, top-most philosophers and educationists.
 - c) Brief life-sketches of those who had become integral part of Ma's *lila* on this earth.
 - d) Articles from the pens of distinguished saints & scholars on Ma's unique personality and message to the world.
- iii) Publication of comprehensive biographies of Ma in English and other languages.
- iv) Publication of an Album containing specially selected 100 pictures of Ma with short descriptions.

- v) Publication of handy volumes containing short life-sketches of Ma with 100 selected *vanis* in different languages.
- vi) To reprint several popular books on Ma's life and teachings which have not been available to the public at large for some time past.
- vii) To bring out Special Numbers of the journal "Amrita Varta" in all the four languages, English, Bengali, Hindi and Gujarati, containing articles on Ma from devotees and admirers from India and abroad.
- viii) Publication during the centenary year of full-page write-up on Ma's life and teachings in all national dailies and other principal journals.

4. Social-Service Activities :

- i) Creation of corpus funds for setting up of regular *Anna-kshetras* in various Ashrams and also for expansion of *Shishu Kalyan* (child welfare) activities under the aegis of the "Ma Anandamayee Karuna" at Varanasi.
- ii) Free distribution of pure milk and fruits to hospital patients in various cities and towns during the centenary year.
- iii) Free Eye operation Camps in principal places, especially in Ma's hospital at Varanasi.
- iv) Running of charitable dispensaries at all principal Ashrams.
- v) Arrangement on permanent basis at almost all Ashrams for distribution of cold drinking water during the summer months.
- vi) Creation of a corpus fund for regular maintenance of free beds in the hospital at Varanasi and also for setting up of a "Poor Relief Fund" with the object of giving free medical services to the needy patients.

With the object of implementing the above-mentioned programme in a proper & regularised manner a representative Centenary Celebration Working Committee has already been constituted and steps have also been taken to form several Zonal Celebration Committees comprising the different States of India.

It is needless to say that full co-operation and active support of all the devotees and admirers of our Divine Mother residing almost all over this country and even abroad are deemed absolutely necessary for fulfilment of this gigantic task.

We are sure that devotees from all walks of life will soon come forward and most willingly take active part to assist us in all possible ways in this noble task, which is also the most sacred duty of all of us.

Devotees are particularly requested to send their donations either by Money Orders or through A/c Payee Cheques/Drafts drawn in favour of "*Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha—Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Centenary Celebration A/c.*" at the following address :

Secretary, Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Centenary Celebration Committee,
Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha,
Kalkaji, *New Delhi* - 110 019.

It may be added in this connection that all donations paid for this noble cause will be exempt from Income-Tax under Section 80-G of the I.T. Act.

Devotees residing far and near may as per their personal convenience pay their donations for this cause to the Zonal Conveners as well and obtain printed official receipts from the Zonal Conveners who have been duly authorised to issue such receipts on behalf of the Centenary Celebration Committee.

May all be privileged enough to receive Ma's blessings on this most sacred and memorable occasion !

JAI MA.