

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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

Vol.-II

April, 1998

No. 2

BOARD OF EDITORS

- Km. Chitra Ghosh
- Dr. Bithika Mukerji
- Dr. Krishna Banerjee
- Km. Guneeta



MANAGING EDITOR
Sri Panu Brahmachari



ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (POSTAGE FREE)
INLAND—RS. 60/-
FOREIGN—US \$ 12/- OR RS. 400/-
SINGLE COPY—RS. 20/-

CONTENTS

1.	Matri Vani	...	1
2.	Sidelights on Matajis Birthday Celebration —Vijayananda	...	3
3.	Sri Anandamayee Ma & the spiritual heritage of ancient India —Prof. Debaprasad Bhattacharya	...	8
4.	From the diary of a European —Melita Maschmann	...	12
5.	Contribution of Ma to the cultural & spiritual heritage of India —Amiya Kumar Majumdar	...	17
6.	Mother —'Shobha'	...	20
7.	Incidents of Ma's grace —Swami Bhagavatananda	...	21
8.	With Mataji at the Hardwar Kumbh —'Krishnanath'	...	24
9.	Manifestation of Mother in nature —'Mohua'	...	28
10.	Some interesting details relating to Dehradun Ashram temples	29
11.	Mother—Majorie Pitzer	...	33
12.	From notes taken in Ma's presence —'Kirpal'	...	34



MATRI-VANI

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.

× × ×

The word '*Manus*' (man) itself gives the clue to what man should really be : a being who is self-aware. Even if he has slipped and fallen, is it not his bounden duty to use as a lever the very earth to which he has tumbled, and raise himself up again ? Besides, one does not fall so often. As a man, constant effort is his duty.

× × ×

Look, in order to pluck a rose one has to put one's hand into the midst of thorns. But if the rose is a person's aim and he has a keen desire to pluck it, he will not refrain from doing so for fear of being pricked. Moreover, the Great Mother arranges whatever is necessary for each one : She certainly knows the real need of each individual. If one has at least this much faith, there is no reason at all to feel distressed.

× × ×

Try your utmost never to succumb to anyone's influence. In order to become firm, calm, deeply serious, full of courage, with one's personality wholly intact, pure and holy out of one's strength, one has to be centered in God.

× × ×

Force of character is man's great strength. If he uses it in his dealings with the world he will indeed be victorious in most directions.

× × ×

Worldly life is no doubt a battle-field. By becoming conscious of one's spiritual wealth one must strive to emerge triumphant from the battle.

× × ×

If you do not allow your thoughts to stray from His Lotus feet there is hope of your being saved from all manner of temptations. Man's duty is to awaken to true

humanity and to cast aside his animal propensities; to choose what is excellent and to relinquish the merely pleasurable. Let your mind be like a beautiful flower that may be offered to the Lord in worship.

×

×

×

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.

×

×

×

When a tree dies it leaves the seed and another tree springs forth out of the seed. Thus there is the end and also the eternity at the same time. The path of God is endless. The revelation from the mantra (seed) is also eternal. As in a tree no two leaves are exactly identical, no two fruits are exactly similar, death and eternity co-exist. There are endless paths of realization. There is no one save God alone. There is a stage when realization happens effortlessly. The entire universe is one's preaching area. One should preach to others only with guru's orders.

×

×

×

God is not far away from you, not also apart from you. The longings and desire are all within you. So, try to proceed on the path of self realization. If you still have worldly desires there will be death and re-birth. But you are the scion of immortality, the eternal divinity, the eternal Servant of the Lord. So turn towards Him, turn away from worldly longings back to your own home. This constant coming and going, birth and death entail great suffering and misery. One is redeemed by knowing one's own self.



SIDELIGHTS ON MATAJI'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

—VIJAYANANDA

My intention is not to give an account of the celebrations—this will probably be done by persons who are better qualified for the task than myself; I just want to write about a few points that struck me on those occasions.

1

Many people have noticed and some have even complained that there is apparently no organization to see to the welfare and discipline of the people who take part in the large gatherings around Mother. It looks as if there were no one to direct and no staff to carry out the orders. In fact to a mind trained in the western way it may at times even seem somewhat disorganized. But this is mere appearance, due to viewing the situation superficially. If we observe carefully and with an unbiased mind, we shall soon discover that in reality everything is proceeding as it should, that every person gets what he or she needs; that in spite of the apparent disorder nobody comes to harm, no harsh words can be heard (except, may be, on the rarest occasions); that most people look smiling and contented.

How can this be possible ?

If we look round and watch the actions of our daily life and the ways of Nature, we shall find that there are two different methods of working, that actions can be performed in two different ways : the way of the human mind and that of Nature.

The former has its origin in the intellect, the ego fully conscious of its possibilities. Let us consider for example the building of a house. The plan of construction has been devised by the mind of the architect. Before starting on the building work, every detail has been thought out and calculated : the amount of the various materials needed, their cost, the number of workmen required, etc. The architect's calculations are done with extreme care, for if the house collapsed it would be disastrous.

All this shows the functioning of a power, namely that of the intellect, the ego—conscious of its capacity no doubt, but aware also of its limitations; a power capable of perceiving only its small circumscribed sphere of activity, but not its relation with the universe.

The way of Nature is quite different. Let us take for example the growth of a mango tree. If we go into details we can notice that branches, twigs, leaves and so on are growing without symmetry. There may be a huge branch on the one side and a very small one on the opposite side. Some branches yield an abundance of flowers and fruits, others almost none. Thousands of blossoms fall down that will never bear fruits. Many unripe mangoes are shaken off by the wind; and when finally the fruits have the chance of producing a new tree? Very few indeed—although, this is surely the ultimate aim of the fruit.

In this way a power acts that is conscious of its infinite wealth, of its omnipotence. The apparently irregular growth of the tree puzzles the intellect used to geometrical forms and to symmetry. But the ultimate result is the majestic beauty of a gigantic tree.

The huge waste is the token of a power that has a storehouse of infinite riches at its disposal. In actual fact there is no waste, but only circulation of matter within the oneness of the universe. The flowers and fruits that fall from the tree are not lost. They will enrich the soil and help other plants to grow, or nourish birds and insects. The power that causes the mango tree to grow does not only see this limited part of its functioning, but knows its relation with the Whole.

A higher aspect of that very same power arranges for welfare of the hundreds of people who collect around Mother. It is the power that pervades all beings and moves them from within. This power is aware of the needs of every single individual and knows the measure of his capacity to receive according to the results of his *Karma*. It is conscious of the relationship between all beings and of the Oneness behind the appearance of diversity, whereas the power of the ego sees only the superficial diversity, the splitting up into individuals.

During the last night of Mother's birthday celebrations (or rather in the early morning) at the end of the *Tithi Puja* everyone is allowed to go near Mother to do obeisance and offer flowers or anything else of his choice. This can only be done one by one and as hundreds of people are present it is bound to take a good deal of time. The mind would naturally wish that there should be some efficient organization keeping people in a queue and making them recede by a different way after doing their *pranams*. But in Mother's presence discipline and organization from outside may be out of place and perhaps even harmful, for by it the free play of the Diving Power might be hampered through the rigidity of the human will. In fact on most occasions, without any organization, people walk upto Mother one by one in perfect order and in complete silence, but on one occasion this was not the case.

I was present during that holy night and as every body else, I also tried to approach Mother when the *Puja* was over. On that night Mother usually lies on a couch, absolutely still and to all appearance far removed from bodily consciousness. As soon as She returns to the normal state, offerings and salutations are stopped and Mother is led back to Her room.

I had brought a beautiful bouquet of flowers, intending to offer it to Mother. I tried first to follow one queue, but another one had formed from a different direction. After several unfruitful attempts I at last managed to come near Mother with only three or four people in front of me. But at that moment a few ladies rushed in and we were obliged to stand back. I then reflected that one should after all take things as they came on all occasions and thus remained aloof.

At that very moment Mother sat up. A human semi-circle was formed around Her to protect Her from the crowd. Offerings and salutations had to stop. It looked as if the bouquet I had brought would not fulfil its purpose of existence.

A few minutes later Mother rose. On those occasions it takes some time until She fully recovers body-consciousness and She is led to Her room, supported by several persons. Two human walls are formed on both sides of Her way to enable Her to walk, undisturbed by the intruding crowd. Strangely enough, the spot where I stood aloof was just on Mother's way and between the human walls. Mother advanced, facing exactly in my direction. I deposited the bunch of flowers at Her feet, made obeisance and stepped out of Her way.

When afterwards I mused about this incident, I realized that in that holy night, notwithstanding the dense crowd and the apparent confusion, I had had the chance to present my offerings to Mother in a unique and exceptional way, in fact in precisely the manner that I preferred. Probably many other persons had similar experiences.

2

During that holy night I had the good fortune of being able to observe closely Mother's countenance almost immediately after She got up from the state of absolute stillness. It is well known that during the *Puja* of the last night of the celebrations, She usually lies with Her face covered entirely or almost entirely by Her sari. She appears to have left body-consciousness. I do not know whether any one has until now been able to ascertain whether Her pulse and breathing stop on those occasions. The reverence we all feel for Mother, keeps us from attempting such investigations. But even if pulse and breathing are not completely suspended, they must at any rate most likely be almost imperceptible.

The state in which Mother appears to be on those occasions is of course quite beyond the range of our understanding. It seems probable that She is then in a disembodied state. Many people believe that She enters *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. In that state, the empirical world ceases to exist and consequently there are neither the Mother nor Her children yearning for Her blessings, but only pure, unbroken, blissful consciousness. Mother is and has ever been free to remain constantly in that supreme and exalted state. It is Her boundless love that makes Her play with us the play of duality. It seems improbable that in the holy night of Her birthday when so many people have gathered to implore Her blessings, She should retreat in the Great Void. I take, in that, rather on the contrary, She very likely assumes a state in which Her benediction can pour down on us at maximum abundance and where She can absorb as much as possible of the bad *Karma* of Her children.

The first birthday celebration of Mother that I attended took place in 1951 at Ambala, only a few months after I first met Mother. During the *Tithi Puja* I sat not very far from Her. She was lying down straight, as usual on those occasions, apparently far removed from this world. I thought She was in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and looked sadly at Her, thinking : "Mother has gone far away from us !" While this thought was revolving in my mind, Mother awoke, sat up and opened Her eyes. Her first glance fell straight on me. It was a long and deep gaze full of significance, which I clearly understood to mean : "No ! I have not gone far away from you; I am ever, ever present with you, very, very near you !"

The year at Dehradun when I saw Mother rise after the Puja, it seemed to me that She bore the expression of one who had just carried away the heavy load of our miseries.

3

The night of the anniversary of Mataji's birth is for most of us a vigil. I myself took rest for only a few hours before the function began. In general when my sleep is cut short even slightly I feel drowsy during the next day. But I have experienced this year as many times before that when we forego sleep for Mother's sake, not the least inconvenience will be felt. I returned from the celebration at about 6 a.m. feeling fresh and rested and immediately got busy with my daily routine.

4

A conversation with a friend from Calcutta, an old and fervent devotee of Mother, attracted my attention to one of the most extraordinary features that have been observed by many people in connection with Mother. The crowds around Her

may consist of thousands or tens of thousands—yet She will never forget any single person. If one asks Her for a private interview, She will grant it in due course and at the most propitious moment. If a request has been made to Her, the response will come without fail. If someone wishes to take leave of Her before going away, he will be received at the right time. She knows where and how everybody has been accommodated. If one encounters a difficulty, She is always there to solve the matter. When She talks to people about their personal problems, She gives the impression of knowing every detail. Not only this; the living interest She takes in every individual gives him the conviction—although it may seem absurd at first thought—that Mother's attention and care are fully focussed on him and on him alone, just as if he were the dearest of all Her children. Many people are convinced of this and although it sounds almost ridiculous it is nevertheless true. How can this be possible ? Mother has no ego consciousness, no limiting personality of Her own. She is one with the pure, blissful, impersonal, all-per-vading *Chaitanya* (Consciousness). When Her attention is drawn towards one individual, the centre of consciousness is atonce focussed on him. She is identified with him, nay, own Self. And there is nothing dearer than the self "Indeed, it is not for the love of all that all are dear, but it is for the love of the Self, that all are dear", says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

●

SRI ANANDAMAYEE MA AND THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF ANCIENT INDIA

—PROF. DEBAPRASAD BHATTACHARYA

Among the great spiritual personalities of modern India there are two notable instances of enlightened souls commanding universal respect who were illiterate, or very nearly so. One is Sri Ramakrishna, the other is Sri Anandamayee Ma. Now this fact of their being unlettered has, from our present point of view, very special importance. The reason is this. Here are two supremely great spiritual personalities who have no direct acquaintance with our śāstras neither in the original nor in translation. Yet their recorded utterances strikingly corroborate and confirm the revelations of the great sages and seers of ancient India that have come down to us through the śāstras.

Had they been great scholars who had a direct access to Sanskrit sacred texts, their affirmations in spiritual matters would be less compelling especially for those of us who think to be intellectual, are sceptically inclined, would be only too apt, to suspect that their affirmations are not based on their realization but on wide reading of the śāstras. But when Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Anandamayee Ma says things that are in complete consonance with what the great rishis of ancient India have revealed through the śāstras regarding the nature of Reality and the life of the spirit, even the most fiercely sceptical among us will be driven, *malgri lui*, to entertain the probability that our rishis of old may have had something to tell that deserved to be heard with respect. This is the reason why their testimony is of such inestimable value.

But this is not the only reason; for there is another, which, to my mind, is quite as important. It is this. There is a word, a very old Sanskrit word, which occurs many times in our śāstras, including the Bhagavadgītā. It is the word—"tattva-darśin" It seems to me from our present point of view a clear understanding of this vital and profoundly significant word is absolutely necessary. The term is of such paramount importance because it clearly implies that, "tattva"s or great Truths can be, and in fact are, *seen*. Now, in the philosophical tradition of India, 'to see' means 'to know'. Hence *darśana* is synonymous with *jñāna*. Jñāna in our spiritual tradition means not knowledge arrived at through arguments or ratiocination, it is direct vision of "tattva", it has, in other words, the immediacy and directness of

sense-perceptions. This is why in our philosophical terminology, it is indistinguishable from darśana. Significantly in the fourth chapter of Bhagavadgītā, in a famous śloka the two terms "jñānin" and "tattva-darśin" have been used in succession : "Upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ jnaninastattvadarśinaḥ" "jñānis and tattvadarśins will teach you jñāna, the Supreme Knowledge. That, this knowledge, this direct vision of Truth, may come to an illiterate person is evidenced by Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Anandamayee Ma; while a highly learned person who is well versed in the śāstras, may never have it. The reason for this is, as Aldous Huxley had put it so aptly in a profound remark : "Knowledge is a function of being". Knowledge, in other words, depends on the degree of purity of mind one has attained; what one knows is determined by what one is like.

There is abundant evidence to show that Sri Anandamayee Ma not only saw distant events, objects and persons; she also, and with equal directness and vividness saw *Truths*, or *tattvas* which belong to the realm of the spirit. This is demonstrated by those marvellous metaphors of hers which owe their startlingly illuminating effect to directness of vision. Take, for instance, her metaphor of the time-table, which she compares to our *śāstras* which give the sādḥaka information that is not only necessary but absolutely indispensable. But not every little detail is there : details like the scenes that the railway traveller see in the way. To give another example : take the metaphor of the electric fan, which continues to rotate for sometime ever after it is switched off, to illustrate the continued existence of the *jīvanmukta puruṣa* after the attainment of *Brahman*, Knowledge.

There is a widespread tendency in our country at present to decry "tattva". People often mention the word sarcastically, even mockingly. The reason, it seems to me is that they mistakenly believe the word to mean abstract theory; hence "tattvakathā" has come to mean in Bengal "theorising". Evidently, this marked distrust for the word arises from the notion that there is something forbiddingly recondite about it.

This suspicion amounting sometimes to dread, is somewhat surprising in the land of ours. For in the philosophical tradition of India, a tradition which is very old, this Sanskrit word does not mean "theory", which is based on intellectual perulation. Etymologically it is *tat+tva = tattva*. *Tat* as we all know, means 'that'. *Tattva* therefore means literally "thatness", "the nature of Reality", "the true nature of something", "the essence or essential principle" and so on.

My contention is that, so long as we persist in our inveterate distrust and dread of this word "tattva", we shall never be able to understand Sri Anandamayee Ma. For this smiling, mild-mannered, soft-spoken Mother of ours who speaks so often

jokingly and playfully, even playing with words, with such a delightful effect, hardly ever says anything which does not express a "tattva"; and the most remarkable thing is that this "tattva" very often, indeed surprisingly often, turns out to be the Ultimate Reality, to which she frequently refers as simply "that", of course with capital 't'.

This 'tat', that or 'sheyi' in Bengali, as we all know is the term which Sri Ma often used to indicate the Supreme Reality, like many other things in her practice, takes us back to the great seers, the rishis of ancient India. It takes us back, for instance to the Chandogya Upanisad, to that celebrated passage where we find that astonishing dialogue between father and son. The father, a great sage, asked his son, Svetaketu to make a few experiments. He asked Svetaketu, for instance, to drop a lump of salt in a bowl of water. Next morning he asked his son to bring the bowl and see what happened to the lump of salt. It was nowhere to be found. Then Svetaketu was asked to taste the water from the surface, in the middle and at the bottom. It tasted salty everywhere. It was then that the father made that startling pronouncement, which was repeated several times "*sa ya eṣoṇimā etadātmātvamavedamidam sarvaṁ, tat satyaṁ, sa ātmā, tatvamasi Śvetaketo!*" "My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there — is that. In that which is the subtle essence, all that exists has its Self. That is the Truth, that is the Self, and thou, Śvetaketu art That"

Incidentally, it is (along with One) this word "that" (*tat*) by which Sri Ma often refers to the Supreme Reality, who cannot be described in words, because language can deal only with the dualistic world. To bring this "thou" (*tvam*) closer and closer to "that".

Incidentally these two "*tat*" (that) and "*ekam*" (One) take us back, as far back as the Ṛgveda, the oldest book of the world. Take for instance this haunting, astounding line from the *Ṛk-saṁhita* in which both these words occur in succession: "*ānīdavātāṁ svadhayā tadekam*" "That One breathed with this power of self-repose, where there was no wind." (10. 129.2) To establish contact with this That or One, to get closer and closer to it through constant remembrance, in the midst of all our activities so that at the end it is felt within us as our very self (Ātman)— this, according to Sri Sri Ma, is the real business, the only business of man, and the ultimate justification of his existence.

Before I stop, I would like to remind you of something concerning Sri Sri Ma, that is of the utmost importance. The time of all of us is indeed limited, inexorably limited. She expresses this grim, dreadful fact in her characteristic manner when she says that there's no believing in the act of breathing, since it may come to a stop at any moment of our lives.

I mention this in order to draw your attention to an aspect of her multifaceted personality which seems to be less clearly and widely noticed than her deep compassion and loving tenderness. I mean her total non-attachment—her supreme unconcern for and indifference to all things of this world, everything that is mundane. This severe and austere side of Sri Sri Ma comes out repeatedly in her utterances; when, for instance she speaks, as she frequently does about the need for "*tapasyā*"—a very old Sanskrit word, which in her characteristic manner from two Bengali words : *Tāāp+Sahā*; interestingly, this derivation is not at all arbitrary or fanciful, for the Sanskrit word *tapas* meant originally, even in Vedic literature, *tāpa* or 'heat'; it is from this that the term *tapasya* implies endurance of pain and suffering.

There is something terrifying in this total uncompromising other-worldliness as there is in that of Sri Ramakrishna. Her life and teachings clearly demonstrate that love and non-attachment can and in fact do perfectly well coexist—that *bhakti* and *vairāgya* are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. This is what our śāstras repeatedly point out, they even suggest, that, there must be something wrong with *bhakti* that is not accompanied by *vairāgya*. In the Bhagavadgītā among the essential characteristics of the *bhakta*, one is non-attachment or *anasakti*. In the last śloka of the 11th chapter we find that the *bhakta* is without attachment to anything (*madbhakta saṅgavarjita*). Again in the famous description of the *bhakta* in the 12th chapter we come across this line : "*śītoṣṇa sukhaduḥkheṣu samaḥ saṅgavivarjitaḥ*"—Equal-minded towards opposites like heat and cold, happiness and misery, the *bhakta* is free from all attachment. Sri Sri Ma warns us, reminds us with appalling clarity, the evanescence of all things and the alarming unpredictability of our life. This grim warning is of course not intended to frighten us but to impress upon us the urgency of turning our minds to "*That which alone is*".

FROM THE DIARY OF A EUROPEAN

—MELITA MASCHMANN

(Translated from German)

Varanasi, October, 1963.

Yesterday most of us left by bus for Varanasi. The rest of the party will follow today with Mataji. Only very reluctantly I left Vindhyachal. There, the foreign country with all its strangeness became familiar to me. This may sound paradox, yet is a fact.

Early morning I ascended to the roof of the Ashram where I had spent many mornings all by myself. I wanted to bid farewell to everything that had been within my horizon here. After a little while I heard the sound of quiet, regular breathing from the tiny room on the roof. Through the open door I saw Mataji lying fast asleep. Perhaps she had fled up here to escape the commotion of packing down below. I have often heard it said that she does not sleep as we do, but nobody has yet given me a satisfactory explanation of this. May be I was deceived by appearances, but what I saw was the deep, relaxed sleep of a person whose perfect inner peace was expressed in the delightful harmony of her features.

I stole away on tiptoe, and sat down in my place on the roof. If God were a mighty magician and granted me the fulfilment of a wish—if he had asked me at that moment, "Where would you like to be?" (How many times had I not imagined this as a child!)—I could only have replied: "Exactly where you have put me."

After the quiet of Vindhyachal, Varanasi seems pandemonium. What a jumble of people, cars, rickshaws, cows, camels, and again people, people, people.

We have to get down in a main street. A narrow lane leads to the Ashram. But here what a relief: the Ganga oceanic expanse, serene, streaming, promise of calm.

The Ashram is situated right on the bank of the Ganga. This is the far end of the town. The building is rectangular, opening towards the Ganga. The main tract which runs parallel to the river is three-storied, with verandas in every storey. The left wing, at right angles to it, accommodates the Kanyapith, a residential Girls' School for religious education. In the right wing there is a small hall downstairs and on the first floor the two temples with a large veranda that protrudes far into the courtyard in the manner of a balcony. Besides these there are a few small rooms in which Swamis live. All the three buildings have extensive roofgardens. Above the

FROM THE DIARY OF A EUROPEAN

—MELITA MASCHMANN

(Translated from German)

Varanasi, October, 1963.

Yesterday most of us left by bus for Varanasi. The rest of the party will follow today with Mataji. Only very reluctantly I left Vindhyachal. There, the foreign country with all its strangeness became familiar to me. This may sound paradox, yet is a fact.

Early morning I ascended to the roof of the Ashram where I had spent many mornings all by myself. I wanted to bid farewell to everything that had been within my horizon here. After a little while I heard the sound of quiet, regular breathing from the tiny room on the roof. Through the open door I saw Mataji lying fast asleep. Perhaps she had fled up here to escape the commotion of packing down below. I have often heard it said that she does not sleep as we do, but nobody has yet given me a satisfactory explanation of this. May be I was deceived by appearances, but what I saw was the deep, relaxed sleep of a person whose perfect inner peace was expressed in the delightful harmony of her features.

I stole away on tiptoe, and sat down in my place on the roof. If God were a mighty magician and granted me the fulfilment of a wish—if he had asked me at that moment, "Where would you like to be?" (How many times had I not imagined this as a child!)—I could only have replied: "Exactly where you have put me."

After the quiet of Vindhyachal, Varanasi seems pandemonium. What a jumble of people, cars, rickshaws, cows, camels, and again people, people, people.

We have to get down in a main street. A narrow lane leads to the Ashram. But here what a relief: the Ganga oceanic expanse, serene, streaming, promise of calm.

The Ashram is situated right on the bank of the Ganga. This is the far end of the town. The building is rectangular, opening towards the Ganga. The main tract which runs parallel to the river is three-storied, with verandas in every storey. The left wing, at right angles to it, accommodates the Kanyapith, a residential Girls' School for religious education. In the right wing there is a small hall downstairs and on the first floor the two temples with a large veranda that protrudes far into the courtyard in the manner of a balcony. Besides these there are a few small rooms in which Swamis live. All the three buildings have extensive roofgardens. Above the

temples there is a tall, pointed tower, surrounded by four smaller towers at the corners. The courtyard is enclosed by the buildings on three sides and by a low wall on the riverside. Here there are shady bushes. In the centre, under a roof, is the well arranged place for the fire sacrifices.

Behind the back-wall of the main building there are several other lower houses, also belonging to the Ashram. There is also a second courtyard. In a low annexe food is prepared; another one contains the office and the library of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. Leaving the Ashram and crossing the narrow lane, one finds a large rectangular platform on which a *satsang* hall is to be built (the original hall that was right on the bank of the Ganga had to be demolished after a high flood). On one side of the hall-to-be a large temple is under construction. Beyond the platform there is a small house, which Mataji's brother has built for himself and his family.

Having passed through the teeming, tumultuous lanes one is surprised to find here such an imposing and extensive project. This Ashram with all its annexe buildings is regarded as a spiritual centre by Mataji's devotees who live scattered all over North and Central India.

Our Ashram family of Vindhyachal has in a trice multiplied by ten. I hardly see a familiar face among the crowd that constantly waits for Mataji. My companions of Vindhyachal have become almost invisible, as the large Ashram provides shelter for all of them, while at Vindhyachal they had to remain in the open most of the day. Mataji has disappeared into her room. Even the door to the veranda in front of her room is either locked or strictly guarded. If this were not so, people would at all times try to force their way to Mataji.

×

×

×

One of the things that I appreciate immensely is that in Mataji's circle no false gesture exists and no artificial pathos. Of course, there does not seem to be any genuine pathos either, or at any rate not noticeable for me. It may well be that the religious poetry which is often recited contains pathos. But this I am unable to judge since I do not understand the language. The manner in which it is rendered does not sound in the least effusive. The same holds good for the style in which the *pūjās* are performed here : the movements of the priests are unaffected, sober and to the point. It is of course true that the numerous symbolic actions keep the *pūjāris* so fully occupied that there are, as it were, no gaps that would have to be filled in with empty gestures.

×

×

×

Yesterday I paid a visit to Sri Gopinath Kaviraj. He had permitted me to do so. His house lies in a small garden. No sooner has one crossed the gate than one enters into an area of silence which encloses this unusual man in ever more silent concentric circles. A vigorous dishevelled palm tree, underwood grown wild and covered with white blossoms. On the terrace a small fire, tended by a servant who, without a word, points across his shoulder to the entrance of the house. A lofty, dark corridor, a steep staircase, everything quite undecorative and austere. The study of the wise man, more a cell than a room: books, magazines, manuscripts are towering on all four sides of the couch on which he is seated. He points to a low stool : "Sit down !" But I prefer to settle myself on the floor. Quite effortlessly : several minutes of silence. At long last he begins to talk about the essay in which I have described my first encounter with Mataji. Great hushed appreciation. Then again silence, which this time is interrupted by myself. I ask whether I may explain to him where, at the time, I believe to stand spiritually. He nods and listens to me with half closed eye-lids. Occasionally a smile of consent flits over his face.

When I tell him that I have really no special desire to converse with Mataji, he opens his eyes in astonishment. "This is excellent," he remarks softly, "do not talk to her. Gaze at her and seek the contact which is beyond words." I then ask him whether I should meditate although I seem to have no gift whatever for it. "It would be of great help to you." We remain silent for a while, then he asks me to come again after a few days. He would then give me some practical hints. Without a word he folds his hands, a remote smile, a hardly perceptible bowing of his head, I am dismissed. After getting up, I remain standing for a moment. This room with its bare walls and its mountains of books seems more familiar to me than any of my own rooms have ever been. The sage on his couch, with his scanty silver hair and the heavy eye-lids was at one time my father or will some time be my brother. I know nothing about his life and yet seem to know all.

While riding on a rickshaw through the crowded streets, I have the physical sensation as if everything I see around me were not outside but within myself. The skin that confines my body seems infinitely widened and encloses all this as well.

I suddenly recall the peculiar sensation I had a year ago after my first *darśana* of Mataji. I felt as if my heart—the physical heart—were growing to double its size. For days I could feel it expanding slowly. It was a sensation that caused pain and bliss at the same time.

×

×

×

This morning I got up very early to go to Sarnath, one of the holiest places of Buddhism. Here the Lord Buddha "set in motion the wheel of *dharma*". He preached for the first time after gaining illumination. I hire a rikshaw. It takes about an hour to get to Sarnath. We at first traverse the city. It is early dawn but the streets are already full of life. Then, gradually houses become fewer. Fields and fallow land, behind walls neglected gardens of old manor houses. A flock of goats by the roadside, donkeys loaded with bundles of dirty linen, peasants carrying milk to town; off and on we meet a monk walking with vigorous strides. Then the road becomes empty.

When I enter the holy district I am completely alone. The sun rises from behind a small grove, wild pigeons are cooing in the tree tops, and a strange perfume overpowers me with impetuous sweetness. I take off my sandals and leave them on the way.

Scattered over an extensive tract of grassy land are the ruins of several temples, stupas, monasteries from early Buddhist times. Before the first monasteries were built during the reign of King Ashoka (three hundred years before Christ), this was a large jungle inhabited only by ascetics and wild beasts. The first five disciples of Lord Buddha were practising rigorous austerities here. Gautama had been one of them and had left. When after several years he met them again, Buddhagaya lay behind him; as a living man he had reached Nirvana. The ascetics recognized him as the Enlightened one, the Buddha, and became his first disciples.

The awakening landscape is full of a secret expectation. I can hear its voice with the naked soles of my feet, while I slowly wander round the excavations. With the entire surface of my body I hear the soundless jubilation that tells of the undying presence of the Enlightened-one. He is here, in the shade of the old trees, in the moss that grows over two thousand years old walls, in the slumber of the temple ruins, in the air that vibrates with the prayers of countless pilgrims.

Buddha, the Enlightened one who conceived God. Was this silence his greatest sacrifice, his holy super-human renunciation ?

But are not silence and speech the same—at the height to which He has ascended ?

I lie down under a tree. Like a purple silk scarf a broad flag of flowering bougainvillia winds round the branch above me.

Thick white cobwebs are lying in the grass, spread all over, like pages of a book—the teaching of the Enlightened-one that has here been put into words for the first time, is later carried into the whole world as scripture. The sun sparkles in the

cobwebs that are studded with dewdrops : the unspeakable is reflected in the revealed word.

In this hour it is also reflected in me : as a speechless exultation of gratitude for all the friends of God whose feet have ever touched the earth—for those whose name I know and for the untold nameless ones. Remain with us, take your abode among us—without you there would be everlasting night.

It is nearly midday when I return to the Ashram. Mataji is sitting in the narrow court-yard of her brother's house in front of the shrine in which her brother is performing a *pūjā*. The courtyard is packed. I remain standing at the entrance. A quarter of an hour later, Mataji beckons to me to join her.

Under the tree under which I was lying at Sarnath, I have picked up a flaming red-yellow pod from which the seeds had fallen. I take it with me because it is so beautiful. Now I offer it to Mataji. I request someone to tell her that I found it in Sarnath. "Regard it as a symbol of something that I want to strive for with your help. Mataji, I wish to become emptied of all karmic seeds, just as this shell has been emptied of seeds." With great care I let the pod drop into Mataji's hands. Reverence makes me too timid to touch her.

Smilingly Mataji looks at my gift while she loudly repeats my words in Bengali. Suddenly she puts the pod into her left hand and stretches out her right one towards me. Among Hindus it is not customary to shake hands. I have never seen Mataji do so. She gives me her small, delicate hand as one would give a flower to someone. I am so surprised that I hesitate to grasp it. Finally I dare to cautiously touch only the upper parts of her fingers and to hold her hand for a few seconds as if it were some venerable and precious jewelery. It occurs to me that I should like to touch it with my forehead, but immediately I feel ashamed of such a crude impulse, and very carefully I return what has been lent to me for a few moments.

Later several people come and ask me to shake hands with them. What they seek is surely the indirect touch of Mataji's hand.

(To be continued.)



THE CONTRIBUTION OF MA TO THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF INDIA.

—SRI AMIYA KUMAR MAZUMDAR

The devotees and admirers of Sri Anandamayee Ma look upon her as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. She is the embodiment of the Mother principle (*Matrisakti*) that lies latent in the phenomenal world. She is the divine incarnation, who descended on the earth to lift human beings from the morass of confusion, doubt and despair at a time when there was appalling erosion of moral and spiritual values. Ma used to say: I am especially in need of those who are unable to move for themselves and have none to prop them up in their religious pursuit. As Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj put it: "All we pray for is that the self-luminous should break through the veil and be manifested. Ma is no other than *Jagatdhatri*, the supporter of the universe". Sri Sitaramdas Onkarnath, the great Yogi, describing Sri Ma said. "This is the same Bhabatarini Ma, the Bhairavi of the Dakshineswar Ashram, whom Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) used to worship."

Now, a critical thinker may pertinently raise the question: What, precisely, is the proof that Sri Ma Anandamayee is a divine incarnation? The answer is this: the expressions of those who have attained Avatarahood are themselves proof positive. Sri Ma expressed the nature of her personality in various ways before her devotees. And the fact of her Avatarahood has been confirmed by such yogis and savants as Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj, Mahamahopadhyay Jogendranath Tarkatirtha, Sri Sitaramdas Onkarnath and others.

An incident expressed the nature of her personality thus before her devotees when some designing persons sent a tantric hermit in order to test her. The tantric started chanting malevolent incantations in the presence of Ma. The devotees were visibly annoyed to see the tantric hermit indulging in vile activities and resolved to turn him out. Then Ma, sensing what was about to be done, warned the devotees saying: Let him sit as long as he pleases. Let him not be manhandled. This body (the body of Sri Ma) makes no difference between benign incantation and malignant ones—it can take all in its stride. If one can chant a Mantra properly it can't fail to be effective. Even diseases approach this body in various shapes, it rejects none". This discloses Ma's identity in unmistakable terms. She always remains immersed in the ocean of *sachchidananda* and is free from the duality of joy and sorrow, love and hatred, acceptance and rejection.

According to Sri Balananda Brahmachari, an eminent yogi, "Sri Ma is not an aspirant. She is *nityasiddha*, eternally perfect, her birth is for a particular mission—that over, she will leave; those of her like have no need of austerities." What precisely, is this mission? It is no doubt doing good to all created beings—*Sarva bhuta hite ratah* (Gita), to show them the path of self-realization. In the Kaliyuga people who are naturally busy thinking of food, shelter and other necessities of life have no time to perform complicated and rigid penances recommended in our sastras. So the only hope lies in repeating the name of god, in whatever form one finds suitable. As Sri Ma observes: "Go on repeating the name. That will do everything for you. Under all circumstances, moving about or going out, you can repeat the name as an unfailing concomitant. Let your hands work and the lips utter the name. The secret of the name is that it brings to you the one whose name it is." Again, "Birth as a human being is a rare boon difficult to obtain. You have received it and must see that not a moment is wasted. Plants, birds and beasts live for a while, reproduce their own kind and then die. If you do nothing but that, what is the difference between you and them?"

The goal is to awaken one's self, to realize one's identity with the Universal Spirit; to actualize the potential divinity of man. This awakening is necessary for all, irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Thus, Sri Ma says, "Hindus and Muslims are one—they seek the same God and call upon Him. Namaz is not different from kirtan." Sri Ma did not utter all this as a theoretician, but these were the outward manifestations of her intimate realization. It is on record that she performed Namaz before the grave of a Muslim fakir according to Islamic regulations and with flawlessly correct postures. A muslim boy was agreeably surprised to observe the transfiguration of Sri Ma during the chanting and hearing her utter "Allah-ho-Akbar" said, "The name of Allah came from Ma's lips with a spontaneous clarity which we are unable to achieve inspite of all our efforts. While uttering the name of Allah together with Ma, I experienced an ecstasy the like of which I had never known in all my life."

All this will unmistakably show that Sri Ma was a living commentary to the dictum of Sri Ramakrishna: "as many doctrines so many paths."

Western devotees who had the privilege of having Sri Ma's *darshan*, have observed, one and all, that to come in contact with Sri Ma is to have ineffable joy. Her personality cannot be described in words. Any attempt to explain the different facets of her being would be futile, as would be evident from the response of an eminent German novelist: "Here I was confronted with a human being of whom I felt that she had no "I" any more."

Those who are acquainted with the many incidents of Sri Ma's life know for certain that many astounding miracles have been performed through her body in a very natural manner and rather effortlessly, the sight of which made her devotees and witnesses dumbfounded. There is of course a feeling in some quarters that performance of miracles is a sign of a high degree of spiritual understanding and insight. Let us see how far this view is tenable.

David Hume defined a miracle as a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent. He refused to accept the validity of miracles on a number of grounds of which the principal ones may be examined. Hume argues that in any period of history no miracle has been attested by a sufficient number of men of education and learning. The passion of surprise and wonder, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, produces in the observing of miracles a sensible tendency towards a belief in miraculous events. Lastly, miraculous events are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations. If, however, civilized people also are found to believe in miracles it may be concluded that they have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors. Plainly, the arguments offered by Hume to repudiate miracles are not cogent enough. The miracles performed by Sri Ma were witnessed by men of science having international reputation, educators, administrators and literary figures widely known in our country and abroad. It is not easy, therefore, to dismiss the miraculous events performed by Sri Ma without making an in-depth study of the phenomenon. At the most, one can suspend one's judgement relating to the validity or otherwise of a miraculous event until one has a direct and immediate proof. When all is said, the fact remains that Indian thought has never regarded miraculous events as component parts of spirituality. If miracle is to be rejected because it is a violation of the laws of nature, what would be the status of dream experience, which also is, not unoften, a violation of the laws of nature. Do I not see in dream that I pass through fire unburnt or leap from the roof of a multistoried building and remain unhurt ? Does it not happen that my dreamthirst is quenched by dream water ? Instead of rejecting dream experience straightaway, we try to find out, what exactly is the agent or principle which connects the three viz. the waking -'I', the dream- 'I' and the deep sleep-'I'. Thus, our approach to dream experience is, by and large, a pragmatic approach, and we do not discard dream experience despite its violating laws of nature.

(To be continued)

