

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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with the divine life and sayings of
Sri Anandamayi Ma

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MATRI-VANI

The Infinite is contained in the finite, and the finite in the Infinite, the whole in the part and the part in the whole. This is so, when one has entered the great stream. He who attains and that which is attained are one and the same.

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Divine Happiness — that which you call *Parama Sukhadam* — is pure, unalloyed bliss, happiness in its own right.

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On the journey through life in this world nobody remains happy. The pilgrimage to the Goal of human existence is the only path to Supreme happiness.

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One who serves God can never be helpless. The more ardently one seeks communion by engaging in Japa, His service and contemplation, the fuller will be His revelation.

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

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What can be expected from this world, whose very nature is constant flux: times are ever changing. To live in time is to be bound by it — by death. If you do not rise above time, how can you escape the clutches of death? Had time not borne away the moment that brought you such acute distress and agony, would any life be left in your body? This is the way of the world.

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Abandon yourself to God in all matters without exception. "May he do as He pleases with me; who am I but a creature in His hands" — this should be your attitude of mind.

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It is the pure, undefiled flower that finds a place at the feet of the Lord and nowhere else.

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Take great care to spend your life in spotless purity, worthy to be dedicated in worship to the Lord. Speak about Him, meditate on His glory, try to see Him in everyone, Him who is the salt, the breath in life, the heart of hearts.

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You feel lonely? In very truth you are not alone. Does the Supreme Friend ever forsake His friends?

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The beauty of it is that man's very nature is to long for Reality, Supreme Wisdom, Divine Joy; as it is his nature to return home when the play is over. The stage of the play is His, the play is His as well, and so are those who take part in it, friends and fellow-beings — everything is He alone.

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CONTRIBUTION OF MA TO THE CULTURAL & SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

II

—Amiya Kumar Majumdar

Before we proceed to consider the nature of spirituality, we will do well to settle another problem, viz. the problem of truth. Do we mean the same thing when we use such expressions as truth of history, truth of science, truth of poetry and truth of religion ? Certainly we do not use the same paradigm when such expressions are used. It is widely believed that religious truths belong to an order different from that of scientific truth. Even if one does not agree to such a view, one may consider what Cartwell-Smith has to say in this respect. Cartwell Smith, an eminent scholar devoted to Islamic theology, observes. " Religious statements are not truth claims in the ordinary sense of the expression, they only indicate how truly a religious man lives his life according to religious tradition which he has accepted." As he puts it, "religious statements at their best have been expressions of personal or corporate involvements, tentative but joyous, inadequate but exuberant, human but transcendence-oriented. To approach them with sympathy is to hear them not as claims but as echoes, to see them not as the moon but as fingers pointing to the moon."

We have seen that in his commentary on Brahma Sutras (IV. I. 15) Sankara asserts that whether a person has unerring *anubhava* or not is to be judged from the person's own conviction.

कथं हि एकस्य सहृदय प्रत्ययं ब्रह्मवेदनं देहधारणं च अपरेण प्रतिक्षेप्तुं शक्यते ?

Before assessing Sri Ma's contribution to the cultural and spiritual heritage of India, it is imperative that we explain the terms 'Culture' and 'Spirituality'. The word 'culture' is derived from the latin root 'Cult', which means filling, care, refinement and worship. In course of time the original meaning has been extended and it signifies the quality in a person or society that arises from an interest in and acquaintance with what is generally regarded as excellence in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits etc. In regard to an individual, 'culture' means refinement of taste. While the same term signifies a system of ideas and ideals embodying an entire theory of life, when one speaks of a nation's culture. The most important cultural trait of India is "unity in diversity." Despite diverse languages which people

of different parts of India speak and the different religious sects they belong to. India is one and indivisible. This unity, is not geographical, but spiritual.

The term 'spirituality' is a much abused term. At the outset, this is to be borne in mind that spirituality does not mean clairvoyance, nor does it signify the art of communicating through a medium heavenly messages. Spirituality is not anything supernatural or mysterious. The term has been used by thinkers in diverse ways, of which the following may be noted:

- (a) Spirituality means that spirit (Soul, Self or *Caitanya*) should rule matter and not viceversa;
- (b) Man is not a mere physico-chemical organism, but spirit or *Caitanya* is his essential nature.
- (c) Man is not an isolated entity living apart from Nature. Rather, man is organic to Nature. In one sense, man is a part of Nature, in another sense man has the capacity to transcend Nature.
- (d) Spirituality signifies reverence for Life. A person is said to be spiritual in outlook when he engages himself in doing good to all sentient beings.
- (e) A person who has developed a spiritual outlook does not look upon the universe as a mechanical aggregate of parts, but as a harmonious whole of parts, where parts contribute significantly to the growth and well-being of the whole.
- (f) A person is said to have developed a spiritual outlook when he feels that his life is not to be considered as ego-centred, but his life will have meaning and purpose in the lives of others.
- (g) One can realize the meaning and significance of spirituality when one attunes one's life to the twin principle of renunciation and service. Renunciation does not mean world-renunciation but ego-renunciation. As it appears in Vivek Chudamani.

सन्त्यन्ये प्रतिबन्धाः पुंसः संसार हेतवो दृष्टाः
तेषामेव मूलं प्रथमो विकारो भवत्यहंकारः

There are many causes leading to the bondage of the *purusha* or *jiva* to the phenomenal world. The foremost of them is egoism. Unless one succeeds in shaking off the sense of 'I' and 'mine' one cannot have a passport to the realm of *sadhana* (spiritual enlightenment). Sri Ma never recommends the same path of realization to all the aspirants. She recommends different paths to different devotees, according to their capacity, temperament and liking. She may lead some even along the path of enjoyment until they reach the saturation point, while for others she recommends the path of renunciation. In the perception of Sri Ma, peace

and satisfaction arising out of renunciation is also a kind of enjoyment and that is why she urges that one must go beyond enjoyment and renunciation.

Saints down the ages, belonging to different orders, have urged unequivocally that all paths of spiritual discipline lead to the same goal, viz. God - realization. What, however, is of utmost importance in Sri Ma's teaching is that *sampradaya* (sect) means *sampradāna* (giving away). Which ever order or sect one may belong to, he must give away one and all in order to realize one's true self. To know oneself is to know God.

It has already been stated that Sri Ma has been eagerly looking forward to those who have none to guide them in their religious pursuits, who are helpless, frustrated and have lost their moorings of life. Thus is indeed the ideal of a realized person. A *dharmika* is one who is constantly engaged in doing good to all creatures (*Sarva Bhuta hite ratah*).

Dharma has been likened to a bridge (*setu*) which takes man to God. We have it in the Sukla Yajurveda : अन्ताद्याद्यै संविभागो भूम्यतश्च यथार्हतः— You have to equitably distribute to all people of the country according to their need, whatever is produced in the country. There is, however, a qualifying clause मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे— You must look upon every being of the world with the eye of a friend. For the Indian thinkers detachment is the end of life, but it is affirmed, at the same time, that detachment does not presuppose an inactive, indifferent and asocial life. Detachment can be achieved only through living an active life taking care to see that activities of a person are not carried with an eye to one's own advantage. It is not enough that a detached person rises above self-interest, he should, at the same time, give up the notion that he is the doer. As the Mahabharata (Santiparva) affirms : We should first renounce all selfishness and then renounce that by which we do so.

त्यज धर्मम् अधर्मञ्च उभे सत्यानृते त्यज
उभे सत्यानृते त्यक्त्वा येन त्यजसि तत् त्यज ।

Sri Ma has always been fully alive to the significance of this saying of the Mahabharata and translated this ideal into action; in consonance with the spirit of the Indian ideal. The salient features of Sri Ma's contribution to the cultural and spiritual heritage of India may be described thus : instead of looking upon religion as a doctrinaire belief, She made religion coeval with life itself; she removed all barriers between the sacred and the secular and the secular. She urged that the main purpose of human life is to live for other, she harmonised contemplation with action and recommended *japa* of the holy name of God as the most practical religious discipline, and advised an aspirant to go beyond both enjoyment and renunciation.

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N. B. : The sayings of Sri Ma quoted in this paper are taken from "Matrilila Darshan" by Debaprasad Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1989.

CONVERSATIONS WITH WESTERN DEVOTEES

[ONE]

—Vijayananda

MA AND SPIRITUAL TRANSMISSION

Q.- It is usually said that a spiritual teacher should wait for the awakening of a real spiritual need in the disciple. But does a sage not have the power to induce this awakening?

V - True, a teacher should wait for the real questions to arise in the disciple. Preaching or teaching to those who are not receptive equals to sowing on a rocky soil; but the sage is able to transform this rocky soil in a fertile one. For some, he can do it all of a sudden, for others he will go progressively; but he usually does not do that with words or oral teachings. A single look from a sage is sufficient to change an atheist into a religious man, a libertine into a yogi. That was the daily miracle that Ma was able to do, but this transformation was by the awakening of the divine power which is latent in everyone. Once this awakening is realised, there will be a fertile soil for verbal teaching, if this is still needed.

Q : Does the awakening of the inner energy given in some cases by the guru lead sometimes to an increase of ordinary desires?

V : When inner energy, that is the power of Kundalini, is awakened by the power of the guru or by yoga exercises, or even spontaneously, the first effect is indeed an intensification of desires and even of the basic desires. Ma one day told me : *Kama* (sexual desire), *Krodha* (anger) and *Bhagavan ki Shakti* (Divine energy, the term by which Ma used to designate the power of Kundalini) move side by side. And with both fingers, she showed me how both movements were intimately intertwined, but going in different directions. What we are looking for in reality is the satisfaction of our desires, is the bliss of the Self; but by trying to obtain this bliss in the sense objects, we are going in the wrong direction, because these objects are only a reflection of this bliss. This is similar to a child who is ready to embrace his own image which he is seeing in a mirror. Then, what is necessary is to reverse the dynamic of the process and to bring it back to its source which is within ourselves.

When the guru awakens the inner energy, he gives intensity to this double movement. It is up to the disciple to choose its own direction. Towards the top or towards the bottom. But the guru will only awaken Kundalini when he has tested

many times the disciple to be sure that he will be able to master the violent passions that this awakening might produce in the beginning. There is a whole process of preparation towards that goal. Apart from the moral discipline, the effort for self-control, etc..., There is whole technique for the purification of the psychic channels (*nadis*). Only then will it be possible for the disciple not to be taken away by the tidal wave that the awakened Kundalini may produce.

Q : Why are the teachings related to Kundalini traditionally kept secret ?

V : Kundalini is a primordial power which goes beyond spoken words. When she awakens, the sadhaka dresses her up, in some ways, with the thoughts stored in his unconscious. For example, for a Hindu, she will take the form of his chosen deity (Krishna, Durga, etc...) for a Christian, it will be Jesus or Mary, etc....It depends of course if the person is a true sadhaka and has already attained a degree of mental purification: because an accidental or forced awakening of Kundalini without the help of a Guru can lead to catastrophe. You are asking why the teaching of Kundalini is kept secret : to be honest, there cannot be a teaching of Kundalini, because we cannot express with words what is beyond words. And if we try to do so, the disciple would interpret the words according to his own mental frame. It would be similar to the story of Ramakrishna, where a man was born blind wanted to be explained the meaning of the words 'white as milk' : a friend explains to him that milk has the colour of the swan, and to explain to him what a swan is, he shows by gesture the shape of a swan's neck; the blind man touches his friend's arm and happily goes around telling others: 'I know the meaning of 'white as milk', and he starts showing the gesture made by his friend... 'It is the shape of a bent arm'

Q : On a meditation path, be it devotional or non-dualistic, you have mentioned the existence of 'Kriyas', that is to say meditation exercises that are spontaneous and found by oneself and practiced for a period of time. Can you be more specific about this notion?

V: Kriyas are exercises (which are most often *pranayamas* which can be associated or not with mantras) designed to facilitate the meditative state when we cannot obtain it right away. They are very useful for most sadhakas, but they are not necessary for those to whom a meditative state comes spontaneously or without much effort.

One day, in a private interview with Ma, she gave me a few Kriyas. I do not know why, I said in a low voice as if talking to myself : 'to want to do something, that is precisely the obstacle'. Immediately, Ma said : 'Kriyas are useful to fight sleepiness' However, when the guru has given you Kriyas, they must be practised,

whether or not you deem them to be useful, out of veneration for the guru, out of love for him.

As far as spontaneous Kriyas are concerned, they have been mentioned by Ma during what she used to call her '*sadhana ka khel*', the play of her sadhana. They were mainly meditation postures, either asanas or mudras, which came spontaneously. They at times take place with the ordinary sadhaka also during the awakening of Kundalini. But in this case, they have little interest and may produce pathological deviations if we get too attached to them.

Q : Ma used to give yoga or meditation exercises to some of her disciples or visitors. When she was alive, she asked them to be kept secret, but now she has left her body, why we do not write them, like for example, one has written the 'Six Yogas of Naropa' after his death?

V : Ma used to give Kriyas to some of her devotees and she asked this teaching to be kept secret and not to be communicated to anyone. It is difficult to know if she asked for secrecy from all the people who had received these instructions, because probably there are certain people who have received them and will not even speak about it. That is why I can only speak with certainty of my own case. When she was teaching me a Kriya, she was always telling me at the end : '*kisi ko mat bolna*' 'You should not tell anyone'. One time, she even added : 'this is a secret Kriya.'

You asked me if now that Ma left her body, these secret instructions could be written down and published. I do not think that it could be possible. The recommendations of a guru does not lose its authority when the guru leaves his body. Anyhow, the guru is ever present even if he has left his body. If one of his disciple has attained realization himself, and himself has disciples, he could then communicate these instructions to them, but that would probably be done also under a vow of secrecy.

Q : Is it possible to say that a guru seduces his disciples to bring them to God?

V : In a way, I think that we can answer : yes, inspite of the fact that the word 'seduce' can bring about some confusion. We should rather talk of 'emotional transference', a method which is well known by psychoanalysts. The ordinary man is bound by all sorts of attachments and worldly affections. He loves his wife, his children, his worldly possessions without even mentioning his own body and his own comforts, and all this because he finds a few moments of temporary happiness in all that. All these attachments attract the mind towards the outside. To discover the Divine which is within each one of us, we must change the direction of the mind and bring it back inside. But it is extremely difficult. That is the moment when the grace of the guru comes up. It awakens in the heart of the disciple an

attachment so intense that all other attachments lose their power of attraction. At the beginning, it is love for the physical aspect of the guru; but it is also love for a being which is a symbol of omnipresent Divine; and the disciple, by the grace of his guru, soon will discover the Divine which is in his own heart and will understand that sensual pleasures drive us only because they are temporarily enlightened by a reflection of the Divine.

Q : Why does the body of a sage, which is *sattvic*, fall prey to illness and death?

V : Just as an ordinary man is identified to the physical body, the perfect sage is identified to *tattva*, that imperishable substance made of *satchidananda*. That is his actual body. As far as his physical body is concerned, it is part of *prakriti*, which is nature, and it is subject to the laws of nature, which means birth, growth, maturity, decay and death. For the sage, the physical body is an instrument which allows him to come into contact with individuals who are bound by the laws of nature and help them to free themselves from them. The sage is no more identified with his physical body than a rider to his horse or a driver to his car.

Regarding the diseases which appear in the physical body of the sage, they are according to the nature of things. Whatever is part of the perishable must by the law of things degenerate and eventually die; but as far as great sages are concerned, some of the diseases are also due to the fact that they absorb the bad karma of their disciples. However, there are also yogis who have not yet attained to perfection but whose aim is to perfect the physical body and to protect it from diseases.

Q : You say that when we concentrate on Ma, we will be able to see her in front of us. This concentration probably requires a certain practice; is it not the result of our own mental projections?

V : The concentration on Ma (as the concentration on an *Ishta-devata*, an image of the deity) is one of the methods which are advised to calm the mind. The mind naturally runs towards what it likes ; pleasure, food, sex, etc....and disperses itself in various directions. When we direct it towards a divine object, we can keep it away from its worldly endeavour. In fact, when devotion for the guru, for Ma is deep, concentration is easy, and we can bring back the mind to a state of happy peace without much effort. But, in addition to that, in the case of a great sage, like Ma, who has left her residual presence, we can get in contact with this presence. And this contact can become a considerable aid in our spiritual pursuit. The guru can transmit the power and he can do so even after he has left his physical form. There is also another benefit which can be obtained by this concentration. When you think about Ma, you automatically invoke her qualities, her virtues, her compassion, etc...Then a sort of transference takes place and we absorb some of her qualities, even if we do not feel it consciously.

To see the image of Ma actually facing us requires a lot of practice, as you say, and only those who have a strong capacity of visualisation are successful in it. But it is not necessary to see her really in front of us. *To simply think about her with devotion is sufficient. What matters is our mental reaction of love and devotion; the image is only a means to produce this reaction.*

Even if we can see her, it is only a form of thought as you suggest it. But this form of thought is a support for the all-pervading Divine, whose centre, for us, resides in our subtle heart. When we have succeeded in fixing our attention straight away on the Omnipresent Divine, on the universal Consciousness, then the support is not necessary anymore.

"MAN'S TRUE NATURE FLOWS TOWARDS GOD ALONE".

- Sri Anandamayi Ma

FROM THE DIARY OF A EUROPEAN

—Melita Maschmann

(Translated from German)

(V)

Varanasi, November, 1963

For the last six weeks I have been watching Mataji very carefully. I do not know how many thousands of people I have seen her greet one by one. For nearly four decades, day after day, men and women have crowded round her, in need of consolation, in search of knowledge, in adoration and out of curiosity. Invariably she receives them with a smile of irresistible charm. This smile has many nuances, only its loving-kindness is unchangeable.

The other day I realized that now and again I am observing Mataji with the unconscious motive to discover at last a smile which is but a mask, not the expression of heartfelt loving-kindness. To this day I have not succeeded and I am happy about it, although it would give me a questionable satisfaction to see her, at least once, smile like a prime minister, or a filmstar, or a nuclear scientist, or a bishop. It might perhaps give me some kind of satisfaction because what I see here in Mataji is—according to human understanding—hardly possible. And because it 'disturbs' the experience something that according to reason cannot be: the expression of a kind-heartedness that by the 'wear and tear' of 35 long years has lost nothing of its freshness, spontaneity, genuineness and strength.

To day, after Mataji had vanished into her room, she asked one of the girls whether many people were waiting for her. When this was confirmed she at once got up and went to meet them. She walked as I had never seen her walk before: with difficulty. Probably she is quite ill. When she sat in silence in her place—10 minutes later she left again—her smile was indescribably touching and expressive. "Look at me, my dear one", it seemed to say. "At times the flesh feels rather miserable. But God is full of infinite glory and strength. Gaze at Him through this sick body."

One of the women who has travelled with Mataji for some time told yesterday that Mataji's illnesses are quite different from our own. One day she may appear to be seriously ill and the next day again perfectly well. It all depends on herself. When she is ill, we pray to her to make herself well again for our sake.

To day she really is well again. At any rate she appears as fresh as ever, although deep shadows can be detected under her eyes. The crowd pressing for private interviews increases daily. This morning the old, nearly blind *sannyāsini* came again for Mataji's darśana. She seemed in a specially deplorable condition. While fumbling about at Mataji's feet she cried and wailed. Obviously she is losing the last remainder of her eyesight.

Mataji spoke to her with unclouded serenity, laughing several times in between. She said : "It is time for your inner eyes to open. God assists you in this by making your outer eyes blind. You know it yourself : that which is really worth while, you have never seen with your outer eyes. What you could still perceive with them would only distract you. That which you are going to behold with the eyes of wisdom is infinitely more beautiful than what the ordinary eyes can see. But as long as you are not willing to close them, the eyes of wisdom will not open."

For a moment the *sannyāsini* remains still, then she starts lamenting once more. For a second, surprise passes over Mataji's face. How can you rebel against God's will so persistently, it seems to say. Mataji silently looks at the *sannyāsini*. A short flicker of sympathy in her eyes quickly again gives place to crystal clear cheerfulness. "You will not be the first of my friends to acquire real sight by becoming blind."

Often I have noticed that Mataji responds to lamenting and wailing by laughter. Of course, not in all cases when people weep at her feet. Sometimes she caresses the desperate person in silence, sometimes she very gently says something, but most of all she replies to tears by laughter. Manytimes she has said, "You should cry only for God; for the realization of Him alone should your tears flow."

What was the significance of the short flicker of sympathy in Mataji's face to-day ? As far as I know I have never before noticed this expression with her. At first I felt nonplussed at her laughing at the sight of tears. Was the sympathy to-day an ascent to Christian compassion or rather a touch of human weakness, similar to the emotional pity with which most of us react to this kind of situation ?

She sees what we cannot perceive: the imperishable behind the earthly processes of decay, and the Light in which our human darkneses are only like the shadows of a fly on a white wall. In order to wail with us, she would have to deny her wisdom and descend to our ignorance. But does not comforting assurance lie just in her laughter ? I have seen how quickly people dry their tears. Perhaps those who still weep when they go away, afterwards come to understand why Mataji laughed.

I notice that it has already become a matter of course to me that Mataji can read in our heads and hearts as we read in books. How does such a conviction develop? I have heard it stated a few times, but that by itself would not persuade me at all. Again and again I have the impression that Mataji "catches me red-handed" at some thought. To-day I was just reflecting about the Lemurian landscape she may sometimes have before her inner eye, when the souls of a hundred people are spread out in front of her like open books. I was sitting in a corner. Suddenly she turned her head in my direction and, looking at me, called my name and laughed loudly.

A young doctor told me, "When Mataji is sick, this has two causes. Either she takes the illnesses of others on herself, or our wickedness makes her suffer, which manifests in her body."

A few days ago, someone brought some sweets to the Ashram and all who partook of them fell ill. Fortunately only twenty or thirty people were affected, but they were in a rather pitiable condition. A child, an old woman and a delicate sannyasi got seriously ill. This morning at daršana time, Mataji discussed this incident. Already for quite a while I had been observing a strange lightning in Mataji's face. For a long time she did not say anything, suddenly she laughed loudly. After calming down a little, she asked: "Do you know why I am laughing?. I have just been reminded of how I saw you lie that morning when you had caught food poisoning. On entering the room, you can't imagine how difficult it was not to laugh. But I did not want to hurt you, so I suppressed it. But now - now it is coming again, now it may be allowed its free course." And it comes over her in a veritable storm. It is shaking her for several minutes. She is unable to utter a single word. Tears are running down her cheeks. Her whole body is one mighty laughter.

By and by the laughing fit decreases and at last subsides. Mataji dries her tears with the lappet of her dhoti and then tries to speak, but it is still vibrating in her throat and the abating earthquake is still visible in her shoulders. "How miserable you were, my friends. How you prayed : 'Hey Bhagavan, hey Bhagavan !' Still laughing, she imitates the whining of the sick. "Then you remembered God, because you were afraid you would die : 'Hey Bhagavan, hey Bhagavan !' Do you see how beneficial it was for you ? It will help you to get over your lukewarmness." Mataji once more laughs a little, while looking with affection from face to face. Gradually the people also join in her laughter. Most of them had so far looked rather puzzled. I often notice that they find it difficult to understand why Mataji is laughing. In one or the other face some faint resentment can be detected on occasions. That I am always irresistibly forced to laugh with her and able to give in

to this compulsion, may be due to the fact that I only rarely understand what it is all about (to-day I have by way of exception a good interpreter.) Usually it does not puzzle me : Why on earth is she laughing?

In the meanwhile Mataji continues : "When the doctor came that morning I at once said to him : Don't feel anxious, all will be well.' After examining you, he again came to me. I asked him three times : 'How does it look ?' At first he said with hesitation : 'Hopeful'. The second time his voice became somewhat more reassuring : 'Yes, hopeful'. Only to my third question he replied with conviction : 'It is hopeful, Mataji.' In the evening, after the worst was over, he told me that three of you had been dangerously sick. But I was sure that nothing would happen."

Mataji looks round with friendly derision. All at once she starts laughing again. Or rather : she does not laugh herself, it laughs in her. It passes through her body like a tempest and she gives in without resistance. Again the gradual subsiding of the outbursts. "I am now laughing about something that happened thirty years ago", she says. "I have just been reminded of it. I got a terrible fit of laughter, although it was out of place. We spent the night in a temple at Dehradun. Early morning in the dark, Bhaiji sat and meditated. Suddenly we heard the priest approaching. Bhaiji did not speak at that time and this body* was also keeping *mauna*. He got up and wanted to go near the priest so that he should not enter the pitch dark temple and perhaps stumble over us and take us for thieves. But Bhaiji was not quick enough. The *pūjārī* really thought burglars had broken into the temple and wanted to arrest Bhaiji. The two men struggled with each other in the dark and I stood there, laughing and laughing....."

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Yesterday morning a gentleman from Calcutta came to the Ashram with his ten years old nephew. The boy had a large malignant looking abscess on his forehead. His uncle felt so worried about the child that he cried. At midday I saw them again. Radiant. The gentleman told me : 'When I came to Mataji with the boy, she said : 'Ah, here he is. I thought he would come.' She then put her hand into the air over his head, saying : 'Don't feel anxious, he will soon be all right.'" The same afternoon the boy was playing with the other children. The pain had subsided. This morning the inflammation had decreased considerably. The gentleman (a Government official) is convinced that Mataji has saved the child.

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Last night an old one-eyed sādhu in ochre robes with a *brahmachāri* dressed in white, who was also quite an old man, came for Mataji's darśana. Mataji offered her own āsana to the sādhu and pressed him to sit on it. She first stood up to greet him. Mataji spoke to the bearded sadhu as if he were her father.

This morning the two men returned, the brahmachāri walking behind his master at a respectful distance. Mataji stood up and offered to the sādhu a place by her side on the couch. When he refused to accept it, as he obviously thought it too great an honour for him, Mataji was about to sit down on the floor next to him. Thereupon he gave in. Strange to see the two sitting side by side. The one-eyed old man, erect and motionless, with fixed expression; a perfect yogi. Mataji relaxed, leaning against the wall, chattering, sometimes laughing, graceful and expressive in the gestures of her hands. Suddenly one can again see and feel distinctly the girlishness in her. One forgets her age completely on such occasions. She addresses the sādhu as 'Pitaji' and about herself she speaks as his little daughter.

But she does not play the role of a young girl, she becomes that. To the very sound and pitch of her voice. A little later she is again the mother who comforts, or the sage who interprets a difficult passage of a scripture, or the judge of peace who settles a dispute, or the physician who gives advice as to the treatment of a patient, or the seer whose eyes reflect super worldly light : *Mātri Līlā* !

MĀTRI SATSANG

—Swami Bhagavatananda

(Translated from Hindi)

9th December, 1947.

Question :— Sri Uddhavaji was Lord Krishna's constant companion, his childhood friend. In spite of this, why did Lord Krishna when He left the world and went to His own abode, say to Uddhava: "Go to Badrinath and practise *sādhana* there!" Why should He have separated His eternal companion from Himself? Why did He not take him to His supreme dwelling-place?

Mataji : What has one to do to please God?

Question : God alone knows everything.

Mataji : If God knows everything, then He does according to His knowledge. Are not all His companions equal in His *Līlā*? When the Lord sent Uddhavaji to Badrinath, who is Badrinath? God is there also of course. God Himself is indeed everywhere. By sending Uddhava to Badrinath, He sent Him but to Himself. Whatever you may behold, it is all God's own form. Bow down to everyone. To go to Badrinath and do *tapasyā* there, all this happens according to God's will. The entire world is His form. Get into the habit of seeing Him in everything. *Tapasyā* is also nothing but God. Do whatever He prompts you to do. You see yourself as separate from God, but God tells you to see Him in all forms. All shapes, all movements, and all rest are contained within Him. In the field of His play, He and none but He is present in every form.

The Guru's words are mantras. According to the Guru's instructions practise *sādhana* with deep religious feeling and God will *have* to respond. Just as the parents know what will make their children thrive, so also God knows exactly what is wholesome for you and what harmful. To ask: "why has God done such and such a thing" is out of place. From your point of view it is of course right. God and His gifts are one. Don't think of yourself as far away from Him. Everywhere God and God alone is present. The father's wealth belongs to his son. Try to see God in every shape and in every mode of being. Man receives according to his desire. Separation is one of God's ways of manifesting. In the separation of Radha from Krishna there also lies a certain charm. Does it not?

Question: Some people go into a state of *samādhi* when listening to kirtan or other religious music. What actually is this *samādhi*?

Mataji : Who goes into *samādhi* ? He who goes into *samādhi* becomes one with God. To remain absorbed in meditation for an hour or two is not called *samādhi*.

Question : Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa also went into *bhāva samādhi*.

Mataji : Ordinarily when *bhāva* occurs to someone during kirtan, yet afterwards he again becomes engrossed in worldly affairs, one has to understand that this was just a momentary glimpse of Light, nothing more than that. What is achieved by repeating God's name is all right. As to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's state, this is quite a different matter. This body is not going to say anything about his *bhāva samādhi*. Just as an M. A. can teach small children the alphabets, but thereby he does not lose the status of an M. A., precisely in a similar manner, once real *samādhi* has occurred one does not divert from this state anymore. For you small and great exist, but *There*, there is no question at all of small and great. Even while moving about, *samādhi* may supervene. For one who has reached the ultimate state, for him all conditions are equal. Some people have the capacity to recognise such a superman.

Question : How can by time-bound knowledge the essence of things be attained?

Mataji : When you attain to real knowledge, you will have found the essence of things.

Question : Truth is one. When we adhere to one particular doctrine, why do all the others seem false to us ?

Mataji : There are many paths to Truth. But Truth itself is One, it knows no distinctions. Depending on his predilections and temperament man adopts the path most congenial to him. It is said : "There are as many doctrines as there are Munis" (sages).

Question : Momentary glimpses of Light are experienced, but they vanish. Why should this happen again and again ?

Mataji : Even though they vanish time after time, they will appear again.

Question : What is the simplest method to make them permanent ?

Mataji : If you cannot do anything else, atleast seek *satsang* ; or if you are unable to secure the company of real saints and sages, read scriptures, meditate, worship, contemplate on God. In the measure as you exert yourself you will make progress on the spiritual path.

Question : God is all-pervading. How can this be proved ?

Mataji : A teacher or professor tests his pupils. Why ? The tests are meant for the benefit of the students, not for the examiner; the teacher knows how much his

pupils have learnt. The purpose of examinations is to make the students aware of their shortcomings. Before putting God to the test, you must first scrutinize yourself; you have to adhere to your practices and it is God who is the examiner. The examiner is beyond examination. The test is taken for your sake, so that you may know yourself. Many people do in fact practise *sādhana* with a view to God-realization, but they do not pay attention to their short-comings, such as anger, greed and so forth. This is why they become diverted from their goal. Thus tests and trials are not for the professor but for the students.

Question : Again and again doubt assails the mind. Is this a good sign or a bad one ?

Mataji : It is natural that doubts should arise to those who are on the path to find God. Until you reach the state in which doubts are impossible, doubts are bound to come. When problems arise, they also call for a solution. In the course of one's practice, doubts will awaken. Those who have not started learning and those who have completed their course successfully, for them there are no questions. When queries spring up in your heart, put them before your Guru again and again. Whatever your Guru says, accept and follow without criticizing. At the same time proceed also with your spiritual practices. Just as you eat, drink, sleep, and do your professional work regularly, exactly with the same regularity pray to God to make you free from doubts. By sustained effort fire will be generated and its heat felt as well. Once the fire of real knowledge is kindled, everything will be burnt to ashes. By giving a little one receives a little; obtaining a fragment is worth nothing. When you pray for any particular thing, it will be granted to you, but you will not get the whole. Burn up everything by the fire of Knowledge or else melt everything by intense devotion.

Question : Mataji, every day I listen to your words— I also pay attention to what you say. How much I have heard you speak about God! And yet, when I get engrossed in my work, why do I not remember Him ?

Mataji : Fickleness is one of the characteristics of the mind. For lives and lives you have formed the habit of letting the mind turn outward. The mind is so used to it that now you will have to reverse its movement and make it turn inwards. So long as the mind's movement does not tend within, it is impossible to find God, therefore, try your utmost to make your mind face inwards. By becoming inward turned, God who is enthroned in the lotus of your heart will be revealed. If the mind roams about outside, it is turned away from God. By practising *sādhana* consistently, a condition ensues when worldly conversation seems distasteful. One is unable to enjoy it. Therefore, so long as you do not enter the current that drives

you inwards, you must continue your efforts to make the mind face within. The mind cannot simultaneously move in two directions. Aiming at the two is detrimental; try to realize the ONE. Worship God, but not for the sake of showing off. Become steady in your practice. What will be the result of this ? There will be no more interruption of your practice. Later you will transcend both practice and non-practice and realize oneness.

Question : Some people are of the opinion that the visions, etc. that come through spiritual practice are due to an unbalanced mind. Is this true?

Mataji : An unbalanced mind is the cause of vision ? How lovely! God is manifested every where and you have to attain to the vision of Him. How can this vision be due to an unsound mind ? To go beyond the pairs of opposites is the characteristic of Enlightenment. How can this be achieved by a deranged mind ? By the vision of God even insanity is cured.

Question : Is it possible to behold God with form (*sākāra*) ?

Mataji : Most certainly.

Question : If you meet a man in the street who is in pain, won't you take pity on him, even though he be unworthy ? Won't you assist him ? Will not God help him ?

Mataji : When appealed to with a sincere heart, God will definitely help.

Question : God is all-pervading.

Mataji : Vasudeva is enthroned upon the lotus in everybody's heart.

Question : When little ants fall into water, we pick them out. Won't God have compassion on us and lift us up ?

Mataji : There are two ways in which God bestows His grace : by favour and also by disfavour. In the world there is both good and bad. Whatever path is right and proper for anyone, that God will choose. In the shape of disease, of *kriyā*, of work, in every shape God's grace can be perceived. At the end of sorrow it comes to light. There is yet another way of looking at it : by sending adversity God destroys adversity. By making you ill He purifies you. God alone is the true doctor who purifies you within and without. Now look at it from yet another angle of vision. Who hits whom ? Who is ill ? That you see sickness is an error. Only God alone is present everywhere. He and He and none but He !

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THE LILA OF BEING A WOMAN*

—Dr. Bithika Mukerji

The *lilā* of Sri Ma as a 'woman' was especially enjoyed by the multitude of housewives surrounding her most of the time. Women always felt really understood and appreciated by Sri Ma. Men, on the other hand, were always impatient with what they considered were trivialities when they were excluded from all-women sessions, sometimes jealous also!

When Sri Ma had the *kheyāla* for Didi and Maroni to acquire the privilege of the sacred thread, it was an innovation of considerable moment. Subsequently many more young women joined them in acquiring the rights as well as the rather strict regimentation of the twice born, such as Purnananda (Kumari Shanta Pathak); Brahmacharini Chandan Bhattacharya, Kumari Geeta Banerjee and Kumari Jaya Bhattacharya of the Kanyapeeth were also given the sacred thread.

Sri Ma brought about major changes in unobtrusive ways. Once it so happened that a girl from the Kanyapeeth was asked to read a sacred book in Sri Ma's presence. While she was reading this book Sri Ma put a garland round her neck. At a sign from her a small *chowki* (lectern which can be used while sitting on the ground) was placed in front of the reader on which she could place the book. A sandal-paste mark was put on her forehead. She now looked like a pathak (reader) who has been chosen for the role. The girl shyly read a page or two of the book. These simple beginnings have lead to amazing results. Many girls of the Kanyapeeth are now scholars, well able to speak in public on religious subjects. In September, 1995 Kumari Geeta Banerjee was anointed the speaker on Srimad Bhagavatam for one week at Varanasi. She occupied the *vyāsāsana* with confidence and for seven days gave entrancing discourses on the sacred book. A worthy offering for the year of celebration of Sri Ma's Centenary. (1995-1996)

In June, 1982, the Jagadguru Samkaracarya, the Head of the Sringeri Peetham, Sri Abhinava Bharati Tirtha and his chief companion Chhote Maharaj came to Kankhal to visit Sri Ma. The entire Ashram turned out in force to accord him the welcome suited to his exalted position in the hierarchy of our *sādhu-samāj*. Flower decorations and the sound of *kirtan* announced an imminent festivity. All the rituals pertaining to the reception of a great Mahatma were observed.

* Reprinted from the book *Life & Teachings of Shri Ma Anandamayee* with the kind permission of the author.

Jagadguru Sri Samkarācārya seemed very happy. When he sat with Sri Ma in the Hall, she introduced many of the girls standing at her side. First it was the turn of Kumari Jaya Bhattacharya, the Principal of the Kanyapeeth. Listening to her academic qualifications he asked a question in Sanskrit from the abstruse treatise *Khandanakhandakhadya*. Jaya made a very polite rejoinder also in Sanskrit, 'With Sri Ma's and Maharajji's blessings, it is true that I have read this treatise but I have not had time to meditate on its intricacies.' Jaya added, 'We are happy that you have visited us. Please come again.' Maharajji seemed pleased with this answer. Sri Ma then presented other academically qualified girls, dressed in their sober yellow robes looking like *brahmacārinis* of Upaniṣadic Age. Dr Padma Mishra, the President of the Kanyapeeth came in last. Sri Ma said, 'Pitaji, all credit for this school rests with Padma.'

The Jagadguru was visibly impressed. He turned round to his companion and said in Sanskrit, 'All things are possible with Sri Ma !' One of the onlookers seeing Sri Ma's glowing countenance thought, 'Truly Sri Ma's girls are persons to be proud of!' His wonderment was shared by many because for well-educated girls to be following the words of Sri Ma's oft-repeated vāni, 'To talk of God alone is worthwhile, all else is in vain and pain,' is an amazing and uplifting example.

As with all other teachings, it is not quite easy to construe Sri Ma's *kheyāla* regarding the position of women in our society. It was obvious that Sri Ma made no distinction between men and women, as regards rights and obligations, although she was heard to say that to demand an equal share in the sphere of possessions was an unworthy aim of life. She encouraged all women to bring an independent spirit to the business of finding their places in the world; but she advocated a way of life which was guided by a spirit of service as distinguished from subservience. Sri Ma always cited her own mother whenever she wanted to demonstrate an ideal behaviour. She would say, 'My mother used to say', or 'My mother would not allow us to do such and such', or 'My mother did not do this.' The life of Didima however was an orchestration of fortitude, dispassion, spirit of service, self-confidence under difficult conditions and a total identification with God's will in life. Her sense of humour fortified her against any attempts at trivializing her position or dignity. She could not be pitied for her poor circumstances or shown sympathy for her hardships. She was taken at her own valuation and that was the dignity of complete self-sufficiency.

Sri Ma appreciated all this and spoke about it to many housewives. She wanted a woman to understand that she was the fulcrum of a well-knit family. The brunt of various outer forces are withstood by a family if the centre is strong and has enough

resilience for the give and take of relationships. She, however, did not advice an endurance which went beyond the fitness of things. Once or twice she has endorsed the separation of husbands and wives, although in general, she always spoke in favour of a harmonious togetherness between a pair. Conversations regarding human relationships took place very often in her vicinity:

A question: 'Ma, do people, who come to you, find peace in their lives?'

Sri Ma: 'Ask them!'

One lady: 'Yes, we are at peace.'

Sri Ma: 'Is it true? May be for the time being. But as soon as you think your husband is neglecting you, you will weep; and so also with husbands. If he thinks his wife is uncaring, he is angry. Then? Sulks, breaking off of communications. for ten minutes in some households, for ten days or ten months or even ten years - Isn't that so?'

Everybody laughed at Sri Ma's way of describing family problems. They shamefacedly acknowledged the truth of her statement. Sri Ma continued, 'Some wives look up to their husbands, are mindful of their ways of doing things; some wives are more full of their own importance: why won't he listen to me? If he doesn't do as I say, I shall also not do as he wants, - typical trader's attitude, a *pukka sethji* (shopkeeper)!'

The audience joined in her laughter. Sri Ma said more seriously, 'A household also is an ashram. Don't you say *gṛhasthāśrama*? where there is no *śrama* (hardship), no pain. Where a husband will pay heed to his wife, a wife will mind her husband, an agreement, a mutuality, a unity of purpose should be evident. The spirit of service should prevail, otherwise there will be discord. The mother should look to the son, the son be mindful of the mother-if everyone renders service in the belief that He alone is being served, then you have hope for peace. Is is not said, *janata-janardana*, God in the form of people. The aim should be to see your own *Iṣṭa* in everyone; in pleasing all, you please your own *Iṣṭa*. If your family life is not congenial or peaceful, it is difficult to make progress in your spiritual endeavour. Another point do not consider, anyone an adversary or enemy. There is only the One, there are no 'others'. All are friends.'

The question of superiority came up sometimes in Sri Ma's presence. At one of the *Samyama-Saptāh* sessions, a provocative statement was made by the controller of the satsanga. A participant asked Sri Ma, 'The controller has just now stated that morning and evening kirtans are not well attended by brothers. The sisters are more regular for all items throughout the day. Does he mean women are more devout and that they will reach God sooner?'

Sri Ma smiled and answered, 'Women are more self-disciplined; they are mothers after all. The mother knows how to serve and how to persevere. One receives according to one's capacity to give. Whether you are here or at home!'

Question : 'Is our capacity to give less than theirs?'

Sri Ma avoided a direct answer. She said, 'I am reminded of a legend. When God created the world and made arrangements for everything Evil asked Him. 'Where is my place?' God answered, 'Make your place in such hearts where there is no room for godliness or devotion.' Whosoever is devoted to God, will gain freedom.'

Question: 'Are women likely to get ahead of men in the quest for God?'

Sri Ma: 'Whosoever is able to concentrate more profoundly will forge ahead.'

The questioner persisted: 'Women are less intelligent; that is why they are devout by nature!'

Sri Ma made none of the obvious rejoinders. She asked, 'Are you saying that those who are intelligent will go ahead sooner? Is it not true ego and intelligence are to be surrendered to God?'

'Yes'

'So?'

'Now you have confused me!' Everyone laughed.

Another person asked rather bluntly, 'Who is more important, a woman or a man?'

Sri Ma answered, 'Both. Don't you say Hara-Parvati, or Radhey-Shyama or Sita-Rama? One is incomplete without the other. Where would you be yourself without your *śakti*?'

Sri Ma was never seen to involve herself in social problems as such. People who sought advice and redress for their predicaments were heard as individuals and Sri Ma always spoke directly to their own particular situation. She dealt with such interviews in hundreds and thousands. There are no set patterns of her responses, because she spoke to the individuals concerned. The only generalization possible is that she seemed to put the onus of holding together the constructive forces of life on women. She seemed to make a distinction between parity of opportunities and an unrealistic demand for equality. She always upheld the quality of friendliness which could bridge all chasms of misunderstandings. She herself, above all, was an unfailing Friend to everyone.

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OLD DIARY LEAVES

—Atmananda.

Various Kinds of Deaths.

Question : The other day I read in the newspaper that someone was found dead. He had left a letter to say that since the woman he loved has passed away, he had gone to join her, for he could not live without her. Can one committing suicide really be united with a deceased person ?

Mataji : Never ! One who commits suicide enters a deep darkness from which it is most difficult to be released, unless someone who wields great supernatural power takes pity and liberates him from it. In that condition of dense darkness one cannot meet anyone. Suicide is a most heinous crime. Man is born in order to read the consequences of his actions of former births. To try escape from this by suicide is extremely foolish, it only prolongs the agony indefinitely. No one who is in his senses can possibly take his life; at the moment of doing so a person is invariably disturbed in his reason. Suicide does not solve any problem, on the contrary it creates endless complications and prevents one from paying off one's *Karmic* debts.

Question : What about murder ?

Mataji : Well, the murderer will no doubt have to suffer for his crime.

Question : And the murdered ?

Mataji : It is unfortunate indeed to be murdered. But it has to be borne in mind that this is due to some evil *Karma*. It is an inauspicious death.

Question : What about *sati* ?

Mataji : That is a different matter altogether. A real *sati* has to be completely steady in mind and body. If entering the fire she suffers, she cannot be called a *sati*.

Once Mataji related the story of one of her ancestors. After circumambulating seven times around her husband's funeral pyre, she put one of her fingers into the flame of a candle to make sure whether she would be able to bear being burnt alive. The finger did not move. She then told her relatives that since one of her little toes had once inadvertently touched the pillow of her husband (which is considered a sin), that toe would in order to expiate this sin, feel the flame and therefore riggle, but nobody should be alarmed at this. She then entered her husband's pyre and at once her body became completely still, just like a corpse. She obviously did not feel any pain whatsoever, she was perfectly steady.

Mataji then referred to a story of *sati*, which she had heard from Bholanath. That particular woman did not even have the chance to leap into the fire. While doing *praṇāma* before entering her husband's pyre, life ebbed away from her and her dead body was consumed by the flames together with her husband's.

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After the terrible disaster at the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad in 1954, when hundreds were trampled to death, Mataji was questioned as to the fate of the victims. According to the *Sāstras* '*Apamrityu*' (untimely death by accident) causes the departed to undergo a restless, ghostly existence. In some cases the deceased is tied to the place of the accident, unable to proceed to higher states of consciousness.

Mataji said : "What the *sāstras* declare, holds good in the ordinary course of events. In special cases it is different. On this occasion, just consider : The constellation of the Kumbh, the sacredness of the Triveni, the atmosphere created by a vast gathering of *sādhus* and *sannyāsis* with their spirit of complete renunciation. Death occurred at that auspicious moment; this ought certainly to mean the opening out of a path to higher planes of consciousness. Just as there is such a thing as '*apamrityu*', there are other possibilities as well."

Later Mataji asked Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj about his opinion. He replied : "The condition of man after he leaves his physical body depends on his state of mind at the instant of death. On that auspicious day and when at the crucial moment everyone was deeply concentrated I cannot believe that this could have been a case of *apamrityu*. It is of course true that the time, place and manner of death are the result of one's past actions; but since it happened during the constellation of the *Maha Kumbh*, at the Triveni, in the holy month of *Magh* and in the presence of so many saints and sages, I feel as good as certain that there can have been no question of *apamrityu*. On the contrary, the departed must have had the rare good fortune of being raised up into higher states of existence."

Later again Dr. G. Kaviraj said : "I know of a similar occurrence where, by some special Divine Grace the dying in their subtle bodies were severed from their physical just an instant before death took place and were lifted into higher states of consciousness. I have a strong feeling that here also, due to the intervention of some special Divine Mercy the dying were blessed with the capacity to ascend straight away into loftier states of being."

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In reply to a question, Mataji stressed the importance of what one thinks at the moment of death. For, just as the leech does not leave its place without hooking on

to something else, so the soul at the time of leaving the body hooks on to some kind of new existence according to the state of mind of the dying person. But at that moment one has no control over one's thought. It will automatically dwell where it usually dwells. This is why one has to practise the Presence of God while one is well and fit, so that the thought of God may come spontaneously when one is ill and weak. To illustrate this fact Mataji told two stories.

"An old woman who had spent many years of her life selling oil, was about to die. Her relatives had assembled round her and were urging her to repeat 'Rama' or 'Krishna'. But the dying woman was only half conscious and her power of hearing was impaired. To the shouting of her children and grand-children; "Repeat God's name", she kept on replying what she had been used to say to beggars who came to her shop begging for oil : 'Not a drop will I give, not a drop.' Saying this, she passed away.

"The following actually occurred in your Ashram at Varanasi. The aged mother of one of the Ashramites had come to spend the end of her life in the Ashram. She used to attend to her *pūjā* and *japa* with great regularity from early morning until nearly midday, without eating or even drinking water. She would then cook and eat her food and scrub the vessels. Towards evening she got busy again with her *sādhana*. After some time she fell ill and was confined to bed, but continued with her *japa* without interruption. Whenever some food or drink was brought to her, she would indicate by signs that she had not finished her *japa* and could therefore not take anything. Finally she breathed her last, with her fingers in correct position for doing *japa* according to the prescribed rules. Those who took her body to the burning-*ghāt* related that, when it had burnt to ashes and only the bones were left over, even then the skeleton remained in the same position until at last the arms crossed over the breast. The people present declared that they had never before witnessed anything of the sort.

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Varanasi, a rainy evening in August, 1949. Mataji was seated in her usual place in the hall with only a few ashramites on either side of her. Nobody had ventured out into the pouring rain. Exactly opposite to Mataji at the west end of the hall an emaciated old lady was lying on her bedding that had been spread on the floor. She was very ill and had shifted to the Ashram a few weeks ago, as she wished to die in Mataji's presence and in sight of the Ganges. Her last hour had obviously come. Her son had been called and was sitting close by her, chanting holy texts, while her daughter was attending to her. The dying woman had a rosary in her hand. She was hardly breathing but evidently fully conscious. Her blouse had been loosened and

one could see every one of her protruding ribs, in fact she looked already like a skeleton. Mataji was watching her intently. Off and on she would shout loudly : 'Mother, are you doing *japa* ?' The old lady could respond only by almost imperceptible gestures. Her daughter confirmed : 'Yes, she was doing *japa* and listening to her son's chanting.' Mataji suggested sprinkling Ganges water on her chest, and a few drops of the sacred liquid were instilled into her mouth with a piece of cottonwool as she was too weak to drink. Not for a moment did Mataji let her eyes off her. Suddenly Mataji got up and walked straight to the dying woman. With great motherly affection she gazed at her, placed a garland on her chest and then with a swift and determined gesture passed both her hands over the shrivelled body from head to foot. The end had come. It was an unforgettable, most impressive moment.

"Call the girls to sing *kirtan* !" said Mataji. The Brahmacharinis of the Kanyapith (the Girls' school of the Ashram) came and sang, some of them children of nine or ten. What a beautiful idea to make children witness death in this atmosphere of peace and serenity. ! Everyone felt moved, but there was no weeping, no lamenting, no regret, on the contrary, a hush, a sense of quiet joy, of fulfilment pervaded the atmosphere. "Death means changing one's garments", one can often hear Mataji say.

The *kirtan* continued for some time, then the body was taken down to the *ghat*. Some Ganges water was poured over the spot where the old lady had breathed her last and an oil-lamp placed there. Everyone left the hall. Fortunate is he who ends his days in this manner.

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WITH MATAJI IN DEHRADUN

(April, 1962)

—Krishnanath

Mataji was leaving for Dehradun on the 15th, and as I was in no hurry to return home, I thought it would be good chance to be with Her a little longer in quieter surroundings. Swami Paramanandaji said I could be accommodated in Dehra Dun and could go in the bus along with the Ashram people. We reached Dehra Dun Ashram about 12.30 noon and as instructed by Swamiji I approached Sadhanda for accommodation. He showed me one corner of a room in the Ashram itself as a temporary asylum, saying that Mataji would decide finally on Her arrival in the evening. The room was fairly big and had one takhat (wooden bed), which was already occupied by Mr. Ghosh from Ma's Agarpara Ashram; there was also the luggage of one or two other persons. As it was *Ekadashi* (eleventh day of the Hindu month) I was wondering whether I would get any food which could be eaten that day, but the Ashram had some ready and Sadhanda, who was looking after me, had me served and gave me also a little drinking water of which, he said, there was a great shortage. After the meal I unrolled my bedding on the floor in the corner allotted to me and rested for a while. For the evening wash I was directed to a canal, to which one had to go downhill by a cobbled rugged path, but the cool water was very refreshing. Mataji arrived some what late—it was almost night time—but She immediately bestirred people to make arrangements to get water. I heard Her enquiring if I had been accommodated. The neighbour of mine in the Dharamshala, Dr. Das Gupta, also arrived the next day to share the room with us and we were five of us there.

Thus began my stay of about ten days in ideal circumstances in Mataji's Ashram. The birth-day celebrations in May were still far away and it was the lull before the furious activity of the utsava I was getting advantage of. Some of the overflow from Hardwar had come over but most of those people left soon, one by one and ultimately only two of us remained in the room, I having elevated myself to the *takhat* for a bed. The shortage of water was first alleviated by getting it in fire brigade lorries, and afterwards even the taps started functioning. For some days I kept on going to the canal for my bath but for the last two days I could bathe in the Ashram. I was all the while feeling that I was having a glorious time, being privileged to put up in a room just below the one Mataji was occupying on the first floor, and getting Her *darshan* for two to three hours every morning and evening.

All of us who were staying in the Ashram were looked after by Mataji with loving care. She used to make a round of all the rooms and we kept ours neat and tidy for Her inspection. One day She did not come down as She was not very well, and I went upstairs to do my *pranāma*. She enquired after my health and I mentioned about feeling feverish. That afternoon I felt better and went to town to do some shopping. When I returned I learnt that there had been some commotion because Mataji had enquired how and where I was and nobody knew what had happened to me. As a rule Mataji used to come down every morning and sit in the courtyard on the veranda of the Śiva Mandir and we sat in front of Her. She was always particular to see that none of us were in the sun. Bhajans were sung, but very often we just sat, quietly looking at Her and basking in Her presence.

One day I noticed a takhat being made ready for Her in the open but covered space between the Śiva Mandir and my room. Later on it became clear why She had chosen this place that day. The sacred thread ceremony of two boys was being performed that morning and they and their parents and other relatives had been invited for lunch at the Ashram. So Mataji kept on sitting there till after 1-0' clock and, after they had taken their food, presented each of the boys with a copy of the Gītā. The idea of selecting this corner was to have as much shade as possible for those who sat in front of Her. Mataji used to find different places like this to sit in. At the other end of the courtyard is a parapet-girt mango tree and one evening Mataji, while walking under it, pointed out that there was honey dripping from its leaves. She plucked a leaf and gave me to taste and it was covered with honey. That night Mataji sat on the parapet of the tree and said it was *Madhuvan* मधुवन, (allusion to the garden where Krishna used to meet Radha). On the full moon day it was a wonderful sight at night sitting in front of Mother in the courtyard and getting a view of the moon between the spires of the two temples, which are close to each other on two sides of the angle of a rectangle with a ॐ sign in the middle. Every evening the *Śiva Mahimna Stotra* used to be recited near the Śiva temple and then *arati* was performed after which we sat round Mother listening to *bhajans* till silence time.

Once there was the reading of the whole of Tulsidas's *Rāmāyana* from beginning to end continuously for twentyfour hours. There is a beautiful refrain in which all present would join; it runs like this 'मङ्गलभवन अमङ्गल हारी, द्रवहु सो दशरथ अजिर बिहारी' meaning, 'Home of good luck and destroyer of evil, may the One (Rama) who plays in the court-yard of Dasharath have compassion on us, be kind to us.' There were relay parties to relieve the Shastri who did most of the reading, but he read through the night. When it was nearing completion at about 11 o'clock next morning, Mataji came down and joined in the finale.

So time passed quickly and imperceptibly. The episode of my *mala* (string of beads) is worth relating. Some years ago I had been present for *Śivarātri* at this very Ashram when the all-night *pujā* was performed of the seven *Śiva Lingas* which were installed in the temple the next day. The main *Linga* is dedicated to Mataji's husband, Bholanath, and one of the others named कीर्तिश्वर was for the young son of Rameshwar and Leila Sahai, who died in Paris in 1957, while working with the Atomic Energy Commission. Curiously enough I was the only relation who could attend his cremation in Paris, being in Europe at the time and I was also present at the Bhāgavata Saptaha held for him in Vrindaban in Ma's Ashram. Along with several other people who took part in the *Śivaratri Pūjā*. I had been favoured by Mataji with the gift of a *rudrāksh mālā* (necklace made of Rudraksha beads). This *mālā* had got broken at Naimisharanya in 1960 and at the instance of Mataji I had got it repaired by Sadhanda. Now in Dehra Dun it again broke, and Sadhanda being at hand. I naturally thought of approaching him. But the matter was not so easy. First I had to get the special kind of red thread manufactured by J. B. Coates, but Sadhanda knew a shop in Dehra Dun which had it and I was able to get it. The next hurdle was a thin enough needle which was not available and Sadhanda said he would have to take the beads to Benares to have the aperture widened. Ultimately however he adopted the device of stiffening one end of the thread with gum and using it in place of a needle. Then the beads had to be carefully cut away from the old string one by one and for this it was necessary to have a fresh unused blade. I managed to produce one. The operation of stringing was however quite a complicated one. After watching Sadhanda for some time I tried to put in one bead but it got knotted very loose and I had to give up. Sadhanda finished it in record time to be ready on the evening prior to my departure. It had then to be washed in Ganges water and dried. After that I had to find a chance to put it in Mataji's hand before using it. I did not want to do this publicly, but that evening, as if to oblige me Mataji left the courtyard and started walking round the corridor of the temple where I could quietly approach Her.

The day I was leaving, I was afraid I might not be able to see Her so early in the morning but just as I was rushing to the staircase I found Her descending it! Mother gave me hope of my returning by saying, : 'योगयोग होगा तो आजआओगे'— 'if it is so ordained, you might come back'. Jai Ma!

*

FROM THE NOTES TAKEN IN SRI MA'S PRESENCE .

—'Kirpal'

24.4.1959 — Rishikesh—Samyam Saptaha

Time 9-30 P.M. Sree Ma gives Her own time to Swami Shayyananda, a young Dandi Sanyasi. When he starts kirtan Ma tells the ashram members also to sing. Ma asks Billoji, a senior Brahmacharini, to arrange for his meal. (In Mother's heart there is only loving care) The sanyasi ends on the note : I deserve eternal Divine Bliss.

Ma. One should strive for Divine Happiness and the desire for eternal Bliss.

Q. What do they call death ?

Ma. You are a pandit. A learned teacher will understand the language of a scholar.

Q. What is *mrityu* (death)?

Ma. What is *amrityu* (immortality)?

Q. What happens after death ?

Ma. What is declared in your sacred scriptures ? What is transformation ?

Q. You are the Diving Essence, *atma*. There is only one Brahma and no other.

Ma. *Maya* (delusion)—In that state there is the coming and departure.

Q. We have heard so many views from childhood, but we don't understand.

Ma. Baba, if you understand, it is because you have studied. But one has to go beyond understanding and not understanding.

- Q.** Should we forget our learning ?
- Ma.** No, your learning should arouse the inner consciousness. You must transcend mere learning. You worship Shiva as the Supreme Divinity. But if you say it is a mere stone then it is not the Divine manifestation. Conversely, if you worship Shivaji as the Divine Lord then it is not a stone. If you say it is a piece of stone, it is not the Divine *Narayana shila* (a special object of worship). Similarly, if you worship the Guru as such, it cannot be worship of a mere human form, for it cannot be the manifestation of the Divine Guru. The Guru is not a mere human being and a human mortal cannot be the Guru.
- Q.** I believe he is the Guru as well as a human being.
- Ma.** There are two perceptions. As long as you perceive the stone you cannot realise the *Narayana shila* in its entirety. If you call him Guru, Lord, and do not realise his Divinity and the idea persists that he is a human being, then you have not realised the Guru in entirety. One should be perfect in all respects and then only will there be true realisation.
- Q.** What will we accomplish by sitting here ?
- Ma.** You have to proceed beyond all directions; beyond here and there, and then what is to happen will take place. As you said I came to listen to the talks. If you have to listen, listen to the talks. Do not listen to worldly tales. By listening to the talks here the path that enables one to proceed beyond worldly matters will be opened.
- Q.** What is death ?
- Ma.** Tell me what is written in your sacred scriptures. What is death and what is immortality ?
- Q.** When the breath leaves the body, death occurs.
- Ma.** What is immortality ? As the breath leaves death occurs, the death of what is subject to change, that which leaves and takes on different forms. But that which is eternal and not subject to any change, Divine-Immortal, where there is no question of any change that is immortality. The world is in a constant flux of

change. The world is that which is in bondage, as long as one is in this dying world. But where there is One *atma*, the One Brahma (Divinity) and no other, that which cannot be burnt, there is no question of coming and going. Where there is constant change and as long as one is in that stage doubts will arise. Hence, to be able to go beyond this ever-changing stage one has to realise there is one Brahma (Divinity) and no other; and till one realizes the One eternal soul within oneself, till then such questions will arise. The sole divinity, *Atma Ram*, neither comes nor goes. There is no place to go to or to return to. Where there is only the One Atma, there is no other. Where there is duality, there the world exists.

PURNA KUMBHA MELA AT HARDWAR—1998

Purna Kumbha, held this year at Hardwar after the due span of twelve years, was the last Kumbha mela of the twentieth century, Hence, it was befittingly named 'Maha Kumbha'—the Grand Kumbha,

Sri Sri Ma's association with Kumbha mela was as old as it was significant. Right from 1947 when Kumbha mela was hosted at Prayag, till the Kumbha mela of 1982, held at the same place of pilgrimage, Ma's presence at the mela was the main attraction for thousands of devout pilgrims and the entire community of saints. Even before that time, Ma had participated in Kumbha fair at Hardwar, accompanied by Her devotees, and reminiscences of those sweet moments are still treasured in many hearts.

In 1947 for the first time a camp was arranged in Sri Sri Ma's name at the site of the Kumbha mela at Prayag. The initiative was taken mainly by Dr. Panna Lal, a great devotee of Ma and a very high government official of Uttar Pradesh. Since that time, special facilities have been provided by the U.P. Government for erecting camps for Ma and Her devotees at Kumbha ground. Following the construction of Ma's Ashram at Kankhal, however, camping facilities were no more required at Hardwar for hosting Ma and Her group.

In this context, the Purna Kumbha of 1962, which was held at Hardwar, deserves particular mention. Sri Sri Ma was staying at that time at Bhimgoda, Hardwar at Baghat House, established by the Raja Saheb of Solan. Just before the auspicious hour of Kumbha, a group of saints from Niranjani Akhada appeared suddenly to greet and honour Sri Sri Ma in a very special manner. Such honour is bestowed only on the Mahamandaleshwars. Not only that, they arranged also a special procession with Ma at Hardwar in Her honour. It was for the first time that a distinguished Akhada honoured Ma in such a special way.

After a lapse of twelve years, Purna Kumbha was once more going to be held at Hardwar in 1974. By that time, Sri Sri Ma's Ashram at Kankhal had already come into existence. The samadhi shrine of Swami Muktananda Giriji (Didima) had also been erected by then in the Ashram courtyard. Muktananda Giriji had received sannyasa initiation from Swami Mangal Giriji of Kankhal, who was a distinguished Mahant (Head) of Maha Nirvani Akhada. After the construction of the samadhi

mandir gradually there developed an intimate relationship with Maha Nirvani Akhada and its Mahant Swami Giridhar Narayan Puriji.

Preparations for the Purna Kumbha were going on. One day, a group of sannyāsis holding high ranks came from Maha Nirvani Akhada and prayed to Ma for participating in their inaugural procession and also in the three principal *snāns* (ceremonial bathings), known as *Sahi* (royal) *Snāns*, of the Purna Kumbha.

Everyone knew that Ma would never turn down any sincere request from the mahatmas,—just as She had not said "no" to a similar request made by the mahatmas of Niranjani Akhada also twelve years back.

But this time, a quite unexpected and tricky problem arose. On the one hand the mahants of Maha Nirvani Akhada claimed that Ma was affiliated to them, since Ma's mother, Didima, had taken sannyāsa from this particular Akhada. On the other hand, the mahants of Niranjani Akhada too came to assert their claim that since the Kumbha mela of 1962 Ma belonged to them.

To resolve the conflict, a meeting was arranged on the verandah of Sri Sri Ma's old Ashram at Kankhal. Sri Sri Ma had just one and only one statement to make — **"This small girl, Baba, belongs to all !"** Can any one ever confine the Mother of the universe within the boundaries of a particular Akhada ? At last, all present were made to accept gladly that Ma belonged to each one of them as much as to all else. It was resolved that from that time onwards, Ma would accompany the procession of Maha Nirvani Akhada on the first *sahī snān*. On the second *sahī snān*, She would join the procession of Niranjani Akhada. No decision was taken about the third *sahī snān*, for the time being. Ma's characteristic remark was : *"Jo ho jay"* (Come what may!).

From the Kumbha of 1974 at Hardwar to the Kumbha of 1982 at Allahabad, Sri Sri Ma participated in the Kumbha mela functions according to the above arrangement, which had become almost a tradition, and even after Sri Sri Ma entered into Maha Samadhi in 1982, till the Maha Kumbha of this year, the same tradition had been maintained by the Ashram, devotees of Ma participating in the Kumbha mela processions with Sri Ma's portrait placed on a silver throne.

Simultaneously with the inception of the tradition of joining in the *sahī snān* processions, began the other tradition of specially inviting the Mahamandaleshwars and head Mahants of various Akhadas to our Ashram on different days, felicitating them, presenting them with gifts and treating them and their accompanying groups of sadhus to a sumptuous feast. The four principal Akhadas are — Maha Nirvani,

Niranjani, Juna and the Udasin, and affiliated with them are certain other Akhadas, such as, Atal, Ananda, Avahan, Agni, etc.

Since Ma was universally held in high esteem by the Acharyas, Mahamandaleshwars and Mahants of all the Akhadas, and Ma belonged to all without any discrimination, Ma thus occupied a really unique place in the society of the saints. Owing to mutual disagreements and conflicts, while the inmates of various Akhadas would not even take food together, they would gladly make an exception in Sri Sri Ma's Ashram. For, verily Ma belongs to all.

During the Maha Kumbha of this year too, it was therefore decided that in keeping with the convention established by Sri Sri Ma's kheyal, and carried out under Her own guidance, we would arrange programmes on particular days to welcome and honour the Mahamandaleshwars and Mahants of all those various Akhadas and would also participate in the *sahī snān* processions. Accordingly, it was decided that our Ashram party would accompany the Maha Nirvani group on the Shivaratri day, the day of the first *sahī snān* and would join the Niranjani group on the Mauni Amavasya for the second *snān*, As usual, no prior decision was taken about the final *snān* to occur on the Chaitra Sankranti, "Let happen what will"—that is what was agreed upon.

The Acharyas, Mahamandaleshwars and Mahants of Niranjani Akhada were invited on 16th March and a similar invitation was sent to Maha Nirvani Akhada for 20th March. The total number of even the special invitees this year for each Akhada exceeded one hundred fifty. In keeping with Ma's tradition, each one of the distinguished mahatmas was offered "*Bhet Puja*" consisting of a rudraksh mala, dhoti, silk chaddar and befitting dakshina, the attendant sadhus were also offered cloths and dakshina, and all were served with food at the bhandara. This year, each day's bhandara and Bhet Puja cost more than 70,000/- approximately.

After the two bhandaras arranged in the honour of the two Akhadas mentioned above, the next day fixed for Udasin Akhada was 23rd March, which had to be postponed due to unavoidable reasons, and the programme of 9th April fixed for honouring the mahatmas of Juna Akhada had to be totally cancelled on special ground.

Now, in the context of the *sahī snān* of the Kumbha, it is relevant to mention that for a long time, the ceremonial *sahī snāns* at Kumbha Mela have been performed by the sadhus of the principal Akhadas, as per the long-established custom. The first bathers at early dawn at Prayag Kumbha are Mahatmas from Maha Nirvani Akhada, followed by the party of Niranjani Akhada, then by the

group of Juna Akhada, and lastly, by the representatives of Udasin Akhada, always in that order.

On all Kumbha occasions till now, the above-mentioned four Akhadas had maintained the custom of taking out processions in the morning for *sahi snān*, one after another, and would return after the *snān* in the same order.

But this year, a certain unfortunate disagreement had been brewing from the very start, between Niranjani Akhada and Juna Akhada, as to which Akhada would take out the procession first and bathe in Brahma Kund. But the Akhada Parishad had resolved that the traditional order be maintained.

According to scriptural injunction, 26th February, the day of Maha Shivaratri, 28th March, the Mauni Amavasya day and 14th April, Meshā Sankranti, had been fixed for the first, second and third main *snāns* respectively.

In accordance with the traditional rule, a party of bathers from our Ashram accompanied the procession of Maha Nirvani Akhada on the first day, and with due pomp, Sri Sri Ma's portrait was ahead of the party, mounted on the silver throne, along with the silver umbrella, the silver *chamar* and other puja articles, which had been part of the procession for a long time. The group of sadhus, brahmacharis and brahmacharinis of the Ashram thus arrived at Brahma kund with the Nirvani group, took the holy bath, and came back safe, inspite of a heavy rain.

The second main *snān* was to take place on 28th March. It had been scheduled beforehand that our Ashram party would join in the procession of Niranjani Akhada.

As already mentioned above, between Niranjani and Juna Akhadas a discord had arisen regarding priority in performing the *sahi snān*. According to the resolution taken by the Akhada Parishad, the authorities supervising the Kumbha Mela had issued permission for the first *snān* to Niranjani Akhada. But what followed on that day was quite unprecedented in the history of Kumbha Mela, and for it, the lack of foresight and utter slackness on the part of the authorities in charge of the Mela were responsible to a large extent.

The sadhus, brahmacharis and brahmacharinis of Sri Ma's Ashram were returning after the *sahi snān* with the silver throne decked with Sri Ma's photo, the precious umbrella, *chamar*, and other articles of silver. They were accompanying the Niranjani Akhada procession. Meanwhile, the sadhus of Juna Akhada had started a commotion all of a sudden. Our procession had just arrived in front of the Keshav Ashram, past the Tourist Bungalow, when like a bolt from the blue, the Naga sadhus of Juna Akhada attacked the procession from the front. They started breaking Ma's throne to pieces and the life-size photo of Ma was torn to shreds by

them. They then goaded their elephant to overturn the cart on which the brahmacharinis were singing Kirtan and following Ma's throne, and even set fire to it. Swami Achyutanandaji, a senior sadhu of the Ashram, who was in charge of the procession, was mercilessly beaten up by the furious Nagas, who, without any resistance from any side, simply carried away major parts of the silver throne, the silver umbrella etc. Even Br. Dashuda, one of the most dedicated *sevakas* of Ma, received injuries in his hand. And it was really by Sri Ma's Kripa that the brahmacharinis of the Ashram had a narrow and miraculous escape from the attacking elephant and the overturned burning cart. In fact, Sri Ma absorbed all the shocks, all the destructive attempts, in Her own benign Self.

Some Mandaleshwars who were following Ma's throne were also hurt and had to get scattered in the crowd for safety. While attacking Ma's carriage, the Naga sadhus also did not spare the Keshav Ashram in front of which our procession had just reached. In a destructive frenzy, they looted the Ashram and inflicted injuries on the inmate sadhus. They even attacked Swami Madhavanandaji, the second Sankaracharya of the Jyotirmath. Later, it was learned that their assault on Swami Madhavanandaji and Keshav Ashram had been pre-planned. And by a coincidence, our procession was passing right in front of that Ashram at that moment.

Above all, it was most astonishing and shocking that while such a calamity was taking place, the Mela Police were totally inactive spectators. They stood passively watching the mishap, waiting for directions from their senior authorities.

Just after the incident, the senior Police authorities, the Akhada Parishad and the Mela authorities were immediately apprised of it. But owing to delayed Police action, the silver articles could not be quickly recovered. Only a few days back, we received the news that a few broken parts of the silver throne have been salvaged from the Ganga at Hardwar and they are now in police custody.

For the last 24 years, during all the Kumbha fairs held at Allahabad and Hardwar, Sri Ma's procession always took part in *sahi snāns*, in accompaniment with the mahatmas of the main Akhadas. Between Ma and the Akhadas, there existed and still exists, undoubtedly, a very unique & sweet relationship. Many Mahamandaleshwars and Acharyas of Juna Akhada too, used to pay high regards to Ma, and in spite of the age-old relationship and sincere amity with Ma's Ashram, it is beyond our comprehension as to why such a mean attack was launched on Ma's devotees and the carriage bearing Her holy throne.

After sometime, a senior Mahant related to Juna Akhada proposed a donation worth 2,51,000/- to Ma's Ashram in compensation for the loss incurred during the

attack, so that the case could be closed up. But the Ashram authorities expressed their inability to accept any amount of money in exchange for the priceless tokens hallowed by Sri Ma Herself.

After the horrendous incident of 28th March, the Ashram authorities were compelled to cancel the Bhandara of 9th April which had been previously scheduled to felicitate the sadhus of Juna Akhada. Secondly, it was also decided that on the Sankranti day, no procession would be taken out by Ma's Ashram for the *sahi snān*.

However, it so happened that in view of the need to maintain peace and order, the Akhada Parishad and the Mela authorities jointly issued an order cancelling the traditional *sahi snān* on the Sankranti day.

The ashramite sadhus, brahmacharis and devotees, of course, did take a Kumbha dip peacefully at Brahma kund early in the morning of Chaitra Sankranti.

Chaitra Sankranti was also the anniversary of the sannyasa diksha of Swami Muktananda Giriji (Didima). On that occasion, on 15th April, over a hundred Mahatmas were invited and honoured with due Bhet Puja and a bhandara was also arranged for them, in which Mahatmas of Udasin Akhada also participated. On the following day, a similar Bhet Puja and bhandara were arranged for some other esteemed Mahatmas who had not been invited earlier, due to untoward incidents. Some of them were Swami Vidyananda Giriji, Mahamandaleshwar of Kailash Math, Swami Parameshwaranandaji of Sadhana Sadan and others. That was the last ceremony of sadhu bhandara during this year's Kumbha Mela.

In the above context, the inevitable question that has loomed in many devotees' minds is whether after the mishap of this year, and in view of the mutual conflicts among the Akhadas, it would be proper from the side of our Ashram to take part in any *sahi snān* at all during Kumbha Melas in the future. After the next three years, Allahabad is going to witness another major Kumbha Mela.

How to keep up the tradition introduced by the kheyal of Sri Ma Herself and how to preserve the honour of Her Name, this is the dilemma which only Sri Ma's own direction and guidance can resolve. And for this is indeed, our prayer at Her holy feet. Jai Ma.

DR. PADMA MISHRA

—A Tribute

It was the month of January, 1982. On the festival of Vasant Panchami, Sri Sri Ma was present in the Varanasi Ashram and Saraswati Puja was duly celebrated in Her presence. After the festival, Ma was leaving. In Ananda Jyotir Mandir, She took leave of Gopalji and was coming out. Surrounding Her, there stood the girl students of the Kanyapeeth. Ma said, "Padma, your family !" The serene person thus addressed by Ma, abashed by the compliment, bowed before Ma and stood with her characteristic modesty, with folded hands. Ma had a garland in Her hand: She put it round the neck of the lady, and repeated, "Padma's family." By "Family". She meant Kanyapeeth, of which Dr. (Miss) Padma Mishra was the President—nay, its guardian, a unique guardian.

Here is an account from Dr. Bithika Mukerji—

In those days, the Kanyapeeth girls used to be taken to Calcutta for appearing in Sanskrit examinations. Bithikaji once raised a question about it to Gurupriya Didi. She said, "How is it that the girls of the Kanyapeeth are always sent to Calcutta for Sanskrit exams. Is there no one in Varanasi to help them, so that they are able to appear in examinations there itself ?" Miss Lalita Pathak, then a teacher of Allahabad University was present there by chance. She said, I know a teacher of Sanskrit in Benares Hindu University. She belongs to a cultured family. She is unmarried and highly educated. She may agree to help." Gurupriya Didi urged that this lady be contacted immediately.

Miss Pathak reached Varanasi with Bithikaji. In the University campus they hunted out Dr. Mishra's residence. She was staying with Dr.(Mrs). Gyanwati Trivedi. They told Mrs. Trivedi that they had come to meet Dr. Padma Mishra. In Bithikaji's words—"Then there appeared before us a lady with a tall, well-built physique and a sturdy but suave personality, an after and exchange of greeting took her seat in a polite manner. At the very first sight, I said to myself, "Here is the right person for the Kanyapeeth !" Miss Pathak introduced Bithikaji to Dr. Mishra. On learning about the purpose of the visit, Dr. Padma Mishra said, "All right, I will certainly try my best to do whatever I can. Do I have to go there just now ?" Bithikaji was very much impressed by these straight forward and candid words. She said, "Please come in the evening at the time of Sri Ma's darshan."

In the evening, Ma was sitting on Her cot in front of the Kanyapeeth. There was a rush of devotees coming, doing pranam to Ma during a brief darshan and leaving. Bithikaji was fanning Ma. Then she noticed that Gyanwatiji was coming forward and behind her Padmaji. It was the first darshan of Ma for Padmaji. She

bowed before Ma, offering respectful pranam at her holy feet. Ma placed Her hand on her head in a gesture of blessing and put a garland round her neck. That was how Padmaji became Ma's forever and Kanyapeeth got its most suitable guardian.

Dr. Padma Mishra was an erudite lady of an aristocratic family. The famous tennis player Sumant Mishra is her younger brother. In Benares Hindu University and in fact in the society of eminent scholars of Varanasi, she was unanimously held in high esteem. Even today, after so many years of her departure from Varanasi, she is remembered with deep respect. Even the Maharaja of Varanasi, Dr. Vibhuti Narain Singhji, has a very high opinion of her and recalls her respectfully.

Even while she was working in the University, and inspite of her very busy schedule, she admirably fulfilled her duties and responsibilities towards Kanyapeeth. For the special achievements of this institution, and for its present shape, the credit goes to her. It is really impossible to assess in a few senences her nobility, magnanimity and the sterling qualities of her extremely magnetic personality.

After retiring as a Professor of Sanskrit, Women's College, B.H.U. in 1977, she went back to Dehradun, her home town. Yet, she was for ever concerned about Kanyapeeth and would frequently come down to Varanasi.

Referring to Padmaji's departure from Varanasi, H.H. Dr. Vibhuti Narain Singhji once said in a presidential address : "In the University compus, there should be residential facilities for highly qualified, idealistic retired teachers, so that the University may not lose contact with them and may benefit from the company of such noble teachers. If there were such facilities, then a great teacher like Padma Mishra would not have been compelled to go away from the city of Varanasi."

In the year 1981, Ati Rudra Mahayajna was held at the Kankhal Ashram, and the Organising Committee unanimously elected Padmaji its President.

In 1988, the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Kanyapeeth owed its great success to Padmaji's initiative, guidance and untiring efforts.

For the last few years, Padmaji could not come to Varanasi, though she paid regular visits to Kankhal on various festivals held at the Ashram. She had been ailing for some time, and on 26th March, 1998, she took her final rest at the Feet of Sri Sri Ma, and left for us a high ideal of self-reliance and self-dedication to Sri Sri Ma's Holy Feet.

At this moment of grief, we pray to Sri Sri Ma that She give solace to the bereaved family and the strength to bear the irreparable loss, and also, we pray to Ma for enabling the 'Kanyapeeth family' to make steady progress on the path chalked out by our dear Padmaji.

IN MEMORIAM

Chakradhar Rani Lakshmi Devi of Gondal

Seeking liberation from the painful cycle of birth and death, many took refuge at the Lotus Feet of Sri Sri Ma, and got rid of worry for the rest of their lives, with the conviction, "There is Ma; what is to worry?" The late Chakradhar Rani Lakshmi Devi Gondal occupies an eminent place among such eminent devotees of Ma.

Many a royal families of India has had a long-standing association with Sri Sri Ma. Since 1934 when at Solan, the Baghat Chief Durga Singhji had the first darshan of Ma, many other royal families were attracted to Ma. The Bhavnagar State of Saurashtra also had the good fortune of being hallowed by the touch of Sri Sri Ma's feet. It was here at Bhavnagar that Rani Saheba Lakshmi Devi had Ma's first darshan in 1968. It is well known that who so ever had just once a real darshan of Ma, would have in life one and only one centre of attraction. The same thing happened to Rani Sahiba as she became fully dedicated to Ma to her last breath.

From 1968 onwards Rani Sahiba always made it a point to be present during various religious functions celebrated at various Ashrams of Ma. In 1970 she participated with full enthusiasm in Kali Puja and Annakut festivals held in Delhi. Responding to her loving invitation, Sri Sri Ma arrived in Gondal for the first time in 1975. On that auspicious day, Ma was accorded a royal welcome in keeping with the traditions of Saurashtra, and the colourful welcome ceremony left an indelible impression in the minds of all present. In Ma's presence, Maha Shivaratri Puja was performed by the royal family in their palace.

In 1976 Lakshmi Deviji offered to sponsor the Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata of the year, the programmes were very successfully organized by her. The participants including great mahatmas, ashramites, devotees from various places and employees of the Ashram, still nurture very fresh, sweet memories of those days of the loving hospitality and beautiful surroundings even after lapse of 22 years. In fact, the gentleness, respect and love of the hostess touched every one's heart.

In 1979, Ma paid another visit to Gondal on Rani Lakshmi Devi's earnest request. The festivals of Dipawali, Kalipuja and Annakut were celebrated with due festive pomp in Sri Sri Ma's divine presence. Ma's last trip to Gondal in 1981 was also in fulfilment of Rani's earnest prayer.

After Sri Sri Ma's self-withdrawal into the unmanifest Eternity in 1982, Rani Lakshmi Deviji started to take a special interest in the upkeep and development of the institutions in Ma's name, and showered her loving care on them. She was specially attentive to Kanyapeeth and the tiny inmate brahmacharinis of the institution who attracted her affection. She always felt a deep concern about all the possible ways and means for an all round development of the Kanyapeeth and the well being of its inmates.

Her enthusiastic participation in the functions under Sri Sri Ma's Birth Centenary celebrations forms an unforgettable chapter in the history of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. Her generous donations made it possible for the Sangha to republish many invaluable books on Ma, which proved a cherished treasure to the devotees of Ma.

During the centenary celebrations, Rani Saheba made special contributions to the Annapurna pujas held in the Varanasi Ashram on the two occasions of Annakut and the Chaitra Navaratra. During the Chaitra Navaratra, she was present with her family in the Varanasi Ashram. For all the brahmacharinis of Kanyapeeth, she had brought with her a bunch of dot pens with Ma's photo and Ma's words engraved on them. She herself had those pens made on special order on the occasion of Ma's Birth Centenary. Also, all the workers of the Ashram received new cloths from her. It was a gesture of her great fraternal affection and dedication to Ma.

Today, Rani Saheba is no more with us. We all, especially the Kanyapeeth family, will always feel the loss.

Lakshmi Deviji had been ailing for the last 3/4 months. In Bombay, she was under adequate treatment. On the request of her family members, prayers were offered and religious rites were held in Varanasi for her recovery. But God granted her a final recovery from the cycle of births and deaths and took her to the Abode of Peace and Light for eternal rest at the Feet of Ma. The end of her mortal existence came on 21st April, 1998.

May Sri Sri Ma grant fortitude and solace to the bereaved family ! May Ma make Her institutions gratefully worthy of all the love and kindness received from her ! We pray to Ma in these words and offer our respectful and loving tribute to late Srimati Lakshmi Deviji.